

**TEACHERS' PRACTICES IN KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS WITHIN THE CAPE
COAST METROPOLIS, GHANA**

by

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Abstract

Even though previous research points to the significance of kindergarten teachers' practices, that take into consideration the nature of children and how they learn, there is limited research regarding developmentally appropriate practices in various socio-cultural contexts. To address this gap in the literature, a qualitative multi-case study into the perceptions and classroom practices of four kindergarten teachers in two Ghanaian schools, Tata and Kariba, was carried out over a six-month period. Four research questions guided the study, namely: How do teachers interpret and apply DAP in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian sociocultural context?; With what kind of learning activities do teachers engage kindergarten children?; Which instructional strategies do teachers use in a kindergarten classroom?; and What factors and beliefs influence teachers' instructional decision-making in a kindergarten classroom? Cognitive constructivist theory (Piaget, 1951) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) informed the research. Data used were semi-structured individual interviews and pair-based interviews and fieldnotes of classroom observations. Both within and across case interpretative analysis, as outlined by Stake (2006), was used.

The findings of this study revealed these teachers' practices were developmentally appropriate and they interpreted DAP within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context through contextually relevant language of instruction (English language, Fante language), age- and culturally- appropriate learning materials, and the use of storytelling, traditional songs, and traditional rhymes. Moreover, teachers in both the urban and rural setting, described a variety of learning activities they believed impacted children's development in different ways; they pointed to play-based instruction and integration as well as specific strategies such as picture-

walk and think-pair-share that they believed promoted effective DAP; and discussed their explicit and implicit theories of teaching involved in their instructional decision-making processes. These findings are discussed in light of current research in early childhood education to provide insights into how DAP, as interpreted and applied in the Ghanaian socio-cultural context, can inform teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms, globally. Implications for future research and practice both within Ghana and elsewhere are established.

Lay Summary

More research into teaching in Kindergarten classrooms within various cultures, and that considers and contributes to children's development is needed. In Ghana, Kindergarten has only recently been included within the formal schooling system, and as such, little is known about the kind of teaching and learning that occurs in these early childhood settings since the transition. My study collected information from 4-four kindergarten teachers, two from a rural and two from an urban school within Cape Coast, Ghana. In addition to asking them questions concerning how they teach their children during several interviews, I also observed how they taught several lessons. These teachers revealed that they make learning meaningful to their children through choosing language, learning materials, and traditions that are familiar to the children and draw from their cultural context.

Preface

This dissertation was conceived and carried out by me with assistance from my supervisory committee in terms of the entire research process. This research received approval from the University of British Columbia's (UBC) Behavioural Ethics and Research Board (ethics certificate number H15-00364).

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Early childhood education has been acknowledged in various research as an effective process of socialising young children into the knowledge, values, attitudes and norms of society (Miller & Pound, 2011; Hurton, 2008a). Hurton argues that there is a strong correlation between quality early childhood education and the economic development of a nation because of the former's effectiveness in developing the creative and problem-solving potentials of young children. However, there is a substantial body of literature that suggests that teacher practices in early childhood classrooms are effective only if they correspond to how young children learn (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Concern for how young children learn was pioneered by Plato (Miller & Pound, 2011). In subsequent years Comenius (1672-1670,) and Rousseau (1712-1778) supported child-centred approaches as an effective instructional philosophy for educating young children. As noted by Parker and Goicoechea, (2010), Dewey, Hegel, Marx, Gesell, and Kant advocated for a new form of education for young children, specifically an educational context that provides opportunities for young children to construct their knowledge.

Early childhood educators worldwide are becoming increasingly aware of what and how young children learn and they are concerned with how to use appropriate instructional practices to promote young children's development (Miller & Pound, 2011). For developing child-centred learning in early childhood classrooms, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the US developed the concept of 'Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)' (Bredekamp 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This

concept supports the use of age appropriate practices in early childhood classrooms to promote the development of young children (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredenkamp, 2009). Elkind (1989) in a paper that explored the philosophical and practical implications of DAP in kindergarten classrooms suggested that teachers' instructional practices in early childhood classrooms could be effective only if the learning environment allows children to construct their knowledge actively through direct experiences within their immediate environment. In effect, Elkind argues that the organisation of a learning environment provides opportunities for children to explore and manipulate objects using their various senses and it is through this process that they come to understand their world. Thus, learning in early childhood settings is a constructive process.

In response to changing global trends in teacher practices, the 2007 education reforms in Ghana incorporated the kindergarten component of early childhood education into the country's formal schooling system (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2007). The aims of kindergarten education under the auspices of these reforms were to foster children's cognitive, emotional and kinaesthetic development through appropriate teacher practices. Moreover, the reforms made provisions for nurturing young children in safe and caring environments with the appropriate infrastructure to promote their holistic development. The reformed curriculum focuses on setting professional standards for early childhood educators and defines these standards according to developmentally appropriate practices. Moreover, these standards encourage teachers to adopt constructivist principles of teaching in kindergarten classrooms to support the natural development of the intellectual, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and physical aspects of children's lives. Policy makers argued that teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms serve

as anchors and building blocks for engendering creativity and problem-solving skills in young children (Ministry of Education, Ghana 2007). From a practical point of view, such appropriate approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms emphasise the developmental needs, interests, capabilities and experiences of individual children. Hence, it is not simply the transmission of academic subject matter that children need to pass various examinations that are required of them throughout their education journeys (Miller & Pound 2011). Pound (2010) describes developmentally-oriented approaches to teaching in kindergarten classrooms as child-centred teacher practices as the approach tends to promote meaningful work based on children's interests, abilities, and experiences. It also provides opportunities for young children to learn by actively engaging in activities within and outside the classroom environment. For example, Schulman and Barrette (2005), who investigated developmentally appropriate approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms, revealed that when children engage in group activities their social, emotional and intellectual competencies are greatly enhanced. The finding suggests that the practices of the teachers were developmentally appropriate. The study's finding is in line with the rationale for the reforms in early childhood education in Ghana because DAP is perceived as an effective means of harnessing children's potentials in early childhood settings.

Teachers in kindergarten settings make some of their instructional decisions based on the uniqueness that individual children bring to the learning context and the corresponding activities that individual children need engage in to develop their potential. Thus, it appears that when suitable experiences, are exposed to young children they tend to develop in a holistic manner. However, successfully promoting children's development requires a kindergarten teacher who has completed the Kindergarten teacher education programme and who has experiences that

allow him or her to employ constructivist principles of teaching successfully to promote children's development (Deku, 2010a).

As indicated earlier, teacher practices in kindergarten classrooms in Ghana are influenced fundamentally by developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). In essence, DAP is predicated on a philosophy of education that supports the notion that children tend to learn and create their knowledge in the course of interacting with their peers, teachers and materials within their immediate environment (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In light of this, policy makers, early childhood educators and other stakeholders in Ghana widely regard it as one of the most effective means of educating young children. DAP, therefore, strongly influences teacher education, and thus, in turn, teacher practices in early childhood classrooms.

The adoption of DAP in Ghana appears to have been influenced by two main factors: The first was the implementation of the 2007 education reforms in early childhood education funded by the US government. For this, experts in early childhood education were brought in from the US to assist their Ghanaian counterparts in crafting the kindergarten curriculum. The second was the Constitution of Ghana which made provisions for dual citizenship between the US and Ghana and, a considerable number of African American scholars have naturalised as Ghanaians. These Ghanaians have established various kinds of businesses including early childhood centres in many parts of Ghana and, they influence Ghana's government policies in every sector of the economy including the adoption of DAP in early childhood settings.

Nonetheless, the understanding and application of DAP in different socio-cultural contexts across the globe have been the subject of criticism by several authors in the field of early childhood education (Cannarella & Viruru 2004; Delpit, 1995; Grumbet, 1999; Lubeck,

1994). The main thrust of their argument is that DAP is largely a construct of the Western middle class, and that it may not be a 'fit' for socio-cultural settings of other countries. The significance of this is that the socio-cultural context of children is a key determinant of what is developmentally appropriate for their learning, and is controversial for some in the field of early childhood education. The question that comes to mind is whether developmentally appropriate practices as understood in the US context, are suitable for the Ghanaian kindergarten context, given that DAP must be tailored to a child's individual development and the socio-cultural contexts (e.g. Ghana) in which it is applied. This assertion is consistent with that of Sarpong (2006) who argues that socio-cultural imperatives of any given society tend to shape the content of curriculum at various levels of education, particularly in early childhood settings. This claim certainly holds in Ghana where the socio-cultural reality influences the interpretation and application of developmentally appropriate practices within kindergarten classrooms. In Ghana, the concept of DAP has been adopted and adapted consistent with Ghana's socio-cultural practices. Thus, it is interesting that Ghanaian lore itself suggests that young children should be engaged in only those learning activities that are appropriate for their level of development as illustrated in a Ghanaian proverb "A child can easily break the shell of the snail but not that of the tortoise." Thus, Ghanaian lore is in harmony with the philosophy underlying developmentally appropriate practices because when children are engaged in learning activities that are suitable and appropriate for their level of development, they will likely develop holistically (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In this sense, the Western notion of how young children learn in kindergarten classroom settings appears to be in line with what happens traditionally in Ghanaian kindergarten classrooms. However, there are differences when it comes to the issue of how learning activities

should be organised in kindergarten classrooms. For example, in Ghanaian kindergarten classroom stories, rhymes, songs and various play activities that are socio-culturally relevant to the children have been integrated into the kindergarten curriculum. In the same vein, learning activities in kindergarten classrooms in the Western world appear to have been influenced by those children's socio-cultural realities. Specifically, play activities and songs in Western settings might differ from the Ghanaian context. Nonetheless, because of the incorporation of certain types of 'modern' modes of learning in kindergarten classrooms, such as a see-saw, learning centres and rhyming, Ghanaian classrooms may have some similarities with their Western counterparts. For, example, kindergarten teachers in both types of contexts take into consideration children's level of development and socio-cultural contexts when they plan their curriculum, set their timetables, design their learning environment and select learning activities and instructional strategies. Given the importance of culturally responsive DAP practices, it is incumbent upon researchers and educators to understand teachers' and children's experiences in kindergartens globally. More specifically, research into Ghanaian teachers' experience with recent curriculum reforms promoting DAP in early childhood education contributes to such understanding globally, while serving to address the 'local' (Ministry of Education, 2007) concerns about the current practices in public kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The quality of early childhood education in Ghana has been an issue of major concern to the government, early childhood experts, and other stakeholders for a very long time because of inadequate attention to the sector (Agortse, 2002). In an attempt to address this concern, some

curricular reforms have been undertaken particularly in early childhood education (Amadahe, 1967; Ampiah, 1974, Etsey, 2000: Tamakloe, 2000) in Ghana since the country won political independence in 1957. However, despite these earlier reforms, there were no noticeable changes regarding the quality of early childhood curriculum and pedagogy until the 2007 education reforms. Thus, as Amadahe (2011) argues, the 2007 education reforms in Ghana marked a watershed in the development of early childhood curriculum and pedagogy regarding the quest for effective approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms. These reforms integrated kindergarten into the formal schooling system. Secondly, the policy led to the introduction of degree and diploma programmes in some of the universities and colleges of education in Ghana. That is, the government policy led to the training of teachers to acquire the requisite content knowledge and pedagogical skills on how to employ constructivist principles of teaching to enhance effective teaching learning in kindergarten classrooms (Amadahe, 2011).

Notwithstanding, the attention, legislation and general concern by the government of Ghana for the development of one of the most effective and suitable curricula for young children (Deku, 2010b; Etsey, 2010), there is a dearth of research to inform best teacher practices in early childhood classrooms. More precisely, research on teacher practices in kindergarten classrooms in Ghana is limited (Deku, 2010), and, there are controversies as to how constructivist principles of teaching are influencing children's development in kindergarten classrooms in many parts of the country. Therefore, creating awareness about the state of teacher practices in kindergarten classrooms will contribute to effective learning in Ghanaian kindergarten classrooms. Previous research into teacher practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Greater Accra Metropolis revealed that individual activities, group activities, and whole class activities were the

instructional strategies employed to promote children's development (Deku, 2010). Thus, in response to the growing need to explore teacher practices in kindergarten classrooms in other parts of Ghana, the current study employed a case study research approach to discover teacher's practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana. The following research questions guided the study;

1. How do teachers interpret and apply DAP in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian socio- cultural context?
2. With what kinds of learning activities do teachers engage kindergarten children?
3. What instructional strategies do teachers use in a kindergarten classroom?
4. What factors and beliefs influence teachers' instructional decision-making processes in a kindergarten classroom?

1.2 Significance of the Study

Regardless of location, the perspectives, of teachers add to the body of literature in early childhood education regarding DAP because teachers' insights about their practices were highlighted. Thus, this study adds insights obtained from kindergarten teachers to the growing body of knowledge in the area of how DAP is interpreted and applied in different socio-cultural contexts globally. Moreover, the study further provides insights to early childhood curriculum developers and researchers regarding the impact of socio-cultural elements on children's learning and development in kindergarten classrooms.

More specifically, since a similar study (Spodek,1988a) focused on explicit theories of teaching and its impact on early childhood teachers' instructional decision-making, this study is

centred on the impact of explicit theories and implicit theories on kindergarten teachers' instructional decision-making. Therefore, the current study provides a baseline data for further research in the field of kindergarten teacher's instructional decision-making processes in other socio-cultural contexts. This is significant because it gives us global insights and adds to the body of knowledge on how teachers' socio-cultural contexts influence' their instructional decision-making in similar and lesser known contexts in the West African Sub-Region.

Also, similar studies have paid much attention to teachers' approaches to learning in different contexts (Hedge & Cassidy, 2009). However, this study is centred on teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian context. Hence, it is intended to be a source of information and reference point for further studies on Ghana and the West African Sub-Region. Also, a study of this nature provided rich insights into approaches kindergarten teachers employ to support the development of young children.

Finally, the findings that arose from the study regarding learning activities and instructional strategies teachers engage their children in have the potential to inform policymakers and other stakeholders about the kinds of interventions and support systems that can be made available to early childhood teachers in Ghana and other countries within the African continent to enhance and promote the quality of early childhood education delivery.

1.3 Organisation of the Study

In the remaining chapters, I provide insights into the steps involved in addressing the research questions that guided this study. I begin in Chapter 2 with a review of the historical antecedents of early childhood education in the US, and to the developmentally appropriate

practices in Ghana to provide insights into the nature of early childhood curriculum in Ghana. I then highlight concepts such as teachers' implicit theories of teaching; teachers' instructional beliefs; teachers' instructional practices; and intentional teaching to underscore the complex nature of teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. Moreover, a review of several studies already conducted in the field of early childhood education about DAP provides deeper perspective and points to what remains to be done to enable us to have further insights into teachers' DAP. Finally, the theories that framed the study such as Piaget's (1972) constructivist cognitive theory and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory are discussed. In Chapter 3, I examine the justifications for qualitative research regarding its philosophical stance and rationale. I also highlight issues regarding case research study design, the study's participants, and its data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Also, included in the chapter is extensive discussions about ethical and trustworthiness issues. Chapter 4 further presents the study's major findings along with their respective research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses some of the major findings that emerged from the study alongside the theories that framed the study and the corresponding literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Finally, other issues discussed include the implications of the study's findings for theory, teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms and future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This chapter presents a review of literature that has a bearing on the current study. The focus of this study is teachers' perceptions of DAP practices in kindergarten classrooms. Because this study deals with teachers in Ghanaian settings, an in-depth account of historical antecedents of early childhood education in Ghana is provided. The study dealt with teachers practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian settings. The essence, of reviewing the related literature in this regard is to highlight the concept of early childhood education and its implementation over the years in the Ghanaian context. Also, a review of related literature more broadly seeks to establish gaps in the current research about appropriate practices in early childhood classrooms for the purpose of informing the reader about what is known already and areas that need further exploration.

2.1 Defining Developmentally Appropriate Practices

As previously mentioned, the expression "Developmentally Appropriate Practices" has connoted teaching attuned to children's ages, experiences, abilities and interests that help them attain challenging and achievable goals" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009 p.22). In short, DAP is conceived as a teaching approach that grounded in research on how young children develop and learn. Kindergarten teachers structure the classroom environment in such a way that the needs of individual children are incorporated into the teachers' curriculum planning to enable young children to construct their knowledge. The concept of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) is predicated on Piaget's cognitive constructivist theory of learning (Piaget, 1972; Wadsworth, 2003) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch,

1983). The theories emphasise the constructivist approach to knowledge acquisition. However, while Piaget emphasises that knowledge acquisition is an individual affair, Vygotsky's (1978) asserts that children construct knowledge through play and the social context. Constructivism assumes that knowledge is temporary, subjective, inherently constructed and socially and culturally mediated (DeVries, 2000). This claim suggests that children construct meaning while exploring and manipulating objects within their immediate environment. Moreover, children's interactions with their peers and adults within a particular socio-cultural context serve as avenues for knowledge acquisition. DAP's are based on the notion that the child is an active learner who comes to the early childhood settings with a certain uniqueness. DAP underscores the need for kindergarten teachers to engage young children in meaningful learning activities that are organised in the form of individual activities, small group activities, and whole class activities.

2.2 Historical Antecedents of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)

2.2.1 1987 Guidelines for Quality Early Childhood Education

The 1980's marked a fundamental shift in early childhood education in the United States. This shift came about because some reforms were made within the public education sector under the aegis of the state for addressing certain fundamental issues namely, teacher education, graduation requirements and accountability (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989). The reforms brought about far-reaching changes in early childhood education regarding the incorporation of practices such as standardised testing and skilled based curriculum (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). However, teachers' approaches to learning in early childhood settings were to develop a broad range of young children's skills. Moreover, teacher-directed methods of teaching became the

mainstay of teaching and learning in early childhood classrooms in the US (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Such education reforms met resistance because of the risk of negatively impacting teaching and learning in early childhood education settings (Elkind, 1989). These contestations served as a wake-up call for the National Association for the Education for Young Children (NAEYC). Thus, in 1987 the NAEYC developed guidelines for determining high-quality programmes for young children. These guidelines were termed “Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Education Programmes Serving Children from Birth through Age Eight.” However, Bredekamp and Copple (2006) argue that the terminology in question was not novel because developmental psychologists for over a century had used such terms extensively to denote the uniqueness that individual children would bring to the classroom context as well as the corresponding teacher practices. Bredekamp and Copple (2006) also argue that the term ‘developmentally appropriate practices’ was used in the 1960’s when the ‘International Kindergarten Union’ contracted nine experts in kindergarten education to develop guidelines on how young children could best be helped to learn effectively. Their terms of reference included taking into consideration the developmental needs of individual children. The deliberations of the experts culminated in the drafting of three reports concerning the future form that early childhood education should take. The first report advocated for a teacher- directed-approach within the context of a well-defined structure. The second report supported an early childhood setting defined by play-based activities, and other child initiated activities. However, the third report advocated for an eclectic approach to early childhood education drawing from the

elements in both reports (Bredekamp & Copple, 1987). Thus, contents of first and second reports became the basis of teaching and learning in early childhood settings.

Meanwhile, 1987 NAEYC guidelines for quality programmes for young children were intended to serve as a set of guidelines for early childhood educators who were seeking to meet NAEYC's accreditation demands. Thus, the document called for the improvement of appropriate experiences for young children and classroom teaching strategies and assessment practices that were appropriate for young children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). By implication, the NAEYC guidelines for quality programmes for young children aim was to articulate the NAEYC's official position that learning experiences in early childhood settings should be developmentally appropriate. This stance was against the agitations of some elements within traditionalist reform movements that were clamouring for the development of early childhood education programmes along certain lines (programmes) that did not meet the benchmarks for best practices in early childhood education. Thus, the NAEYC guidelines came about after well-meaning individuals urged the NAEYC to be proactive in addressing the lacuna in early childhood education regarding the lack of a well-defined framework for effective teaching and learning in early childhood settings. They feared that if the reform movement's conception of early childhood education espoused in the education reforms were accepted then, the death knell would have been sounded regarding the search for the appropriate practices for early childhood settings. This decision would have been a setback for the development of early childhood education in the US. However, this dire situation did not come to fruition because the NAEYC responded by crafting the 1987 policy guidelines for quality or quality programmes for young children. According to

Bredenkamp and Copple, (1997), the NAEYC's guidelines included benchmarks to guide teachers' practices in early childhood education settings such as:

- Active hands on learning
- Conceptual learning that leads to understanding and the acquisition of basic skills.
- Meaningful and relevant learning experiences.
- Interactive teaching and cooperative learning.
- A broad range of relevant content integrated across different subjects.

The document served as a platform for bringing about change regarding the best teacher practices in early childhood education by encouraging early childhood educators to design and implement a curriculum that considered how young children learn. DAP emphasises a learning environment that is supportive of the age, interest, experiences, and capabilities of learners. It also emphasises the inculcation in children the sense of what it takes to be an active participant in a free and democratic country such as civil rights and liberties (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997). Moreover, approaches to teaching and learning in early childhood settings are child-centred and places much emphasis on the holistic development of children regarding intellectual, social, physical, moral, emotional, and aesthetic aspects of their lives. The recommended organisation of classroom environments was such a way that young children could create their knowledge while, engaging in educational activities. Thus, the provision of a variety of experiential materials and activities that offered the learner the opportunity to make choices and opt for activities that best suited his or her interest and capabilities were deemed essential (Pound, 2011).

In contrast, when developmentally inappropriate practices are the focus in a kindergarten classroom, teaching and learning are characterised by teacher-directed experiences such as lecturing, modelling, teacher-led discussions and repetitive drills and practices (Miller & Pound, 2011). However, the downside of this approach is that the teacher assumes a lead role in the teaching and learning context while the learner assumes a passive role. This approach does not augur well for the development of young children because it encourages the transmission of facts, rote learning.

2.3 Critique of the NAEYC's Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practices

To some extent, the 1987 policy statement on developmentally appropriate practices marked a watershed in the history of early childhood education in the United States. However, the policy statement has been subjected to criticisms since its inception. The criticisms appear to be fourfold; First, several authors (Cross, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Kessler, 1991) argue that developmentally appropriate practices were designed for a particular social context. Hence, those who implement these practices appear not to take into account the variations in social contexts, specifically non-Western contexts such as Ghana. However, what appropriate for children to learn in the Ghanaian context might not be appropriate in other contexts.(eg.drills as an instructional strategy). In the development of DAP, cultural variations of other social settings were not considered. Second, Rathburn, Walston, and Germino (2002) argue that DAP does not sufficiently address the developmental needs and learning challenges of children with special needs. Third, several authors (Delpit, 1995; Hausker, 2000; Jipson, 1991; Kessler, 1991b; Lubeck; 1994) argue that developmentally appropriate practices deal with the developmental and learning needs of young children within the American context and that their application in other

contexts is problematic because the developmental and learning needs of children differ from one society to another. Finally, a substantial body of literature (Delpit, 1995; Kessler, 1991a; Spodek, 1988a, 1988b; Zimiles, 1981) suggests that DAP's do not take into consideration the political, economic and historical factors affecting children from different countries yet these factors appear to influence policy decisions and implementation regarding what is appropriate for young children to learn.

In response to these criticisms, the (NAEYC) in 1997 issued an updated version of DAP dubbed "Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programmes (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The new document addressed some of the shortcomings of the 1987 policy statement. First, the new policy statement incorporated the significance of families and the relevance of meaningful and context-based learning within the early childhood curriculum. Second, the new policy statement highlighted the need for early childhood educators to promote holistic development of children through child- initiated activities and teacher-initiated activities (Miller & Pound, 2011). However, because of the need to deal with both individual and groups needs within early childhood classrooms, a teacher-initiated teaching was integrated into the policy. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). However, despite these revisions, criticism of DAP continued mainly regarding the 1997 position statement's failure to consider the needs and interests of children with special needs and children from socio-cultural contexts other than middle-class white Americans.

As we continue to use this term in a broader context, the interpretations that teachers from diverse socio-cultural contexts ascribe to DAP is likely to differ according to the various worldviews of people across the globe. Indeed, the attendant concept of 'childhood' itself differs

from one context to another. Thus, it essential that children’s socio-cultural contexts determine what is relevant for them to learn and when it is appropriate to do so early childhood settings

2.3.1 2009 Guidelines for Quality Early Childhood Education

In 2009 another revised policy statement entitled “Understanding and Applying Developmentally Appropriate Practices” was issued to address the concerns of critics who called for an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in early childhood classrooms in socio-cultural contexts other than American. This, the new policy statement addressed diversity with respect to children with special needs. The 2009 Position Statement offered the following guidelines for enhancing the quality of early childhood education delivery (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009);

2.4 Age Groups and Appropriate Practices

The 2009 NAEYC position statement pointed to developmentally appropriate practices for different age groups: Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers, Kindergarteners and children in lower primary grades.

2.4.1 Know How Children Learn

Copple and Bredekamp (2009) argue that it is important for teachers in early childhood education settings to be well-informed about how children think and learn. This suggests that competent early childhood teachers observe children as they engage in a variety of activities, and they do so to find out each child’s interests, capabilities, and experiences. With this information, they plan and modify their teaching strategies to help the children develop.

2.4.2 Consider Children's Social and Cultural Settings

The cultural settings within which a child grows up tend to influence curriculum planning in early childhood education regarding which elements of the curriculum are appropriate for young children to learn. A child's sociocultural context is a determinant of what is suitable or appropriate for him or her to learn.

2.4.3 Recognise that Social Contexts of Young Children Differ

The social contexts of children differ in many respects, such as family background, urban or a rural and economic circumstances are. These factors tend to influence children's learning and other aspects of their lives greatly.

2.4.4 Consider What Is Individually Appropriate

One cardinal principle underlining child development is that there are individual differences. Children tend to exhibit differences in various aspects of their development such as physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. At the same time, when a child remains within a scope of development it is considered normal. Nonetheless, when the development of a child falls outside the normal scope, the child is said to have experienced developmental delays.

In short, since the idea of DAP was mooted (Bredekamp(1987)), the narrative about the historical antecedents of developmentally appropriate practices gives a complete picture of the trajectory of the concept. However, researchers continue to raise concerns despite these improvements addressing inherent weaknesses associated with the DAP concept. One reason such controversies continue to surround DAP is the value-laden nature of the term itself what is considered appropriate in a socio-cultural context might not be considered appropriate in another

(i.e. Canada versus Ghana), which risks children being ill-served by overgeneralizing or normalising DAP practices such that particular socio-cultural groups are deemed deficit.

2.5 The Philosophy of Developmentally Appropriate Practices

At the heart of developmentally appropriate practices is the quest for holistic development of young children with respect to their intellectual, physical, social, emotional, social, moral and spiritual aspects of their lives (Pound, 2011). The holistic development of children can come about if they are active participants in constructing their knowledge by interacting with elements within their environment as well as with their peers. However, children bring their uniqueness into the classroom settings (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). A kindergarten teacher's concern is to identify the uniqueness that individual children bring to the classroom context, and then to utilise this knowledge as a springboard to assisting individual children in harnessing and developing their potentials through effective curriculum planning. The philosophical underpinnings of DAP, provide us insights into how children learn, the teachers' role and the kinds of learning experiences that impact children's development in early childhood settings.

2.5.1 Autonomy

According to Kamii and DeVries (1993), autonomy is one's capacity to make moral decisions and act upon them. Young children depend on older people caring for them when they are born. However, a sense of autonomy can be engendered in young children over time, especially when the opportunity is given to them to engage in activities within a context (i.e. home and kindergarten settings) in which adults appreciate and value children's decisions.

Within such a milieu, it is likely that children can develop the ability to behave in an acceptable manner and make decisive, well-informed decisions at certain stages in their lives (DeVries,1993). Nevertheless, autonomy in the classroom is not a matter of allowing children to make all decisions based on their perspectives about issues they encounter within the classroom but to collaborate with their peers to solve a task assigned to them by the teacher. By implication, even though children are expected to make their decisions at a point in time, it is also worthwhile for them to also listen to the perspectives of their peers because it might serve a useful purpose to them in the course of completing a task. As DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston and Salas (2002) observe, autonomy is one's ability to reflect on and consider the various options related to a particular issue as well as the views of others before making an informed decision.

According to Kamii and DeVries (1993), “young children are more mentally active when they are physically engaged in any endeavour for trying to figure out how to do something” (p.42). According to the philosophy of DAP, young children are active participants both mentally and physically in any learning context, and kindergarten teachers are expected to plan the curriculum to provide young children with the opportunity to interact with the external world (i.e. both the social and physical settings of the class) through individual, small group or whole class activities. The social environment provides opportunity for children to interact with their peers and share ideas regarding how to accomplish task. Moreover, during such interactions the class teacher might provide children insights as to how to accomplish a task. However, the physical environment provides an opportunity to engage children in a variety of learning activities to promote their development (DeVries, et al. (2002).

2.5.2 Holistic Development of Children

The focus of DAP is to harness and develop children's potentials. The focus of kindergarten education, is to enhance and promote the holistic development of children regarding the intellectual, physical, social, moral, emotional and spiritual aspects of life. The significance of this is that teachers are expected to provide learning experiences that foster various aspects of children's development (Pound, 2011). Thus, within early childhood settings, teachers are expected to employ integration and play-based approaches to promote children's physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development.

2.5.3 Emphasis on the Individual

DAP harnesses individual children's potential. Young children come into the classroom context with differing capabilities and it is the responsibility of the teacher to identify the uniqueness of individual children and help each of them develop at his or her pace through effective curriculum planning and instructional strategies. The discussion so far has highlighted, appropriate practices, in early childhood settings. In the next part, I will discuss the implications of DAP for teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms.

2.6 The Implication of DAP for Teaching and Learning

The concept of DAP is based on how children learn and teacher's practices that impact children's development in early children settings.

2.6.1 Respect for Individual Children

Respect for individual children exhibited by kindergarten teachers is usually in the form of active listening, concern for children, preparedness to assist them in solving problems and

respect for children's views on issues in class. By implication, this process constitutes the basis for building a trusting relationship between children and their kindergarten teachers. Developing trust requires a twofold stance on the part of the teacher: First, they are expected to respect children's rights. Second, the teacher assumes a liberal posture that encourages power sharing with children. Such a classroom atmosphere engenders active learning, which allows for the integration of cognition and affect and enhances individual children's meaning making about the world around them (DeVries, et al. 2002). Hence, respect for individual children is crucial for the social and emotional development of young children.

2.6.2 Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is at the heart of teaching and learning in DAP-infused kindergarten classrooms. Hence, it is essential for kindergarten teachers to engage children in activities that provide room for them to experiment and explore their environment. The teachers are expected to employ observation as a tool for identifying the interests and capabilities that individual children bring into the classroom settings. Observation serves as the basis for effective curriculum planning regarding the provision of requisite activities to enhance the development of children. Children within such a learning environment tend to have choices regarding the selection of learning of activities. The options that are at their disposal give them the latitude to opt for activities that suit their interest and the pace at which each of them develops. This results in a learning scenario in which kindergarten teachers place emphasis on play and child-initiated activities (DeVries, et al. 2002; Kamii & DeVries, 1993).

2.6.3 Learning in an Integrated Fashion

Adhering to DAP implies that learning in kindergarten settings is organised in such a way that young children lived experiences become a springboard for teaching and learning concepts. This, in turn, suggests that learning in kindergarten classrooms ought to be such that children learn content across subject areas. Hence, an integrated activity designed on children lived experiences form the basis for the explanation of concepts and names of objects in their environment (DeVries, 1993).

. In the next section, the discussion would focus on the historical backgrounds of early childhood education in Ghana and various issues regarding teacher practices in early childhood settings.

2.7 Historical Antecedents of Early Childhood Education in Ghana

Throughout the centuries, educators and theorists have grappled with how to initiate young children into the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of any given society in the hopes that equipping young people with the requisite creative and problem-solving abilities would benefit them and broader society. Moreover, young children could develop capacities for finding solutions to the myriad of challenges that their compatriots are currently experiencing regarding the economic downturns and its attendant challenges that people of many developing countries like Ghana experience daily (Agortse, 2006). In Ghana, attempts to find effective ways of educating young children have taken many paths through history. The journey so far can appropriately be described as a chequered one because it has been characterised by pre-colonial, colonial and post- colonial trajectories. The historical accounts offered here provides readers

insights into how early childhood education and teacher practices have evolved over the years in Ghana.

2.7.1 Precolonial Era

Before the introduction of formal early childhood education in Ghana, traditional Ghanaian societies relied solely on the extended family system as a means of child care and support system for young children. Sarpong (2006) argues that child care is the responsibility of all members of the extended family system. Whenever a child was born the family members took turns caring for the child when the need arose. For example, they took turns bathing the child and providing other necessities of life to enhance the child's development. However, there were times when a family member was specifically assigned or volunteered to oversee bathing the child. As the child was growing up, the onus fell on the entire extended family to attend to the needs of the child whenever the parents were absent or in situations in which the parents were not able to provide certain necessities of life for the child. As the child was growing up, certain mechanisms were put in place to initiate him or her effectively into the traditions of the family, the community and the nation (Gyekye, 2002). These mechanisms aimed at helping the young child to internalise the norms and values of the community to enable him or her to lead a responsible life that would bring honour to the family and the community. Gyekye further argues that at the heart of traditional approaches to educating young children is the quest to initiate young children into the knowledge, skills, and values common to the adult members of the society- ensure that young children learned and applied traditional knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and emotional commitments in addressing several issues.

Prominent among the practices developed by traditional Ghanaian societies to initiate young children into the culture of the people were storytelling, poems, proverbs, and songs. Perhaps, one of the most effective techniques and tried and tested social creations by traditional societies for educating young children was the coding of lores into stories (Deku, 2008; Amissah, 1978 ; Senkyi, 1984). Deku, Amissah, and Senkyi further argue that the purpose of coding these lores into stories was twofold; the first was that it made it possible to remember the content of experiences in various fields of human endeavour such as politics, medicine, and values. Emotional stability was an attribute cherished by traditional societies and issues relating to vicissitudes of life and how to overcome them as one journey on in life are emphasised in stories. Such stories, illustrate that one's ability to persevere in times of adversity without doing anything untoward is a key determinant of success in life and these stories foster emotional development of young people.

Moreover, traditional Ghanaian societies often use children lived experiences as a means of introducing them to new concepts. Sarpong (2001) maintains that caregivers and mothers within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context do not teach young children by academic subjects (as schools might do) but rather through the live-experiences approach. Etsey (2000) argues that this approach uses the real-life experiences of the child as the basis for introducing him or her to new concepts. The home is the natural environment of the child and the home serves as a platform for learning within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context. For example, a mother who sends a child on an errand to pick an onion from a basket that contains various vegetables would be introducing the child to the concept of "sorting" which is a concept in mathematics. In the same vein, when an older sibling instructs a younger child to use his or her right hand in collecting an item from

an older person, the former is indirectly instilling the sense of social expectation into the younger child. In short, Ghanaian indigenous pedagogy in early childhood education during the pre-colonial period was based on a child's lived experiences.

2.7.2 Colonial Era

With the advent of colonialism, the first attempt to establish a school for young children in Ghana, previously known as Gold Coast, happened in 1523 at Elmina, which was then known by the Portuguese as the city of Sao Jorge. The curriculum consisted of subjects such as reading, writing, and religious education. This school was established purposively for mulatto children (children with Portuguese fathers and native mothers). However, there were instances in which children who came from privileged backgrounds but lived outside the town gain admission into the school. The technical rationality approach was the main medium of instruction in the schools, teachers employed a step by step mode of lesson delivery interspersed with recitation and memorization as a means of initiating young children into the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that the Portuguese deemed appropriate in their quest to civilise the children of the natives in Elmina (Francis, 1974).

However, the first attempt to establish a broad-based early childhood education in Ghana was started by Christian missionaries such as the basic schools established in Elmina and Cape Coast in 1745 (McWilliams, 1956). Missionary societies who sought to propagate the gospel in many parts of Ghana, saw education as an effective tool for converting the natives to Christianity. They established schools in many parts of the country wherein the missionary societies were especially active (Kpoh, 1961). The Basel Mission was commended by the governor because of its pioneering role in the establishment of schools for young children.

Between 1828 and 1843, the mission attached kindergarten schools to all the primary schools that they had established earlier (Deku, 1995). The ages of the children ranged from four and five years. According to Senkyi (1967), missionary societies such as the Wesleyan Mission took a cue from the Basel and established some kindergarten schools in various parts of the country where they had previously established primary schools. However, the most intriguing part of this development was that the technical rationality approach to teaching, which is the end-means approach to education was adopted as a means of teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms.

The latter part of 1852 marked a new beginning in early childhood education in the country because the colonial government saw the need to establish preschools to complement the ones which had already been established by the missionary societies. Basel Mission, Kimble (1965) The Governor's appreciation of the missionary efforts to provide kindergarten education to many young children in many parts of the country prompted the governor to take pragmatic steps towards the establishment of more kindergarten schools in many other parts of the country (Kinble, 1965).

Kimble further argues that 1920 marked a turning point in early childhood education in the Gold Coast because of Gordon Guggisberg's 12-point policy for education. This policy aimed at restructuring the educational system in the country. The change in policy covered kindergarten and primary education (Kimble, 1965). Morrison (2009) maintains that the policy brought about the introduction of Froebel's methods of teaching infants and kindergarten children. Also, funds were set aside for the training of kindergarten teachers the current ways of teaching and the procurement of instructional materials. The subjects in the kindergarten

curriculum comprise games and physical exercise, spoken English language, object lesson, various occupations, singing, and arithmetic.

The 1940s up to the early 1950s marked a new chapter in the development of early childhood education in Ghana. This period witnessed a proliferation of early childhood centres in urban areas, particularly in Accra. Acquah (1956) observes that the phenomenal increase in the number of infant schools and kindergarten schools resulted from the increase in the number of working mothers. Acquah further observes that initially most the working mothers left their children in the care of maidservants or older children but later resorted to leaving their children at child care centres when they realised that their children previously had been maltreated. Parents quest for safe environments where they could leave their children brought about the establishment of many nursery schools for the enrollment of children aged two and above. The Women Association of Convention People's Party established six-day care centres in Accra. The funding for the establishment of these schools came from the Queen Elizabeth II Day Nursery Coronation Fund.

2.7.3 Post-Colonial Era

The 1960's also brought about the introduction of new policies to improve early childhood education delivery in Ghana. Deku (2008) posits that one of the hallmarks of the Education Act of 1961 was that all the preschools in the country were under the control of the Ministry of Education. A nursery and kindergarten unit was created to oversee the registration and the running of the day-to-day activities of early childhood education centres in the country.

Another milestone during this post-colonial era was the establishment of the National Nursery Teachers' Training Centre in Accra (S. Gampo, Personal Communication, December 2010). Teachers who enrolled at the centre completed one month of training in early childhood education. They were subsequently posted to various parts of the country after completing their training. However, from an analytical perspective, the duration of the training was so short that the teachers who benefited from the training were unlikely to have developed the requisite content and pedagogical competencies to enable them to employ effective instructional strategies to help young children develop. The quality of early childhood education during this period may have not met today's standards.

Agortse (2002) avers that most of the preschools were in Accra and its surroundings. However, the quality of early childhood education in the country began to dwindle because the Nursery and the Kindergarten Unit under the Ministry of Education became dysfunctional due to lack of funds. The unit could not fund the activities of the National Nursery Teachers' Training Centre, and it became insignificant and ineffective. Moreover, while the Dzobo education report of 1974 recognised the significance of early childhood education, its recommendations were not implemented due to a military coup de'etate. Hence, the challenges that bedevilled the sector persisted and even exacerbated over time. However, in 1998, the Parliament of Ghana passed the Children's Act. This Act empowered the Department of Social Welfare to supervise all segments of early childhood education (crèche, day cares, nurseries, and kindergartens) in the country. However, Deku (1995) underscores the fact that officials of the Department of Social Welfare could not carry out their supervisory work effectively on the quality aspect of early

childhood education delivery because they did not have the requisite competencies in content and pedagogy of early childhood education.

The 2007 education reforms in Ghana marked a watershed regarding early childhood education because this government-led policy initiative had a twofold impact on early childhood education delivery in the country: First, the kindergarten aspect of early childhood education became part and parcel of the formal schooling system leading to the development of the early childhood curriculum. Second, the policy brought about the introduction of a degree and diploma programmes in early childhood within some of the universities in Ghana for the purpose of educating teachers in the content and pedagogy to improve teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms (Amadahe, 2008).

2.7.4 The Current State of Early Childhood Education in Ghana

As indicated above the 2007 Education Reforms in Ghana brought about an unprecedented transformation in early childhood education in Ghana.

The reforms encouraged the crafting of a philosophy of education for early childhood education that is based on traditional knowledge, values, and attitudes as well as the exigencies of the global context. It emphasises the development of a well- balanced individual and the need for effective teacher practices to promote the holistic development of young children (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The early childhood programme in the country is organised along the following lines: crèche (0-1 year); day care (1-2years); nursery (2-3years); and kindergarten (4-5years) (Ministry of Education, 2007). However, initially, only the kindergarten component of early childhood

education was incorporated into the formal schooling system in the country. Hence, other aspects of the early childhood programme fall under the auspices of the private sector. Since the private sector component of early childhood education is not well regulated, different curricular models such as Montessori and Reggio Emilia characterises teachers practices (Deku, 2010a). In contrast, within the public-school kindergarten system, DAP consistently influences teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms. In the latter part of 2014, the Ministry of Education incorporated the nursery component of early childhood education into the public basic school system. DAP now also influences teacher practices in nursery classrooms.

2.8 The Implicit Theories of Early Childhood Teachers

Many educators believe that the most informed teachers are, the greater the likelihood that the teachers' practices in classrooms can impact positively on children's development. Moreover, teachers' deeper insights into their practices would enable them to make informed instructional decisions regarding pre-lesson preparation, during and after the end of every instructional segment. Teachers' instructional decision-making in early childhood settings appears to be influenced by explicit and implicit theories of teaching. However, Spodek (1988a) maintains that teachers' explicit theories of teaching evolve because teachers tend to process information as they interact with children in class. Through this mechanism, they come to understand certain concepts and values that they have gathered over the years of their practice as teachers. Hence, teachers' actions and instructional decisions are usually influenced by their perceptions and beliefs. These factors tend to influence their views about their practices as teachers. These impressions held by teachers stem from their beliefs, ideas or theories. As Spodek (1988b) suggests, these interpretations eventually become the foundation for teachers'

practices in early childhood classrooms. Spodek further argues that for a better understanding of the role of teachers, there is the need to understand the implicit theories that guide instructional decision-making. Spodek, asserts that implicit theory refers to instructional ideas that teachers develop in practical experiences which complements the theoretical approaches to teaching that teachers acquire during their pre-service education.

Some studies explored teachers' implicit theories in classroom settings. For example, Bernstein (1975) explored ideologies influencing early childhood programmes in England concluding that there is a hidden pedagogy or implicit theories of teaching that influence teacher practices in infant schools that serve children from age five to seven. Mitchell, (1994) in a study that investigated teachers' implicit theories concerning how teachers ask questions in class concluded that most teachers believe that to ensure an effective setting for questioning, students should be comfortable with both the teacher and their peers. The implication is that effective questioning tends to be influenced by the learning environment that teachers create in classrooms. However, Spodek (1988a) in a study that explored the implicit theories of early childhood teachers revealed that there is more to teaching than just having firm grasps of the principles of teaching. In other words, there is more to teaching than just what is visible about the activities of teachers in their classrooms. The study's findings revealed that in moments of solitude teachers might be still functioning as a teacher because they might be contemplating on an earlier topic taught in class or a topic they are planning to teach in class. There is the need for more research into how explicit and implicit theories of teaching impact teachers' instructional decision-making in kindergarten classrooms. In the next section, the discussions will focus on the language policy that influences teaching and learning in early childhood settings in Ghana as

well as storytelling which is one of the mediums of interpreting and applying DAP in kindergarten classrooms.

2.9 Education Reforms for the Development of Mother-tongue Education in Ghana

The history of language in education policy in Ghana has been a chequered one. According to Rosekrans, Sherris, and Chatry-Komarek (2012), the language in education policy cuts across two strands: English language only medium of instructions in classrooms (1957-1966; 2000-2005) on the one hand, and Ghanaian language for the first three years of schooling (1967-1969;1974-2002) on the other hand.

Rosekrans et al (2012) argue that the English-only language policy of 2005 appears to have failed to have the desired impact on children's learning in classrooms because of some flaws inherent in the policy. They further maintain that even though the English language is spoken widely in many parts of Ghana, it appears to be limited to urban centres. Most children speak one or two of the 44 Ghanaian languages at home and in their communities. Before children's enrollment in school, they have limited knowledge of the English language. Nonetheless, children are expected to understand whatever the class teacher is teaching in a language they do not understand. Moreover, they are expected to read and write in English. The challenge for such children is pointed out by Canagarajah (2005) "clear grounding in a location gives us the confidence to engage with knowledge from other locations as we deconstruct and reconstruct with our purposes" (p.15). When children are taught in their mother tongues, it gives them a foothold to develop the target language (English language).

Opoku-Amankwaah (2009) observes that a Ghanaian language-only policy for the first three years of schooling provided room for 11 Ghanaian languages to become mediums of instructions in early childhood settings throughout the country. These included Akan (Twi and Fante), Nzema, Ga, Ga-Adangbe, Ewe, Gonja, Kasem, Dagbani, and Dagaare. In contrast, Opoku-Amankwaah (2009) and Rosekrans, et al. (2012) assert that the Ghanaian language-only policy has failed to “activate the voices of thousands of children who have been voiceless in the classrooms” (p.7) because it was limited to only a few Ghanaian languages.

2.9.1 Emergence of a New Language Policy for Mother-tongue Instruction

Rosekrans, et. al, (2012) argue that there were several large-scale attempts in the past to introduce a mother tongue-based medium of instruction in Ghana (non-formal education and shepherd schools). None of these attempts proved successful due to financial constraints and the lack of political will. However, in the words of Hornberger (2009), “Opening up spaces for multilingual education is like considering all languages in the ecology and recognising that these languages are situated in spaces and contexts” (p.6). In light of this assertion, factors such as international pressure and donor support influenced the decision of the Government of Ghana to introduce bilingual education nationwide. The language policy currently in effect in Ghana is referred to as the “National Literacy Acceleration Programme (NALAP). The policy is under the auspices of the Ghana Education Service, a sector under the Ministry of Education.

2.9.2 Thrust of the Bilingual Medium of Instruction

According to Rosekrans, et al., (2012) and the Ministry of Education (2013) the National Literacy Acceleration Programme (NALAP) is a bilingual medium of instruction that is designed

to guide mother tongue instruction and the transition of children to the English language. This policy further outlines that children from kindergarten up to Grade 3 of primary school would receive instruction in their Language and Literacy courses in both their mother tongue and English at the same time. Also, children are expected to spend five years of their education learning their mother tongue (L1). Consequently, kindergarten children and those in primary are expected to spend 90% and 70% of their time learning through their first language, (L1), while 10% and 30 % respectively of their time are spent learning the English language. Also, the time children spend learning the English language was to gradually increase until parity was achieved between the times spent learning the children's first language (L1) and the English language.

2.9.3 Empirical Research on Language in Education Policy

Some studies (e.g. Opoku-Amankwaah2009; Davis & Agbenyegah (2012) have been conducted in Ghana to explore the impact of language in education policy on children's learning in early childhood classrooms. For example, Opoku-Amankwaah (2009) used an ethnographic case study research design to compare the academic performance of children in an English only Grade 2 class with another Grade 2 class in another primary school where the Fante language was a medium of instruction. The researchers used interviews to collect data from 10 head teachers from 10 schools. The findings revealed that the participants in a class where Fante language was used as the medium of instruction felt more confident contributing to discussions in class than in the class where the English language served as a medium of instruction. Also, a study conducted by Davis and Agbenyegah (2012) explored the inconsistency between language policy and instructional practices in primary schools in Ghana. Interviews were used to collect data from 10 head teachers selected from 10 schools. The findings revealed that there appears to

be a gap between the policy prescriptions and teachers practices because the primary school in urban settings under the influence of parents tend to place much emphasis on English language as a medium of instruction.

2.10 Stories Told and Lessons Learned

According to Tappen and Brown (1989), storytelling has long been recognised across diverse cultures as a tool for the moral development of young children. Tappen and Brown used a qualitative research approach to explore storytelling and its impact on children's moral development. The researchers used interviews to collect data from an informant called Jennifer, who shared her experience about a moral conflict situation she encountered when she was in Grade 4 and how she resolved it. The study's findings revealed that when the opportunity is given to children to tell stories and reflect on the moral dilemmas in the stories, they learn lessons. Hunter and Eder (2010) on the other hand, posit that children can make meaning of their world through storytelling. Thus, children use storytelling as a frame to make meaning and understand the complexities of their environment. Therefore, it appears that storytelling plays an interconnected evaluative and social role for the listener because it creates a situation whereby children can relate to the characters in the stories. By implication, stories provide an opportunity for children to comment on essential life experiences and see themselves through others. Moreover, Hunter and Eder (2010) investigated the role of storytelling in children's moral/ethical decision-making in a multicultural context. These researchers also used interviews to collect data from 45 participants. The participants were selected from two different school settings, both rural and urban primary schools and put into groups of four or five in each of the schools. The findings revealed that storytelling provides a unique reference for teachers to have a

better understanding of the complexities that are inherent in children's every day, ethical decision-making. The findings of the two studies suggest that storytelling impact children's development in multiple ways, which is succinctly captured in the words of Winston (1999), "the use of storytelling can offer a dramatic narrative that not only stirs the emotions but also contributes to the cognitive power of these emotions, making particular contributions to moral learning" (p.11). Winston's assertion is significant because storytelling provides a valuable opportunity for children to reflect on real life experiences. This claim is in line with the finding of a study in which Ota (2010) used a case study research to investigate the development of narrative skills in a small group of three young girls. The study's findings revealed that storytelling makes it possible for teachers to deal with the personal, cultural, spiritual and emotional development of the child, making it possible for them to reflect on themselves as individuals along with their relationships with the people in their immediate environment. Moreover, Tappen and Brown (1989) argue that storytelling influences the moral development of children because it provides an opportunity for children to make a moral judgment regarding the actions and inactions of characters in a story. The lessons learned from stories tend to shape the conduct of children into the future. However, the negative consequences of the absence of storytelling in the lives of children are well articulated in the words of MacIntyre (1989), "Deprive children of stories, and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions and their words" (p.4). Storytelling appears to be one of the most effective means of developing the moral fabric of children in kindergarten classrooms because it imparts in them values such as concern for others, self-discipline and the sense of what is right and wrong.

2.11 Teacher Beliefs

The idea of “teacher beliefs” for a very long time has been an issue of great interest to many researchers in the field of education. However, most researchers and theorists define teacher beliefs in diverse ways. For instance, according to Nespor, (1987) beliefs regarding its general meaning are entirely personal, steady, etched in vivid memories of earlier experiences, lie outside an individual’s control or awareness and tends not to be affected by personal persuasion. It, appears that belief is a complicated issue. In light of this, some researchers perceive belief as a system (e.g. Green, 1971; Thompson, 1992). Green (1971) outlines three elements that characterise belief systems. These elements have to do with their interconnected nature rather than the substance of the beliefs systems. The first element classifies beliefs into primary and derivative. Primary beliefs stem from an individual’s way of operating, and so it is not influenced by other beliefs. However, derivative beliefs emanate from primary beliefs. The second element has to do with core beliefs which are not amenable to change. The third element is related to the other two beliefs clusters. Green (1971) maintains that beliefs are held in clusters, so they are independent of the other set of clusters. Dewey (1933) argues that belief is an element that is inherent in the thought processes of an individual. Dewey further maintains that the belief itself emphasises issues such as facts or principles which are beyond the individual. By implication, principles or laws that an individual is aware of constitute one's beliefs about the world. Moreover, according to Borg (2001), a belief refers to an idea that an individual may knowingly or unknowingly have about a certain phenomenon. It tends to be evaluative in nature. Individuals who hold that belief tends to accept it as the truth. Thus, there is an emotive attachment and commitment to it. Thus, teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning represent

teachers' views about teaching and learning that they consider being appropriate. Borg further argues that such beliefs develop during the time that teachers spend at school; first as students; then as student teachers and finally as classroom teachers. Thus, over a period and with more practice, beliefs become more robust. The importance of this is that once a belief is acquired it becomes extremely difficult to alter it. Moreover, Richardson, Anders and Tidwell (1991) observe that beliefs are a key factor in determining what should or should not be acceptable to an individual who holds a certain belief about an issue. Teachers' beliefs about instructional strategies may differ from one teacher to another. For instance, a teacher may have a belief that a mixed-ability grouping is an effective instructional strategy in a kindergarten classroom while another teacher may have a belief that a homogenous grouping is more effective (Erkmen, 2012; Thomas, 2011). In short, a belief is a personal stance that one takes on an issue which tends to guide an individual teacher's thoughts and actions. Thus, beliefs serve as a signpost for individual teachers to engage in acts or practices that are deemed appropriate and acceptable in classrooms. However, several authors (Rowe, 2006; Hermans, Van Braak & Van Keer, 2008) argue that the ideological orientation of teacher beliefs consist of traditional teacher centred instruction and child centred constructivist strategies. Teachers with teacher centred beliefs perceive that their role in the classrooms is to give students problems that are precise which they can easily resolve. On the other hand, teachers with constructivist beliefs see students as active participants in the teaching and learning process. Thus, teachers from this perspective, give children the opportunity to find solutions to problems on their own (Hermans et.al (2008).

However, there is a difficulty when one tries to distinguish "belief" from terms such as "knowledge" and "attitude." Pajares (1992) asserts that belief is an individual's personal

judgment of an issue, so there is always an element of subjectivity embedded in it. In contrast, Pajares argue that knowledge is an objective fact or evidence that can be proven. However, Berankova, Kvasnicka and Houska (2010) posit that the prevailing belief is that knowledge is difficult in defining, but only its features can be determined. For example, Berankova et al.(2010) identified two elements that define knowledge, and these include information applied at the right time at the right place in the right manner; and knowledge as information for problem-solving. There appears to be a bit of a difficulty when it comes to establishing the differences between beliefs and attitudes because both concepts seem to have similar connotations. However, Smith (1997) contends that there is a dichotomy between beliefs and attitude because beliefs reflect the relationships that an individual perceives among social objects within a certain environment, while attitudes are an individual's evaluative reactions to those objects within the social settings. In short, the concepts of "beliefs" and "knowledge" differ in respect to the emotive aspects. In a similar vein, the "beliefs are not the same as "attitudes" because the former constitute one of the fundamental elements of attitude development.

2.11.1 Defining Teacher Beliefs

There are a variety of definitions that well synthesise what teacher belief is and factors that impact teacher belief. For instance, Thomas (2011) maintains that the definitions of teacher beliefs in the past are focused solely on teachers' behaviour. However, the term "teacher beliefs" is complicated. Because it encompasses the rich store of knowledge that teachers have about general principles of teaching and learning with respect to objects, learners, events, linkages and the interplay of these elements and how they influence the teacher's actions in class (Agezo,2009). Thus, teacher beliefs guide teachers to think, plan and make instructional

decisions about what they are expected to do at every stage of the teaching and learning process. Pajares (1992) further argues that a teacher belief denotes the attitudes that teachers have about education regarding the teaching and learning process. In a similar vein, Thomas (2011) posits that teachers' beliefs relate to issues such as teachers' practical knowledge, principles governing practice and teachers' orientation. In short, teachers' belief comprises issues such as how children learn, classroom management, teaching strategies and assessment practices in the classroom.

2.11.2 The Basis for Teachers' Instructional Beliefs

The beliefs that teachers have about their practices in classrooms are likely to differ from one teacher to another because their beliefs appear to emanate from various sources. Spodek (1988b) argues that the differences in teacher beliefs stem from factors such as teacher preparation, the personal nature of the teacher and the impact of the collaborations that teachers engage over the course of doing their work. Spodek further argues that teacher beliefs appear to have been influenced by factors such as culture, the quality of pre-service experience and the reflections that emanate from pre-service experiences. By implication, several external factors impact the development of teacher beliefs. Richardson (1996) however, identifies three sources of teacher beliefs; personal life experiences that impact a teacher's worldview; experiences as a student; and formal knowledge regarding pedagogy and content. Keegan (1990) on the other hand, argues that factors influencing teacher beliefs include the teachers' in-depth understanding of classrooms; students; the nature of learning; the teacher's role in the classroom; and the goals of education.

2.11.3 The Significance of Teacher Beliefs

The relevance of teacher beliefs can be seen from two perspectives; from the perspective of its relevance for the teacher, and the perspective of its relevance to others. In the case of its relevance for the teacher, Dewey (1933) argues that even though belief focuses on an issue that is not yet certain, it gives enough grounds and assurance for a teacher to act upon it as true knowledge but which is also likely to be questioned for some time to come in the future. It can, therefore, be argued that teacher beliefs serve as a frame for teachers' instructional decision-making in class. Moreover, Borg (2001) observes that teacher beliefs make it possible for teachers to make sense of their world because it helps them to determine the extent to which any additional information may be useful for promoting the learners' development. By implication, teacher beliefs serve as a mechanism for teachers to screen and select useful information to enhance a specific aspect of a child's development. In this regard, it appears that teacher beliefs provide a sense of direction as to the requisite learning activities, instructional strategies and instructional decisions that a teacher is expected to employ in class to address certain developmental needs of learners (Eisenhardt, Cuthbert, Shum & Harding, 1988). In short, teacher beliefs serve as a means through which instructional decisions and judgments are determined. In the case of others, teacher beliefs become a useful template for others such as officials in the inspection division of the Ministry of Education to determine the effectiveness of teacher's practices in early childhood settings (Kegan, 1992).

2.12 Educational System in Ghana and Early Childhood Education

To give readers insights into the educational context within which the present study was carried out, it is worthwhile to describe the prevailing educational system in Ghana. This system

comprises three forms; formal, non-formal and informal (Educational Reform, 2007). However, the focus of this study is only in formal education. According to the 2007 education reforms, formal education has well-defined philosophical underpinnings, goals, aims, curriculum, and duration. According to the Ministry of Education (2007), the formal education system in Ghana comprises; early childhood education, primary education, junior high school (JHS), senior high school (SHS), vocational and technical education and tertiary education. The duration of the various stages of Ghana's educational system is as follows; four years' early childhood education, six years of primary schooling, three years of junior high schooling, and three years of senior high schooling. In Ghana, primary education begins at the day nursery (ages 2-3yrs) for two years; kindergarten (ages 4-5yrs) for two years, and then the child starts primary one at the age of six years old. In early childhood settings, before a child progresses from one class to another, he or she should have attained a certain level of development through their scores in authentic assessments conducted by the teachers over time.

2.13 Teachers' Instructional Practices in Ghana

In this section, I address issues that are central to teachers' instructional practices such as basic concepts that define teachers' instructional practices, the elements that define teachers' practices, intentional teaching and the complex roles of an effective early childhood teacher. The study focuses on teachers' practices in a kindergarten classroom. Thus, the discussion would focus on suitable instructional practices that kindergarten teachers are expected to engage children within the early childhood settings in Ghana.

2.13.1 Basic Concepts that Define Instructional Practices

The concept of instructional practice and its corresponding term “teaching” are concepts that do not lend themselves to easy definition. For example, Fumoto, Hargreaves and Maxwell (2004) define teaching as a process of engaging learners in useful activities to enhance their development. Fumoto, et.al further perceived teaching as a well-coordinated and a well-thought-through practice, and not something done in a haphazard manner. Thus, the learning activities that teachers are expected to engage children should be well-planned ahead of time for the purpose of helping each of the learners to develop their unique potentials. This suggests that pre-lesson preparation is essential for effective teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms. In a similar vein, Quam (1998) posits that teaching is a process whereby learning materials are well-planned for making it possible for the teacher to provide the requisite information and learning activities to help students learn. By implication, the essence of teaching is to bring about a qualitative change in the learner regarding his or her thoughts, understanding, values, and skills. Gage (2008) on the other hand, maintains that teaching is what teachers do to help learners complete any given task. Thus, the definitions appear to suggest that teaching is a complex process. It is, therefore, characterised by purposeful and deliberate activities to promote children’s development.

However, several philosophers and theorists perceive education as a learning experience, so they tend to see teaching as something that is concerned only with the provision of information to students. For instance, Dewey (1933) contends that the object of education is to prepare learners for future responsibilities and learners’ personal successes in life. The significance of this is that teaching should be organised in such a way that opportunity is given to

learners to integrate their learning experiences. In this vein, teachers are expected to take into consideration a learner's interest, needs and differences when planning the curriculum.

Pestalozzi perceives teaching as a process of nurturing and directing learners to construct their knowledge. In a similar vein, Blank (2008) argues that Froebel reiterated the need for learning to be centred on learners' interest and their active participation in first-hand experiences. Froebel further argues that the focus of teaching should be on nurturing, but it should not hamper the learners' natural growth (Bredekamp 2014). In effect, teaching is not only meant to provide information to learners but also comprises a process of planned activities to promote children's development. To this end, Bredekamp (2014) argues that teaching is an activity that a teacher purposefully selects and applies in a flexible manner to help the learner to construct his or her knowledge. In all, Bredekamp's (2014) definition is the best fit because it seems to be the best-synthesised description of the term used currently. Thus, teaching is a complicated issue to deal with because it involves using effective practices to integrate children's learning experiences to promote their development in early childhood settings.

2.13.2 The Elements of Teacher Practices

This section focuses on the elements that define the concept "teacher practices." And in turn, constitute the basis for determining the effectiveness of a kindergarten teacher's practices. Considering this, Quam (1998) asserts that the effectiveness of the teacher is measured according to two basic elements: teacher's knowledge about content areas and the teacher's ability to effectively communicate that content for a learner to understand. Moreover, Femoto, et.al (2004) argue that elements that define teacher effectiveness in early childhood settings comprise the following: strategies that teachers employ in the classroom to engage learners in learning

activities; the clarity with which the teacher explains issues in content areas; the selection of the requisite instructional materials; the sort of questions that teachers ask learners; and the strategies teachers use to focus children's attention on a lesson. Stronge (2002) maintains that the elements for determining the effectiveness of teaching include; teacher's in-depth knowledge about content areas; and teachers' pedagogical skills. For example, Hunsaker, Nielson and Bartlett (2010) used a quantitative research approach to explore 61 primary school teachers' practices influencing students' learning outcomes in reading. The study's findings revealed that there is a strong relationship between the organisation of classroom instruction, content, instructional strategies and children's reading outcomes and not explaining it was the focus. However, because of the quantitative nature of the study, establishing the strong relationship between the factors and children learning outcomes, and not explaining it, was the focus. The study's finding is revealing because it supports the notion that teachers are expected to have the necessary teaching experiences before they become effective because experienced teachers tend to have mastery over the content area. Also, they are likely to have insights into individual children's needs, interests, and experiences. This assertion is significant because effective teachers are likely to make well-informed instructional decisions before, during and after teaching to impact children development in early childhood settings.

2.14 Intentional Teaching

According to Bredekamp (2014), early childhood teachers can only become effective at their work if they plan on certain key aspects of children's development and learning. In early childhood settings, teachers are expected to plan the curriculum and select instructional strategies before the commencement of teaching in order to meet the developmental needs of individual

children. Bredekamp (2014) further argues that effective teachers are intentional teachers because whatever they do in class is backed by certain objectives. Thus, the intentional teacher not only plans ahead but has adequate knowledge to make appropriate instructional decisions during teaching, including those unanticipated moments. Esptein (2007) on the other hand, posits that an intentional teacher tends to have explanations for every instructional decision that is made during every teaching and learning context. Bredekamp further argues that the features of intentional teaching comprise; effective planning, explanation of practices, and informed instructional decision-making.

In planning children's learning experiences, the intentional teacher is expected to reflect on learning experiences which are likely to promote children's development in all aspects of development and learning. At regular intervals, the teacher observes and assesses individual children and uses the information to plan for their developmental needs.

Also, the intentional teacher can explain to parents, administrators, and other stakeholders in early childhood education aspects of their practices that are of particular concern. Moreover, intentional teachers are also aware that the learning activities or the instructional strategies they select for a lesson will not be effective in all cases. Hence, the teacher always plans for such possibilities by using different instructional strategies or by engaging a child in different learning activities.

Moreover, Bredekamp (2014) maintains that the three key issues that early childhood teachers should consider in their instructional decision-making processes include knowledge about how children in early childhood settings learn, the uniqueness that each child brings to the learning context; and the sociocultural context in which children live. Bredekamp (2014) further

observes that these three factors “interact with and influence each other in shaping children’s development and behaviour” (p.83).

In all, intentional early kindergarten teachers make informed instructional decisions before, during and after every teaching and learning context for harnessing the potentials of children.

2.15 Empirical Research on Teacher Practices in Kindergarten Classrooms

2.15.1 Effectiveness of DAP

The efficacy of DAP has been an issue of concern to many researchers in the past (Jones & Guldo, 1999; Horn & Ramey, 2003; Horn, Karlin, Ramey, Aldridge, & Snyder, 2005; Shiaku & Belsky, 2009). For example, studies conducted by Jones and Guldo (1999) and Shiaku and Belsky (2009) consistently revealed that there is a strong correlation between teacher practices and children’s social, emotional and cognitive development. However, because the studies were situated within the North American and European contexts, there is still a need for a study to determine whether comparable results would be found in other socio-cultural settings. Moreover, the researchers (Jones & Guldo, 2009 Shiaku & Belsky, 2009) employed a quantitative research approach to ascertain the effectiveness of DAP in kindergarten classrooms. For instance, while Jones and Guldo studied four elementary schools in a large urban school district in the Midwestern United States, Shiaku and Belsky on the other hand studied Greek/Cypriot children in seven public schools. However, this study failed to provide implications that could inform kindergarten teachers’ decision-making about learning activities and instructional strategies in kindergarten classrooms. Therefore, there is the need for a nuanced study of teacher practices through qualitative research. Also, Jones and Guldo studied a total sample size of 293 (153)

males and (140) females using a survey of teachers belief practices which was designed to reflect concepts underpinning DAP as contained in the 1997 NAEYC's guidelines. Shiaku and Belsky studied 142 Greek/Cypriot children enrolled in seven preschools classes (67) and nine first-year kindergarten classes (75) using a questionnaire about teachers' and parent's beliefs about play instrument and preschool play and learning. The sample size of the former study far exceeded that of the latter. In the case of the former study, because of the large sample size, there was likely to be more diversity in the responses. Moreover, because of the large sample size, the researchers obtained more comprehensive data. Thus, the study is likely to provide insights into the effectiveness of DAP in kindergarten classrooms than the data obtained from a smaller sample size given the homogeneous nature of the participants in that study. However, the challenge with quantitative studies and their large sample sizes is that the researchers might not be able to use in-depth interviewing as a means of finding out from participants why they make certain instructional decisions in class. In this vein, there is the need for a study that will use in-depth interviews with a small number of participants to elicit their views about how they make such decisions in kindergarten classrooms.

Moreover, the studies by Jones and Guldo (1999) and Horn and Ramey (2003) consistently revealed that teachers employed an integrated approach as a means of promoting children's cognitive development. However, as indicated earlier, while Jones and Guldo surveyed a large sample of teachers regarding their beliefs and practices, to explore the effectiveness of DAP in kindergarten classrooms, Horn and Ramey, on the other hand, used a longitudinal intervention trial that followed the progress of former Head Start children from kindergarten. These researchers used a template of the developmentally appropriate practices to

collect data in three consecutive years which generated data from 1,537 classrooms in 296 schools in 1996 as well as data from 859 classrooms in 256 schools in 1997 to explore the effectiveness of DAP in kindergarten classrooms in the US. But because the latter researchers (Horn and Ramey) used a larger sample size and a longitudinal approach for their study, their findings are likely to provide different insights into the impact of DAP on children's development than the findings of the former researchers because of the diversity inherent in the responses and the longitudinal nature of their study. Nonetheless, the results of the two studies (Jones & Guldo, 1999 Horn & Ramey, 2003) failed to provide details about how the teachers make instructional decisions about learning activities in kindergarten classrooms. Thus, there is the need for a nuanced study to be conducted to explore how teachers interpret and apply DAP in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian social-cultural context.

2.15.2 Effectiveness of DAP on Children's Development

However, several researchers have conducted studies to determine the effectiveness of DAP on children's development by comparing early childhood settings where teachers' practices are developmentally appropriate (DAP) with early childhood settings where teachers' practices are not developmentally appropriate (developmentally inappropriate practices or DIP). For instance, Horn et.al, (2005) reviewed 17 former quantitative empirical studies conducted by researchers who explored the impact of DAP and DIP on children's development. The authors further classified the previous studies into two main groups. The first group was focused on the impact of DAP regarding cognitive and academic development of young children whereas the second group was focused on the impact of DAP on psychosocial outcomes. The data analyses revealed contrasting effects of DAP on children's development. The analysis of the data for the first group

revealed that there was a mix of positive, neutral and negative impacts of DAP on children's cognitive and academic development. But the findings of the second group revealed that DAP had a positive impact on children's development regarding psychosocial outcomes. However, Horn et.al, acknowledged that one major weakness of the studies was that the researchers solely relied on the grade outcomes of individual children as reported by the teachers as a basis for determining the efficacy of DAP on children's development. Since these researchers employed a quantitative research approach to explore the effectiveness of DAP on children's development, details about how teachers interpret and apply DAP kindergarten classrooms within the US socio-cultural context were not provided. Hence, there is the need for a qualitative study to explore how teachers interpret and apply DAP in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context.

2.15.3 Teacher Practices in Kindergarten Classrooms

Previous research findings consistently revealed that the kind of teacher practices to which kindergarten teachers resort tends to impact children's development. Several researchers (Hayson, Hirsh-Pasek & Rescorla, 1990; Maxwell, MacWilliam, Hemmeter, Ault & Shuster, 2001; Horn & Ramey, 2004; Hedge & Cassidy, 2009) have revealed that a majority of kindergarten teachers employ a play-based method and an integrated approach as instructional strategies for engaging children in learning activities for the purpose of promoting children's development. For example, Hayson, Hirsh-Pasek & Rescorla (1990) used an observational instrument based on NAEYC's guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices for four and five-year-old children and an inventory checklist of classroom practices to collect data from a sample of 68 respondents to explore developmentally appropriate teacher practices in

kindergarten classrooms in the US. In contrast, Maxwell et al.(2001) five years later used an observational checklist referred to as assessment of classroom practices in elementary schools to collect data from 69 kindergarten teachers in 40 public elementary schools in the U S. In the same vein, Horn and Ramey in a longitudinal study used a measure for assessing appropriate practices in early elementary schools in order to collect data from a sample size of 854 and 1511 children in first through third-grade classrooms. The sample size suggests that the sample size of Horn and Ramey's study was larger than the studies of Hayson et al, and Maxwell et al. The importance of this is that in a large-scale study like that of Horn and Ramey, there is likely to be diversity in the responses of the respondents. By implication, this is likely to provide a different overall picture of teacher practices in kindergarten classrooms because of the broad data it tends to generate. Moreover, the studies were carried out in a North American context. Hence, there is a need for a similar study to be conducted to determine whether parallel findings could be found in other socio-cultural contexts. However, it is possible, that differences will emerge, between the American context and that of Ghana because of the differences in the children's socio-cultural contexts. But because of the quantitative nature of the studies, the researchers failed to report reasons teachers used play and integrated instructional strategies in kindergarten classrooms. On the other hand, the findings of a study carried out by Hedge and Cassidy (1996) differed because they used a self-constructed interview schedule to collect data from 12 teachers to explore their practices in kindergarten classrooms. The study revealed that the teachers used the play-based method and the integrated approach as instructional strategies in kindergarten classrooms. However, because of the nuanced nature of their qualitative study, Hedge and Cassidy reported that individual differences influenced the instructional decisions of

kindergarten teachers regarding the use of either play-based method or integrated instructional strategy for a particular lesson. On the other hand, this study was carried out in an Asian context. Hence, there is the need for a similar study to be conducted to ascertain if parallel results would be found in other socio-cultural contexts. However, Asian, African and European contexts are likely to differ because of the differences in their socio-cultural contexts which impact on the worldviews of people from these diverse backgrounds.

The studies conducted by Bryant, Clifford and Peisner (1991) and Hedge and Cassidy (2005) consistently revealed that creative activities and dramatic play influence children's development. However, other findings differed in many respects. For example, while the former study revealed that language reasoning, free play, and cultural activities influence children's development, the findings of the latter study concluded that group activities impact children's development. Nonetheless, in part, such differences may be explained by the different research approaches of the two groups. For instance, while Bryant, et. al., took a quantitative approach using questionnaire and an observational measure to explore teacher practices in 103 kindergarten classrooms across South Carolina in the US, Hedge and Cassidy, on the other hand, used a qualitative case study research approach and a self-constructed interview schedule consisting of open-ended questions to collect data from a sample size of 12 kindergarten teachers to explore classrooms in Mumbai, India. Again, the studies' findings were context specific, US and Indian contexts; thus, there is a need for similar studies to be conducted in other socio-cultural contexts.

Finally, Clarke-Stewart, Lee, Allhusen, Kim and MacDowell (2006), in a comparative study, explored early childhood programmes in South Korea and the US, to determine the

differences in developmentally appropriate practices in the two countries. The study participants included 90 children from South Korea and 119 children from the United States. A classroom observation checklist and teacher questionnaires were used to collect the data. The Multivariate Analysis of Covariate (MANCOVA) was used to determine the overall differences between classroom practices in South Korea and the US. The study revealed that kindergarten teachers in South Korea had a traditional attitude toward early childhood education. Hence, they employed drills as an instructional strategy to engage children in learning activities while their counterparts in the US gave children the opportunity to interact with their peers. Also, there were differences regarding educational materials used in both contexts. For, example, early childhood classrooms in the US had more material for large motor activities and socio-dramatic play while there were more materials for maths and music activities in South Korea. These contrasting findings are revealing and intriguing because they buttress the long-held notion by early childhood educators and researchers that socio-cultural context is a key determinant of what constitutes appropriate practices in early childhood classrooms. Thus, this implies that the South Korean socio-cultural context determines appropriate learning activities in which kindergarten teachers engage children. Therefore, DAP cannot be universally applied. However, because the study was carried out within the US and the Korean contexts, there is still the need to determine whether comparable results could be found in other socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, because of the quantitative nature of this study, there is the need for a more nuanced study of teacher's practices through qualitative research which tends to provide descriptive and in-depth information about a small sample of kindergarten teachers. This approach is likely to unearth the subtleties that are inherent in kindergarten teachers' instructional decision making.

Nonetheless, previous studies in Ghana have consistently revealed that teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms conform with developmentally appropriate practices because their practices are play-based. For example, some researchers (Deku, 2010b; Etsey, 2010) in their studies consistently revealed that most kindergarten teachers had in-depth knowledge of constructivist principles of teaching. While Deku used an ethnographic research approach, interview protocol, and observations to collect data from five kindergarten teachers to determine their approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms, Etsey, used a descriptive survey and a questionnaire to collect data from 15 kindergarten teachers to investigate their approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms. But because of the nuanced nature of the qualitative study, Deku further reported that most the teachers employed a play-based method to promote the holistic development of young children in a kindergarten classroom. However, the two studies failed to report how kindergarten teachers interpret and apply DAP within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context. Thus, there remains a need for a study to be conducted to explore this perplexing issue.

2.15.4 DAP Beliefs and Practices

Several studies (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Thomasson, Mostley & Fleege, 1993; McMullen, Elicker, Wang, Erdiller, Lee, Lin & Sun, 2005; Hedge & Cassidy, 2009b; Parker & Neuhart-Prichett, 2009; Abu-Jaber, Al-Shawreb & Gheith, 2010; Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2011; Rio-Cortex, Alanis, & Flores, 2013; Hedge, Sugita, Crane-Mitchell, Averett, 2014) explored teachers' DAP beliefs and practices in kindergarten, classroom. However, analyses of the studies reveal that these studies can be grouped into two: factors that influence beliefs and practices and DAP beliefs and practices in other cultures.

2.15.5 Factors Influencing DAP Beliefs and Practices

Past research indicates that the beliefs that teachers have about their practices do not often conform with their practices in kindergarten classrooms (Parker & Neuharth- Pritchett, 2009; Rio-Cortex, et.al., 2013; Abu-Jaber, et al., 2010; Hedge & Cassidy, 2009a; Rentzou & Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2011; Charlesworth, et al., 1993). Several researchers (Parker & Neuharth- Pritchett, 2009; Riojas-Cotex, Alanis, & Flores (2013) used qualitative research approach to explore teacher beliefs and their practices. Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2009) explored kindergarten teachers' beliefs regarding instructional practices and the factors that influence their practices and beliefs. The study's participants consisted of 34 kindergarten teachers selected, from seven schools in a rural Southeastern US school district. The participants were interviewed and observed in the study. The study findings categorised the teacher beliefs and instructional practices into three groupings; out of the 34 teachers, nine of them described their practices as teacher centred, 16 saw their practices as child-centred and teacher centred while the other nine teachers described their practices as child-centred. The study further revealed that four external factors accounted for the discrepancies between teachers' beliefs, and practices: the shift to a more academic kindergarten curriculum; pressure from teachers' peers and parents of children; and teachers' perceptions of teachers directed instructional strategies. Moreover, Riojas-Cotex, et al. (2013) also employed a qualitative research approach to explore how early childhood teachers re-construct their beliefs and practices through reflective actions. The study's participants comprised five teachers selected from the River State School District (South Carolina). The researchers also conducted focus groups and multiple individual interviews. Also, the teachers were observed at the beginning and end of the study. The study

revealed that the participants understood the relevance of appropriate practices, but they had difficulties putting into practice their beliefs about appropriate practices. The study further revealed that they could not put their beliefs into practice because the kindergarten curriculum was too demanding and the difficulties that they had had in engaging children in didactic practices. Meanwhile, a critical analysis of the two qualitative studies revealed that there is a disconnect between teachers' beliefs and their actual practices. Thus, because of the qualitative nature of the studies, the reasons teachers' beliefs differed from their practices were established. However, the study's findings might not be the same in the Ghanaian socio-cultural context because the kindergarten curriculum is centralised and controlled. Hence, there is the need for a similar study to be conducted within the Ghanaian context to explore how teachers' beliefs and practices in that context shape teacher's instructional decision making in kindergarten classrooms.

Meanwhile, several recent studies (Charlesworth, et al.,1993; Abu-Jaber et al, 2010; Sakellariou &Renzou, 2011;) have consistently revealed that teachers' beliefs differed from their actual practices in kindergarten classrooms. Thus, there were significant differences between their DAP beliefs and practices. However, because the studies were carried out within the European and South American context, there is still the need for a similar study to be done primarily to established how teachers' beliefs and other factors influence teachers' instructional decisions making processes in kindergarten classrooms. Moreover, the researchers mentioned above used quantitative research approaches to establishing, the relationships between teachers' beliefs and their DAP practices, therefore, the study failed to provide reasons why there is a disconnect between teacher's beliefs and their practices in kindergarten classrooms. Thus, there

is also the need for a nuanced study to ascertain reasons accounting for the disparities between teachers' beliefs and their practices on how they make instructional decisions in kindergarten classrooms. A more recent study, Hedge, et al, (2014) used a self-constructed interview protocol to collect data from six nursery teachers and four kindergarten teachers to explore Japanese nursery and kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices regarding developmentally appropriate practices. The study revealed that the 10 participants used play-based instructional strategies in the classrooms because they believed that play promotes the holistic development of children regarding their cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.

2.15.6 DAP in Other Cultural Contexts

Moreover, McMullen, Elicker, Wang, Eridillar, Lee, Lin and Sun (2005) compared beliefs about appropriate practices among early childhood educators and care professionals from the US (414), China (244), Taiwan (222), Korea (574), and Turkey (214). The Pearson's correlations and the one-way ANOVA were used to compare the overall mean score for teachers' beliefs which were measured by the teachers' beliefs scale. The researchers conducted an item by item analysis using a factor analysis and an X² analysis within and across countries. The study revealed that the similarities among the countries included integration across the curriculum, promoting social and emotional development, providing concrete and hands-on materials and allowing play choice in the curriculum. However, because the study was quantitative in nature, the researcher could not establish the reasons the teachers' use play-based learning and integration as instructional strategies in kindergarten settings.

Moreover, the study found that for the teachers from all five countries, there was a positive relationship between self-reported beliefs and the corresponding developmentally

appropriate practices and their self-reported rate of engagement with instructional activities. The study further revealed that this relationship was weak in the sample from China, strong in the US and moderate in other nations. The outcome was strong in the US because developmentally appropriate practices originated from that country. However, culture is a key determinant of what constitutes appropriate practices in kindergarten classrooms. Therefore, in the case of the other countries, certain peculiar cultural elements relevant to the context of each country might have been incorporated into their respective kindergarten curriculum, and this might have accounted for the differences between the US and the other countries. However, because the study was carried out in different contexts, there is a need for a study to be done in the Ghanaian and other contexts to determine how teachers' beliefs influence their instructional decision making in kindergarten classrooms.

Also, a study conducted by Hedge and Cassidy (2009a) explored teachers' beliefs and practices in the urban and cosmopolitan city of Mumbai, India. The study was divided into four zones; east, west, central and south. Five schools from each of the four zones were selected for the study. The research instrument used was scales of teacher beliefs comprising 76 items that teachers rated on a five-point Likert scale. The researchers used One-way ANOVA's to examine the differences between teachers' beliefs, stated practices, and actual practices. The study revealed that there is no significant difference between them. However, the study was conducted within Indian settings, and there is still the need for a study to find out if there would be similar findings within the Ghanaian context. Also, the study failed to report why there is no significant difference between teachers' beliefs, their stated practices, and their actual practices.

2.15.7 Summary of Literature Review of Empirical Research

A scrutiny of the entire empirical research reviewed so far has revealed three major strands of developmentally appropriate practices were explored in kindergarten classrooms by several researchers over the years. These are; the effectiveness of DAP; the DAP practices of teachers; and the teachers' beliefs and practices of DAP.

2.15.8 Effectiveness of DAP

Several quantitative studies (Jones & Guldo, 1999; Horn & Remey, 2003; Horn, et.al, 2005; Shiaku & Belsky, 2009) exploring the effectiveness of DAP in kindergarten classrooms point to the strong relationship between teachers' practices and children's social and cognitive development. To this end, there is the need for researchers to conduct qualitative studies to explore how kindergarten teachers in Ghana implement and reflect on their practices in kindergarten classrooms.

2.15.9 Teachers' Practices in Kindergarten Classrooms

A number of studies (Hayson, et al, 1996; Maxwell, et al, 2014; Hedge & Cassidy, 2009b) which explored teacher practices in kindergarten classrooms consistently revealed that teachers used play-based methods and integrated instructional practices to engage children in learning activities. There are only two studies (Deku, 2010b; Etsey, 2010) that have been conducted in certain parts of Ghana to ascertain the types of instructional strategies teachers use used in kindergarten classrooms. Both studies recommended the need for further studies to explore teacher practices in other parts of Ghana.

2.15.10 DAP Beliefs and Practices

Numerous studies (Charlesworth, et al., 1993; Hedge & Cassidy, 2009; Abu-Jaber, et al, 2010; Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2011) have consistently revealed that teachers’ beliefs about their practices in kindergarten classrooms are often not in line with their actual practices. However, because of the quantitative nature of these studies, the researchers failed to report why there is a mismatch between teachers’ beliefs and their actual practices in kindergarten classrooms. However, the studies conducted by Parker and Neuhartt-Pritchett (2009) and Riojas-Cotex et al, (2013) consistently revealed that there are inconsistencies inherent in teachers’ beliefs and their actual practices in kindergarten classrooms. However, because of the qualitative nature of both studies, the researchers uncovered reasons why teachers’ beliefs are not always in conformity with their actual practices in the classrooms. To this end, a qualitative research approach would be useful to shed light on how teachers’ beliefs and other factors influence instructional decision making in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian context. Table 1 presents the summary of the studies reviewed.

Table 2-1 Summary of the Studies Reviewed

Author(s)	Year	Title	Study Type of Research
Jones & Guldo	1999	Differential social, and academic effects of developmentally appropriate practices and beliefs	Quantitative

Author(s)	Year	Title	Study Type of Research
Horn & Ramey,	2003	The effects of developmentally appropriate practices on academic outcomes among former Head Start students and classmates, grades 1-3	Quantitative
Van, Horn, Karlin, Ramey, & Snyder,	2005	Effects of developmentally appropriate practices on children's development: A review of research and discussion of methodological and analytic issues	Quantitative
Shiaku & Belsky,	2009	Exploring effects of developmentally appropriate practices in Cyprus	Quantitative
Hayson, Hirsh-Pasek & Rescorla,	1990	The classroom practices inventory: An observation instrument based on NAEYC's guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices for 4-5-year-old children.	Quantitative
Maxwell, McWilliams, Hemmeter, Ault & Shuster,	2001	Predictors of developmentally appropriate classroom practices	Quantitative

Author(s)	Year	Title	Study Type of Research
		in kindergarten through third grade	
Van Horn & Ramey,	2004	A new measure for assessing early elementary school, A developmentally appropriate practice template	Quantitative
Hedge & Cassidy,	2009a	Kindergarten teachers' perspectives on developmentally appropriate practices: A study conducted in Mumbai	Qualitative
Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner	1991	Best practices for beginners: developmentally appropriateness in kindergarten classrooms	Quantitative
Hedge & Cassidy	2009b		Qualitative
Clarke-Stewart, Lee, Allhulsen, Kim, & McDowell	2006	Observed differences between early childhood programmes in the US and Korea: Reflections on developmentally appropriate practices in two cultural contexts.	Quantitative

Author(s)	Year	Title	Study Type of Research
Deku,	2010	Approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms: A case of University of Cape Coast kindergarten teachers.	Qualitative
Etsey,	2010	Teachers' approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms	Qualitative
Abu-Jaber, Al-Shawreb & Gheith	2010	Kindergarten teachers' beliefs towards developmentally appropriate practices in Jordan	Quantitative
Hedge & Cassidy	2009b	Teachers' beliefs and practices regarding developmentally appropriate practices: A study conducted in India.	Quantitative
Sakellariou & Rentzou	2011	Cypriot pre-service Kindergarten teachers' beliefs about and practices of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education	Quantitative
Riojas-Cotex, Alanis, & Flores	2013	Early childhood teachers reconstruct beliefs and practices through reflexive action	Qualitative

Author(s)	Year	Title	Study Type of Research
Parker & Neuhart-Pritchett	2009	Developmentally appropriate practices in Kindergarten: Factors shaping teachers' beliefs and practices.	Qualitative
McMullen, Elicker, Wang, Erdiller, Lee, Lin, & Sun	2005	Comparing beliefs about appropriate practices among early childhood education and care professionals from the US, China, Taiwan, Korea and Turkey	Quantitative
Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Thomasson, Mosley & Fleege	1993	Measuring developmentally appropriateness of kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices	Quantitative

2.16 Theoretical Framework

Piaget's cognitive constructivist theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory are considered to be constructivist theories of learning. These theories have greatly influenced the early childhood curriculum globally (Wardsworth, 2003; DeVries, 2000; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Bredekamp, 2014). Constructivists' learning is based on the notion that the learner actively constructs knowledge. This perspective on knowledge construction has led to calls for teachers in early childhood settings to move away from the transmission of knowledge to a much more

complex one which is interactive in nature (Ault, 1979). Piaget's and Vygotsky's constructivist theories are useful because they enable early childhood teachers to plan the curriculum by providing the requisite teaching and learning activities, and their corresponding instructional strategies to enable children to construct their knowledge (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The theories guide and assist researchers regarding how teachers interpret and apply DAP within a particular socio-cultural context; the kind of learning activities teachers can use to engage children; instructional strategies teachers use, and factors and beliefs influencing teachers' instructional decision-making processes in kindergarten classrooms. Thus, these theories serve as a guide to a researcher and could be likened to what a compass does for a sailor. However, various forms of constructivism have emerged in the last two decades with different perspectives about how young children construct knowledge. The theories of Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978) are referred to as the cognitive constructivist theory of learning and sociocultural theory of learning respectively. While the former's version of constructivism sees the child as a solitary learner, who constructs knowledge within a social setting, the later perceives the learner as someone who constructs knowledge within a social context through the collaboration with others. Since these theories which are related to DAP, constitute the basis of constructivist principles of teaching in early childhood classrooms, they have been invoked to frame the current study, which aims at exploring teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana.

2.16.1 Cognitive Constructivist Theory

Piaget (1972) theorised that children have innate capabilities to organise and make meaning of their experiences. Piaget coined the expression "schema" for the mental structures

which serves a basis for thinking or regulating human behaviour. Piaget further argues that children develop through the process of adaptation because as children gain experiences, they modify their earlier schemes to conform to the new experiences. Piaget maintains that adaptation comes about through assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation comes about when a new experience for a child has a link with an existing schema. But if the new experience has no bearing on any of the existing schema, the child is expected to change his or her schema or create a new one through a process referred to as accommodation. Piaget also observes that when a child has a new experience, he or she experiences a disequilibrium, the imbalance in thinking that happens when a new information cannot be understood regarding what the child already knows. Piaget is of the view that to enable the child to make sense of the new experience he or she has to restore balance by constructing new schema through the process of equilibration.

However, Piaget argues that activity constitutes the basis of young children's cognitive development because this development of children happens when the child assimilates and accommodates new experiences as he or she encounters certain elements in the environment. As a child engages in activities within the environment by manipulating objects and exploring that environment, he or she is acquiring new experiences. The activities that the child is engaged in lead to the reconstruction of experiences that the child has already acquired. These activities can either be physical or mental because as the child grows older, some activities which engender cognitive development become less and less observable. For example, in the case of infants, the action might be focused on the movement of the legs or arms. However, for a five-year-old, the act might be internal in nature such as thinking while subtracting three objects from five objects.

In both cases, the activities that each of the children is engaged in are crucial for their development.

Piaget further argues that actions which are needed for children's cognitive development are more than just any physical undertaking. Other types of actions are behaviours that arouse a child's psyche, such as observing the reactions of two objects, and thus, might not be readily visible. There is a likelihood that these actions can bring about equilibrium and allows assimilation and accommodation to occur. Therefore, mental and physical activities that children engage in within the environment at certain stages of their development are useful but insufficient for children's cognitive development because there must be synergy between mental activities, and physical activities before these activities can stimulate child's development. Piaget further argues that a child's actions result in the construction of knowledge. However, Piaget recognised that the social context of a child informed learning but focused more on the learner and environment rather than learner in interaction with others.

Piaget (1952) argues that there are three various kinds of knowledge, and these include; physical, knowledge, logico-mathematical knowledge, and social-conventional knowledge. Physical knowledge refers to a child's awareness of the physical features of objects such as shape, size and weight as well as how objects move and function in space. A young child gains this kind of knowledge about an object while manipulating and exploring those objects with his or her senses. For instance, a young child who is playing with pebbles might pour the pebbles from one container to another and touch them with his or her hands. During activities like this, the child is constructing his or her knowledge about the nature of pebbles such as the size and shape of each one of them. Therefore, it is through young children's active engagement in

activities that they assimilate new experiences into their schemata. The features of objects in term of how they move and function in space are revealed to children as they manipulate those objects. This type of knowledge is known as physical knowledge. The child ends up constructing the correct schema of the pebbles. A child constructs logical-mathematical knowledge by observing and constructing the relationship between two objects as the child acts on those objects. As it is in the case of physical knowledge, the child can acquire logical-mathematical knowledge if he or she mentally or physically acts on objects. However, the corresponding individual roles of activities and objects in the creation of logical-mathematical knowledge are not the same. A child's logical-mathematical knowledge is not inherent in objects as it is in the case of physical knowledge, but it rather stems from the actions that a child brings to bear on objects such as throwing a ball and a stone against a wall and observing the reactions of each of the objects. Thus, logico-mathematical knowledge is the relationships that created in child's mind, as he or she acts on objects. Social-conventional knowledge refers to culturally accepted norms, names, and symbols cherished by a social or cultural group that need to be transmitted directly to the learner. However, the mode of acquiring this kind of knowledge is different. This type of knowledge is acquired through others (Wadsworth, 2003; DeVries, 2000; DeVries & Zan, 1994). The implications of the three kinds of knowledge for teacher practices in kindergarten classrooms are that if the teacher wants children to acquire physical knowledge, the teachers should create opportunities in his or her classroom for children to act on various kinds of objects in order to assimilate and accommodate new experiences into their schemata. In the case of logical-mathematical knowledge, the teacher plans the curriculum in such a way that children can act on objects and reason about their actions regarding the similarities or differences

between the reactions of two objects. Finally, if the knowledge is social- conversational in nature, the teacher does not hesitate to tell the children, or it is a matter of the teachers imparting knowledge to the children by speaking to the children. Also, by setting good examples of moral conduct, teachers can influence children's behaviour positively. Kindergarten teachers need to acknowledge that the several types of knowledge necessitate diverse approaches to teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms. For instance, even though social-conventional knowledge is learned effectively through instruction, this does not suggest that a similar process can be used to acquire other types of knowledge. A complex notion such as counting which is a type of logico-mathematical knowledge entails a much more in-depth understanding than the mere recitation of numbers. At the same time, children would not be able to learn to count if they were not familiar with the number sequence. Similarly, children would not be able to read if they were not familiar with the letters of the alphabet. Thus, in creating their understanding of concepts, children in kindergarten settings frequently draw on all forms of knowledge (Bredekamp, 2014).

Piaget (1972) in his research on children's cognitive development established that cognitive development is a consistent process of sequential qualitative transformation of cognitive structures (schemata) with each structure and its attendant change stemming logically from the earlier one. As both a theorist and researcher, Piaget outlined four stages of development as the trajectory of cognitive development from birth to adulthood: First, from birth to two years, children are at the sensory motor stage when they develop perceptual and tactile senses. Hence, at this stage, they tend to be egocentric. Second, from two to seven years' children are within the pre-operational stage when they are likely to make use of visual images and words to represent their thoughts. The third stage is classified as a concrete operational

stage, consisting of children from seven to 11 years old. Children at this stage develop the ability to apply logical thought to concrete problems. At the fourth stage, the formal operational stage is when children are aged 11 to 15. During this stage, their cognitive structures develop at a faster rate. Hence, the child develops the capacity to relate logical reasoning to various kinds of problems (Piaget, 1972; Wadsworth, 2003). However, research in the intervening years suggests that Piaget underrated children's abilities to some extent. For example, recent research findings have revealed that within a certain context if children are given clear directives, they can accomplish a task that Piaget thought they could not accomplish (Case & Okamoto, 1996). Nonetheless, misinterpretation of Piaget's theory by researchers appear to account for this notion of the theory.

Nonetheless, Piaget further argues that the cognitive processes or the behaviours that characterise children's development processes reflect only the continuum of development of samples of children in the research context (Geneva). Hence, the findings do not apply to children of another socio-cultural context. This finding stems from the belief that the age at which children develop can differ because of the influences of individual experiences and hereditary potentials that each child brings to any learning context (Piaget, 1952)

The implications of the developmental stages outlined by Piaget for educators in kindergarten classroom settings is that young children between the ages of four to five years tend to use visual images to represent their thoughts. This finding gives us insights into the intellectual skills that young children in early childhood settings can acquire in any learning context. Examples of such skills include classifications, relationships, reversible and irreversible change and the notion of time and space. Thus, kindergarten teachers who teach in a Piagetian

frame would be expected to make learning meaningful to young children by providing platforms for them to interact with a variety of objects and events. This finding suggests that if teacher practices in kindergarten classrooms are in sync with children's level of development, it is likely that the cognitive structures of young children will develop. The teachers are expected to provide opportunities for children to construct their knowledge by using effective instructional strategies to assist individual children in creating their understandings about their world.

2.16.2 Sociocultural Theory

By Piaget's assertion, a young child is a solitary learner, who learns in a social setting whereas Vygotsky emphasised that sociodramatic play, language growth of children at the early childhood level, and social interactions between children and their peers and children and adults all impacts child's development. The sociocultural theory of learning, therefore, complements Piaget's cognitive constructivist theory in framing this study.

The main thrust of Vygotsky (1978) sociocultural theory of learning is the impact of human activity on the transformation of society. Vygotsky argues that the quest of humankind to greatly influence and improve the world is implicated in man's ability to "learn from the past, imagine and plan for the future" (p.129). Vygotsky further argues that these human capabilities are usually missing in infants, however, when a child reaches three years old, he or she tends to experience tension between his or her needs, which should be satisfied immediately, and the needs that can only be satisfied in the future. Using play this paradox is delved into and dealt with momentarily. Vygotsky therefore, argues that human creativity starts at age three: "Imagination is a new formation which is not present in the consciousness of the very young child, is totally absent in animals, and represents a specifically human form of conscious

activity” (p.129). Vygotsky further maintains that children project themselves into activities within a specific socio-cultural context during play as means of practising their prospective responsibilities and values in society. Thus, play influences children’s development because it enables them to obtain the motivation, skill, values and attitudes required for their active participation in social activities. However, adult and peer support are needed before children can accomplish them.

Vygotsky further argues that children’s intellectual abilities are broadened via play and reflections on their actions during early childhood years. As children engage in play activities, they emulate adult examples. The impact of play on children is succinctly expressed by Vygotsky (1978) when he asserts that “In play, a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour, in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (p.129). Thus, children through play emulate socio-culturally defined activities which have been set aside solely for older people in society. Play creates a platform for children’s intellectual development because play activities that children create stem from real life issues that they encounter daily in their environment. However, by incorporating implicit rules into their play activities, children tend to learn the basics of abstract thinking (note: children’s play has different interpretations; dramatic play, free play, onlooker play, solitary play, associative play, parallel play, and cooperative, Hirsh, 2004).

In a similar vein, classroom instruction and learning in early childhood classrooms should incorporate an element of play for the purpose of promoting children’s cognitive development. The content of lessons taught in class should be well-planned. Thus, teacher’s practices in early childhood classroom should be focused on the play-based method so that

different instruction themes can be emphasised to promote the holistic development of young children (Vygotsky 1978).

Meanwhile, Vygotsky (1978) argues that the development of young children is influenced by the social and cultural context within which they find themselves. Vygotsky asserts that children's interactions, engagements and participation in social and cultural activities with others are crucial factors that engender their development. This assertion stems from Vygotsky's fundamental premise that all knowledge and knowledge making tools (language and symbols) are passed on from one generation to another within a socio-historical context (Vygotsky, 1978). The main thrust of Vygotsky's argument is that every community tends to hold beliefs and knowledge products about how the world operates. Vygotsky further argues that the beliefs and knowledge products of a community which are inherent in the social discourses with young children become the basis of children's development.

Young children tend to appropriate the knowledge and the psychological tools of their community gradually (Vygotsky, 1978; Wadsworth, 2003). It has been argued that children gradually internalise a community's knowledge and tools through two planes of psychological development, referred to as intrapersonal and interpersonal planes of development (Wertsch, & Tulviate, 1994). Thus, knowledge acquisition and the development of a child's intellectual capabilities are deemed to be socially and culturally constructed. This perspective about cognition tends to question the notion that the child is a solitary learner because Vygotsky provides insights into another perspective of children's development at the "zone of proximal development" (p.85). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) identifies two developmental levels; the level at which a child can complete a task independently, that is without the adult

support and the level at which the child can only accomplish tasks with the assistance of a more capable peer or through adult support. The implications of the zone of proximal development for teacher practices in early childhood classrooms is that interactions between children and their peers, as well as with adults, constitute the basis for knowledge acquisition. Also, learning activities and instructional strategies for engaging children in learning activities within early childhood classrooms should be developmentally appropriate, which is related to ZPD because a child can only accomplish a task that is commensurate with his or her level of development.

Therefore, when the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky informs the early childhood curriculum, then elements such as play-based learning, integration, activity centre, individual learning activity, group learning activity, developmental considerations, age, and socio-cultural appropriateness become the hallmarks of the early childhood curriculum and by extension teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. Moreover, the kinds of knowledge that kindergarten teachers want children to acquire should constitute the basis for the selection of learning activities for teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter illustrates the methodology used in this study. The chapter provides insights into the description and interpretation of teachers' practices in kindergarten within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana. A qualitative research approach was selected for the current study because it gave me the researcher an opportunity to investigate these practices in detail. Through observations and in-depth interviewing teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms were discovered. The research questions that guided the study were as follows;

1. How do teachers interpret and apply DAP in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian sociocultural context?
2. With what kinds of learning activities do teachers engage children?
3. What instructional strategies do teachers use in a kindergarten classroom?
4. What factors and beliefs influence teachers' instructional decision-making in a kindergarten classroom?

3.1 Philosophical Assumptions of Qualitative Research

In this study, a qualitative research approach was used to explore teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. According to Hathaway(1995), there are two major philosophical assumptions that underpin qualitative research, and these include ontology and epistemology. From the ontological point of view, qualitative researchers believe that to understand what constitutes reality one needs to be an active participant in the stream of events and activities and thereby becoming an integral part of the phenomenon under investigation. Erickson (1995) also, argues that it is through qualitative study that a researcher can make a meaningful interpretation

of a situation. The researcher's interactions with a study's participant, is the basis for determining the reality of a particular phenomenon. Moreover, Hathaway (1995) argues that the natural setting of a phenomenon is an ideal place for conducting such a study. The natural setting provides a researcher with an opportunity to interact with participants and determines the reality of the phenomenon. In the words of Garrick (2010), "it is through the subjective views of the participants" (p.12) that the researcher comes to understand real issues that underlie the phenomenon under investigation. Candy (1991) maintains that it is extremely difficult to obtain complete neutrality in qualitative research because participants in a study bring their individual beliefs and perspectives on what they consider to be the reality of the phenomenon under investigation.

The epistemological assumption that underpins qualitative research is that knowledge stems from human experiences (Erickson, 1995; Hathaway, 1995). Reality is seen as constructed in the interaction between the researcher and the participants of the study within the research context. Garrick (2010) further observes that because reality is constructed, the qualitative researcher places much emphasis on the perspective of the participants. Realities from the perspective of a qualitative researcher are manifold, but they are also constructed individually by participants (Rampussheki (1999). Nonetheless, the voices of participants of the study are interpreted by the researcher. According to Yilmaz (2013), qualitative researchers assume that knowledge is socially constructed, so reality is neither static nor fixed because of different cultural groups. Thus, participants' perspectives are essential in understanding a phenomenon. There are multiple interpretations, of any event or situation. However, Cresswell (2012) posits that axiology is another element of the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research

because the research is value-laden. Thus, qualitative researchers bring their perspectives to bear on the phenomenon which is under investigation, so there is an element of subjectivity inherent in qualitative research.

3.2 Justifications for Qualitative Research

In the words of Merriam and Tisdell (2016) “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p.6). Moreover, Pathak, Jena, and Kaira (2013) posit that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding participants’ beliefs, experiences, behaviour and interactions regarding a particular phenomenon. Thus, qualitative researchers are interested in exploring how participants interpret their experiences and how these experiences impact what they do in real-life contexts. However, Boeije (2010) maintains that the “process of inquiring is flexible and open-ended” (p.13). This is important because one cannot determine the views of participants’ regarding a phenomenon prior to his or her exploration. Moreover, several authors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Gerring, 2011; Creswell, 2012) argue that qualitative research aims at helping a researcher understand a phenomenon from the viewpoints of participants who are well-informed about the phenomenon. Thus, these researchers are intrigued by the complication of social interactions expressed in their daily lives and the meanings participants themselves attribute to these interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Yimax (2013) on the other hand, argues that “events, cases, individuals and their behaviours are unique, context-dependent and largely non-generalisable” (p.7). Thus, in qualitative research, what is needed is a thick description of carefully selected smaller samples or cases for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of a phenomenon.

Yin (2016) maintains that qualitative research cannot be reduced to only one single definition because it is a multifaceted concept. Hence, in seeking a working definition of the concept, Yin (2016) identifies five features that differentiate qualitative research from other types of social science research: studying the meanings people attach to their roles in real-life situations; indicating the opinions of people; dealing with real-life contextual issues; providing insights into current issues or novel concepts that might help explain societal behaviour; and recognising the possible relevance of several sources of data. Yin (2016) provides further explanations of two of the features of qualitative research that are relevant to this discussion. These include indicating the opinion of people, and recognising several sources of data

Yin (2016) argues that qualitative research is different because its main concern is to represent the opinions and perceptions of the participants of the study. Thus, recording the perspectives of participants appears to be one key objective of qualitative research because the occurrences and ideas emanating from the research represent the meanings assigned to real-life occurrences by people who have lived them rather than the opinions of the researcher.

Moreover, Yin (2016) further argues that qualitative research recognises the usefulness of collecting, incorporating and presenting data from various sources as evidence. The complex nature of the research context and the multiplicity of the participants are likely to merit the use of interviews and direct field observations in addition to the inspection of documents and artefacts. Another methodological advantage of qualitative research according to Yin (2016) is the “ability to triangulate among the various sources of data to create a converging line of inquiry” (p.11).

3.3 Case Study Research Design

More specifically, to explore teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana, I employed qualitative case study research design. According to Yin (2012) and Stake (2006), the case study research approach explores context-specific events within specific boundaries. Hatch (2002) argues that the boundaries which are also termed as a unit of analyses serve as "major decision point in case study research" (p.32). Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) argue that the case study approach "is an in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspectives of the participants involved in the phenomenon" (p.545). The aim of this current study was to develop an understanding of the intricate phenomenon of teachers' practices as related to developmentally appropriate practice in kindergarten classrooms. Others like Hedge and Cassidy (2009) have employed a case study research approach to gain rich insights into teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms in Mumbai, India. Although, the study's context indicated above differs from the kindergarten settings in Ghana, it provides insights into the effectiveness of case study research in exploring a bounded phenomenon like teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context.

The purpose of using case a study research strategy is that it would help me to develop an understanding of a complex phenomenon such as teachers' practices in detail, and to conduct an in-depth analysis of issues. These issues include how kindergarten teachers apply and interpret DAP within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context; learning activities teachers engage children; instructional strategies teachers use in a kindergarten classroom, and factors and beliefs influencing teachers' instructional decision-making in a kindergarten classroom. Moreover,

using qualitative case study research would afford me the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of certain delicate issues such as how teachers interpret and apply DAP in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context. Also, a case study research strategy is essential for me to conduct an in-depth study of a case using multiple sources of qualitative information such as interviews, observation and documentary analyses such as conversational poster (Creswell, 2012). Through this case, I explored teacher practices in two public kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis with each class consisting of two teachers. Although the findings of the study are limited to selected public kindergarten schools, within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana, similar schools elsewhere may find them useful. In this study, the findings are limited to only two suburbs within the Cape Coast Metropolis. Despite the limited nature of the sample size, the “thick descriptions” (Stake, 2006 p.102) of the phenomenon in question would sensitise readers to the need give to pay attention to instructional practices that can promote effective learning in kindergarten classrooms across specific contexts and worldwide.

3.4 Study Participants and Contexts

The massive migration of rural residents into some of the major cities in Ghana in search of job opportunities has created a situation in which more people reside in the cities than in the countryside (Obeng-Odoom, 2012). This development tends to worsen the unemployment situation in many of the country’s cities and towns thereby rendering most them poor. Therefore, affluence and abject poverty have characterised most of the cities in Ghana. The urban settings where the study was carried out are consistent with the above description because the northern part of Cape Coast is predominantly a settlement for fisher folks, artisans and peasant farmers

whereas the southern part is predominantly a settlement for those in the middle class. So, there is an economic disparity between communities in the south and those in the northern part of Cape Coast regarding school infrastructure and parental support for schools. Therefore, the study was carried out in Cape Coast, which is characterised by economic and social diversity. Cape Coast, located in the South-Western part of Ghana has a population of about 169, 894 (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2012).

Cape Coast, because of its strategic location is diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity, culture and religion. In a study of this kind data that emanates from such a varied socio-cultural background tend to give a broader picture of the issues that are under investigation. The participants in this study were drawn from two public primary schools located in differing socio-economic settings within the Cape Coast Metropolis. The schools included Tata Primary School (located in the southern part of Cape Coast, an affluent suburb with different socio-cultural and economic contexts) and Kariba Primary School (located in the Northern part of Cape Coast, a poor suburb with different socio-cultural and economic contexts). The two schools selected reflected the dichotomy between rich and poor, especially as it relates to schooling at the basic level within the Cape Coast Metropolis. Moreover, Yin (2012) argues that several factors inform the decisions for the selection of cases for a study. Thus, in this study, two cases were used to explore teachers' practices kindergarten classrooms because the cases have contrasting features. The research was, therefore, conducted in two distinct locations within the Cape Coast Metropolis. The schools provided the basis for establishing the external validity of the study because of the "diversity that is inherent in the phenomenon of interest"; and because "the findings of the study can be applied to a greater range of other situations" (Merriam, 2007

p.212). The findings of the study provided insights into the kind of teacher practices that goes on in similar kindergarten settings within the Cape Coast Metropolis. In this study, the four kindergarten teachers comprising two teachers from each of the two elementary schools within the Cape Coast Metropolis constituted the two cases for this study. Therefore, two case study schools; Tata School, in the southern part, and Kariba School, in the northern part, Kariba School, were the research contexts and the focus of this study.

3.4.1 Early Childhood Education and Curriculum in Ghana

In the Ghanaian context, teachers maintain high-level control over classroom learning for the purpose of improving student's performance and also for fear of losing their commanding authority as French and Raven (1973) rightly point out. The study's findings of Eargly, Johannsen-Schmit, van Engen and van-Ghoreishi (2003) revealed that transformational leadership impacts teachers' sense of responsibility and thus, this, in turn, shapes students' learning and achievement of educational goals. As Valli, Buese, and Vahl (2007) posits teachers' institutionally mandated roles and responsibilities tend not to be in conformity with their beliefs about good teaching. Interestingly these mandated roles appear to focus on basic skills acquisition to the detriment of placing much emphasis on engaging children in cognitively complex meaningful interactions to create their meaning and understanding about their world. Thus, this is not surprising because the test culture has defined the nature of learning and how it should be done even in early childhood settings. Test scores and policy demands take precedence over the development of students' problem-solving abilities (Valli & Buese & Vah 2007). In the Ghanaian early childhood setting, the kindergarten curriculum content determines what should be taught, how it should be taught and how what has been taught should be assessed by the

teacher. Even though the curriculum provides an opportunity for children to construct knowledge actively, at a point learning for understanding is on a limited scale in classrooms because of the examination fervour that has characterised the educational system in Ghana. This assertion concurs with Van and Slegers (2009) claim that sociocultural context plays a major role in shaping a teacher's sense of identity and purpose as a teacher.

Since the education reforms in 2007, early childhood education has been mainstreamed into both public and private primary schooling systems. About 15% of teachers in public early childhood settings have been trained (Ministry of Education, 2013). The teachers also benefit from series of in-service training programmes organised by Ghana Education in partnership with several Non-Governmental Organisations to upgrade the teachers' knowledge about current trends in early childhood education. The early childhood teacher education programme at the university level is four years while at the colleges of education is three years. In both cases, the students are taking through content courses and methods of teaching courses. The last year of the programme is set aside for practicum which provides an opportunity for the trainee teachers to put into practice their content knowledge in their respective subject areas and the corresponding instructional strategies in a real life context.

3.5 Case Study T: Tata School from Southern Part of Cape Coast

There are about 15 Kindergarten classrooms (15 schools) in the southern part of Cape Coast. Tata School was selected for this study because it is in socio-cultural and economic contexts that were deemed appropriate. Two teachers were selected from this school for the study because it made it possible for me to have rich data for gaining insights into the teachers' practices. One kindergarten classroom from Tata School was selected as a case from this part of

Cape Coast for exploration into teachers' practices and two teachers, Kate, and Sophia who co-taught in this classroom were selected because they have the requisite qualifications and experiences in early childhood education. Moreover, the practices of the two teachers became the focus of this study because the teachers have different teaching experiences, and their responses would be complementary each other. In other words, they would provide divergent views about their practices in a kindergarten classroom. The school also has a track record of promoting high-quality kindergarten education within the Cape Coast Metropolis and the Central Region of Ghana. The kindergarten teachers in this school are known for their dedication to duty and their exemplary work ethics. Tata is a public school located at the University of Cape Coast. In Ghana, every public university has a primary school. The primary school is structured as follows; nursery (3-4years), kindergarten (4-5year), lowers primary (6-9 years) and upper primary (10-13 years). Most the children in the school are from families of university employees, along with others from throughout the city and beyond who constitute about 10 % of students. The kindergarten serves about 200 children. The classes have been subdivided into A, B, C and D, with each class consisting of about 45 children. Two teachers and one assistant have been assigned to each of the classes. Based on the recommendation of the school's head teacher, two teachers from the same kindergarten class were selected as participants for the study. Both Kate and Sophia taught in the same class, and their individual and combined practices became the focus of this case study of an urban public kindergarten classroom (Tata School).

3.5.1 Participants from Tata School

To maintain their confidentiality, the two participants selected pseudonyms. Mrs Kate and Mrs Sophia both held a Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood Education (B.Ed.), and at

the time of the study Mrs Kate had 25 years, and Mrs Sophia had 19 years of teaching experiences at numerous grade levels.

3.5.1.1 Profiles of Kate and Sophia

In this section, I present additional background information that each of the participants shared with me over the course of their interviews.

1. Kate

Kate was a 48-year-old married woman with four children. She graduated from the University of Education, Winneba, a public university in Ghana. Before her appointment as a teacher at the University of Cape Coast kindergarten, Kate had taught in some public primary schools in the Greater Region of Ghana and within the Cape Coast Metropolis. She was considered the best teacher in the kindergarten division within the Cape Coast Metropolis and was awarded National Best Teacher Award Scheme in 2015. In 2005, she did her internship at the University of Cape Coast kindergarten when she was a student at the University of Education, Winneba. Due to her dedication to duty and her work ethics, she was appointed as a classroom teacher at the University of Cape Coast kindergarten in 2006 upon graduation. Since then she has been the teaching in that school. Apart from being a class teacher for kindergarten A, Kate is assigned the responsibility of coordinating in-service training for teachers as well as serving as one of the resource persons for the sector that is responsible for organising in-service training for teachers within the Metropolitan Directorate of Education in Cape Coast. She concedes that it is difficult for her to combine teaching and in-service training but loves serving her country and humanity. Kate further shared her love for children motivated her to become an

early childhood educator. Kate was interviewed on three separate occasions, over the course of four months from July to November 2015. The initial interviews were meant to explore how the teachers perceived their practices. The data obtained from the first interviews served as the basis for probing certain issues further in subsequent interviews.

2. *Sophia*

Sophia is a 42-year-old married woman with two children. She too graduated from the University of Education, Winneba in 2006 with a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. Before her appointment as a teacher at the University of Cape Coast kindergarten, she had taught in some schools within the Cape Coast Metropolis such as five years of teaching at Our Lady of Fatima, one of the Roman Catholic, primary schools in Cape Coast. Sophia shared that her love for children and her quest to harness the potentials of children influenced her to become an early childhood educator. She, co-teaches in kindergarten A with Kate due to the large class size. Like Kate, Sophia was interviewed on three separate occasions over the course of four months. The initial interviews were also meant to ascertain how the teachers perceived their practices. The data obtained from the first interviews served as means of probing certain issues further in subsequent interviews. Sophia has been teaching in the same class with Kate for five consecutive years and based on my interactions with them they appear (from my personal observations) to have developed a good rapport with each other.

3.6 Case Study K: Kariba School in Northern Part of Cape Coast

There are about 16 kindergarten classrooms (16 schools) in this part of Cape Coast. Kariba School was selected for this study because the school is situated within socio-cultural and

economic contexts that differ from the other school in this study (Tata). Only two teachers were selected from this school because it made it possible for me to obtain rich data for the purpose of having insights into the teachers' practices. One kindergarten classroom from Kariba School was selected as a case for an investigation into teachers' practices, and the two teachers, Ramatu and Akotia, who co-taught in this classroom, were selected because they have the requisite knowledge and experiences in early childhood education. The practices of the two teachers became the focus of this study because they too have different teaching experiences, and their responses would also complement each other. The school also has a track record of providing high-quality kindergarten education in this part of Cape Coast. However, the location of the school is in one of most deprived communities in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Parents in this community are poor, and unable to support the school by providing it with teaching and learning materials to supplement what the government provides. In light of this, the school lacks adequate teaching and learning materials to enhance effective teaching and learning in the school. The Government of Ghana solely funds the school in question. But due to financial constraints, the government is usually not in a position to provide adequate teaching and learning resources to the schools.

The school has a primary section which starts from day care up to primary six. The kindergarten section is made up of two classes which comprise Kindergarten 1 and Kindergarten 2. It is the only school in the community, so the kindergarten section and the other classes tend to have large class sizes (for example with 36 students). Considering this, two teachers and an assistant are assigned to each of the kindergarten classes. The two teachers in one of the kindergarten classes became the focus of this study. The two teachers, Ramatu and Akotia, were

recommended to me by the head teacher of the school because they have the requisite qualifications and experiences to teach at the kindergarten level.

3.6.1 Participants from Kariba School

For maintaining their confidentiality, the two participants in the southern part of Cape Coast also selected pseudonyms. Mrs Ramatu and Miss Akotia each held a Diploma in ECE, but at the time of the study, Mrs Ramatu had nine years, and Mrs Akotia had seven years of teaching experiences.

3.6.1.1 Profiles of Ramatu and Akotia

In this section, I present additional background information that each of the participants shared with me over the course of the interviews. Ramatu and Akotia taught in the same class, and their individual and combined practices became the focus of this case study of a rural public kindergarten in Cape Coast (Kariba School)

1. Ramatu

Ramatu is a 34-year-old married teacher with two children. She obtained her diploma in Early Childhood Education from Our Lady of Fatima College of Education in 2008. She is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood by distance learning at the University of Cape Coast. She has been teaching at her current school for the past five years. She taught in a primary two class in another school in the south before she was transferred to this school which is in the northern part of Cape Coast. Ramatu shared that her passion for helping young children harness their potentials influenced her to become an early childhood teacher.

1. Akotia

Akotia, the youngest of the participants, is a 25 years old woman. She is unmarried and has no children. She received her diploma in Early Childhood Education from Our Lady of Fatima College of Education, which is located within the Cape Coast Metropolis. She started teaching in 2010 in primary one at Kariba. At the time of the study, Akotia has been teaching in kindergarten two since 2014. Akotia's care and concern for the children and the poor ones were overwhelming. She shared that she had always wanted to be a teacher when she was in primary school because of how her primary four teacher assisted her to come this far in life. So, her desire in life was to become a teacher so that she could touch the lives of children who come from deprived backgrounds.

Ramatu and Akotia were interviewed on three separate occasions over the course of four months from, July to November 2015. The first interviews were meant to ascertain how the teachers perceived their practices. The data obtained from the initial interviews constituted the basis for probing certain issues further in subsequent interviews. Both teachers were interviewed together on the first two occasions. Ramatu was the first person to be interviewed on both occasions. The last interview was conducted on an individual basis. The school had no office for teachers, so the interview was conducted in the kindergarten classroom when the pupils were on break. There was background noise during the interview because the school has a small compound and the children were playing closer to the classroom. In the initial stages of the first interview, the teachers were a bit tense, but towards the end, of the first interview, they felt very comfortable.

3.7 The Researcher

I had had four years teaching experience in two different primary schools in the northern part of Ghana before I enrolled at the graduate school at the University of Cape Coast. While I was teaching in these schools, I attended several in-service training programmes that were organised under the auspices of the district directorate of education. The purpose of the programme was to upgrade the knowledge of my colleagues and I about teacher's practices which are considered appropriate for children at the lower primary school, and which constitute early childhood education. During such in-service training programmes, resource persons who have expertise in early childhood education usually guided us through the theoretical basis of how children learn and how to put the theories into practice in a real-life classroom context.

My knowledge further broadened about how children learn grew when I became a research assistant to a renowned early childhood expert at the University of Cape Coast. Through the professor's explanation of theoretical issues underpinning how children learn and through my readings, I came to understand how children learn and what early childhood teachers are expected to do in order to promote children's' development in early childhood classrooms. With this background in early childhood education in Ghana and my expanded knowledge about how children learn, I argue that my insider knowledge situated me well to explore how 'fellow' teachers put their theories of how children learn into practice in early childhood classrooms.

3.8 Data Collection Methods

Data collection consisted of three phases. The first phase focused on the negotiation of entry into the schools selected for the study. The recruitment process began with seeking official

consent from the metropolitan directorate of education which superintends over the schools where the study was to be carried out. After obtaining the said approval, I sought permission from the principals of the two designated schools. After obtaining the principal's permission, two teachers in each of the participating schools were contacted individually to seek their consent to participate in the study. The teachers were given two weeks to decide and respond to the consent form (either agree or disagree to take part in the study).

After the conclusion of the negotiation of entry, I began a series of visits to each of the schools with one or two weeks separating each visit. During these visits, I reassured the teachers, who volunteered for the study, that my presence in the classroom would permit me to learn from them and, seek clarification from them about their practices. During each visit, I observed them from a distance, with minimal note taking, and provided positive feedbacks on their strength when requested. I also supported the teachers in ways they requested, such as distributing learning materials to children, as long as such participation did not alter the normal practices of the classrooms. These initial visits, which were conducted over a six week period. and two weeks, were intended to offset the issue of the power dynamics between the researcher and the teachers selected for the study, namely, by establishing a collegial rapport among the two parties.

3.8.1 In-depth Interview

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were used with the kindergarten teachers in the two basic schools selected for the study. This process made it possible for the researcher to gain insights into the participants' perspectives on teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. The teachers were interviewed in English language because the researcher could not express his views well in the Fante language. Moreover, it was useful for determining participants' thoughts,

perceptions and feelings about issues (Creswell, 2012) such as how teachers interpret and apply DAP, learning activities teachers engage children, instructional strategies teachers use in kindergarten classrooms, and factors and beliefs influencing teachers' instructional decision-making in kindergarten classrooms (see Appendix A for Interview Protocol). With the teachers' consent, the interviews were audio recorded. So the pair interviewing was done among teachers in the same school. Interviewing teachers in pairs provided a platform for them to share their rich teaching experiences with each other and the researcher as well. Also, this mode of interviewing provided room for Ghanaian socio-cultural understandings of how males should relate with married women to be respected because two women were interviewed at the same time. There were follow-up interviews with individual teachers after I had reflected on comments made on the transcripts of the previous interview for probing certain issues further and getting rich data to make sense of issues which are crucial to the study. Because of the tight schedule of the teachers, the interview sessions were conducted during break time. The interview sessions lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. The participants were interviewed a number of times. They were first interviewed individually on two occasions and then in pairs once. Other reasons for interviewing the participants several times included the following: First, it enabled me to establish the consistencies of the responses of the participants across the interview sessions. Second, it allowed for the interviewees to talk at length and elaborate because they were given the opportunity to react to questions multiple times. After each interview session, the data were transcribed verbatim. Notes were made on the margins of the transcripts to comment on issues such as tentative themes, relationships between the themes, issues to probe further and lead to pursue in subsequent interviews. However, when the need arose, further interviews were

conducted with those who had already been interviewed for certain issues to be clarified. All three interviews were conducted with each interviewee, one pair-interview and two individual interviews. The interviews were conducted at the time when children were on a break. In all, each of the visits to the classrooms lasted one hour.

3.8.2 Observation

In the third phase, observation took place in each of the two kindergarten classrooms. These observations provided an opportunity for me to determine how teachers' levels of knowledge about their practices unfold in a real classroom context. In the course of my observations, on occasion, and in an unobtrusive manner as possible, I conversed with the kindergarten teachers while children were engaged in certain small group activities or individual activities to seek clarification from them reasons for engaging children in group activities and individual activities. After, the end of every lesson, I engage them in a discussion for about ten minutes to seek further classifications on certain issues. This process of interacting with the teachers provided each one of them an opportunity to clarify an issue that was perplexing to me arising while observing the teachers' instructional practices in the classrooms. That is, during these sorts of activities, the teacher was seen moving from one group to another giving guidance to the children on how to accomplish a task whenever they encountered any challenge. This method provided an opportunity for me to observe and interact with individual kindergarten teachers in classrooms, two or three times during the study. Because my focus in this study is to explore teachers' practices in the classrooms, I refrained from engaging in activities with the children. Field notes, rather than recording, reduced such intrusions. Such observations allowed me to see the enactment of issues beyond self-reporting because how teachers describe their

actions and how their actions unfold in real life teaching and learning contexts may differ. The observations started in each of the two classrooms selected for the study. The teachers schedule their work such that one of them taught at a time. Only one teacher was observed at a time in each of the classrooms. The observations of the teachers were done after each of the two teachers had been interviewed. Apart from being an important technique for generating primary data, observation served as a check on the other data collection method. This method was used to check individuals' biases that were likely to be exhibited in the in-depth interviews. Also, the gathering of data using two research instruments allowed for triangulation of the data. The triangulation, in the long run, led to the overall credibility of the study and ensured the internal validity of the study (Creswell, 2012). In short, the observational data enable me establish consistencies across the two data sources which in turn, generated a robust data to enable me interpret the data and as well respond to the research questions.

3.9 Data Analysis

The first phase of the data analyses process was the transcription of data from the interviews. The transcriptions of the audio tapes of both the pair and individual interviews with the teachers were the first step. Data analyses started during the data collection phase. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. At each data collection phase, the audio recordings were listened to several times to enable me to become conversant with the responses and comments of the participants. According to Merriam (2009), data collection and analysis in qualitative research is a simultaneous process. So after each data collection phase, the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and comments made on the margins of the transcripts regarding tentative themes, relationships between the themes, and issues to probe further in

subsequent interviews. In the case of the observations, I also made comments in the margins of the observations field notes on tentative themes, relations between the themes, and issues to probe further in subsequent observations. The research questions became a guide for the interviews and observations.

3.9.1 Unearthing Themes

After the initial stages of my data analyses, the real process of teasing out the themes stemmed from moments when I reflected on the data obtained from the two case schools. However, the emphasis was on the tentative themes and the relationships between the themes within each case school. Thus, the analyses of the data were on a case (school) by case (school) basis to identify the key themes within each of the cases as constituting responses to the research questions. These were in turn, compared and analysed to determine the overall themes that cut across the cases as constituting responses to the research questions. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The thoughts of the four teachers from each of the schools were explored and organised into categories (Straus, 1987). Initially, the transcripts were read several times, and key thoughts discerned. Short compressed summaries of each thought were developed. The thoughts were classified to answer the research questions.

Complementary data sets from the observational field notes on teachers practices were also examined to determine the inherent thoughts (thematic patterns) or pertinent themes. The data from observational field notes from individual cases (teachers from Tata and Kariba) were analysed in detail by comparing within and across schools to unearth thematic patterns that were common or differed within the individual teacher and schools (cases). Using triangulation, I searched for inherent differences and similarities in the data for each theme and its corresponding

research questions. The triangulation process served a useful purpose during the analyses. For instance, when the extracts from the teachers' interviews and excerpts from the observations field notes were compared to the respective research questions, similarities and differences were noted.

A cross-case analysis was the next step. At this point, the themes that emerged from the individual cases were compared. The idea behind the cross-case searching strategy is to compel researchers to go beyond the initial impressions of the individual cases by probing the data further. This process led to the emergence of an additional theme across case comparisons.

3.10 Establishing Credibility

According to Malcott (2005), credibility increases the “correspondence between research and the real-world” (p.160). Merriam (2009) maintains that credibility in qualitative research is measured regarding the extent to which research findings correspond with reality. In this study, the four benchmarks for guaranteeing credibility as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) will be discussed. These include; the use of different data sources (triangulation), debriefing, member checking, and thick description of the issues explored.

3.10.1 Triangulation

The data collection methods used in this study consisted of semi-structured interviews and observations. According to Yin (2012), triangulation is an effective means of arriving at consistencies across several sources of data. Yin (2012) further argues that triangulation enhances the validity of the study because the themes that emerged are based on several data sources. For instance, throughout the interview sessions, I could elicit responses from the

teachers regarding how they perceived their practices in kindergarten classrooms. Also, the observations of how the teachers put their theories of teaching into practice enhanced the credibility of the findings.

3.10.2 Debriefing

Another means of ensuring the credibility of this study is a debriefing. During the entire research process, I held several discussions with members of the supervisory committee on issues concerning interview protocols, coding schemes, and other pertinent issues that are vital for reporting and interpreting the research findings. The discussions that ensued during these meetings served as a debriefing provided insights into certain issues which eventually gave me broader perspectives on the entire research process. In all, debriefing provided an opportunity for other views to be factored into decisions regarding certain aspects of the research process rather than relying solely on the individual researcher who might be flawed or bias at times.

3.10.3 Member Checks

During the data collection process, it is pertinent for the researcher to verify the accurateness of the data collected. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argues that member checks are one of the effective means of establishing credibility because it makes it possible for the researcher to go back to the participants with the interview transcripts so that the participants can authenticate whether the transcriptions truly reflect the views they shared during the data collection process. I went back to the participants and read the transcripts to them so they might authenticate whether the transcripts reflected the views they shared regarding their practices in kindergarten classrooms. The participants accepted the content of the transcripts.

3.10.4 Thick, Rich Description

Thick, rich description was the fourth and final mechanism used in this research to make the study credible. The essence of thick descriptions is to provide enchanting and insightful passages for the readers (Geertz, 1983). According to Merriam (2009), thick descriptions tend to convey to readers the real picture about research setting and give the discussion a semblance of shared experience. Yin (2012) observes that a thick description establishes the credibility of qualitative research because it provides room for readers to make decisions relating to the findings of the study to a different context because vivid accounts are given by the participants of the study.

3.11 Summary

This chapter gives an overview of the methodology that was used to conduct the research. The issues defining the methodological process include the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, the justification for the use of qualitative research, the research context and participants, the research design, the data collection methods and the data analyses procedures used to investigate teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms.

A case study approach was used to explore teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. The participants were purposively sampled from two primary schools located in different communities within the Cape Coast Metropolis. The two cases have contrasting features. For instance, one of the schools is in a middle-class community, whereas the other school is in a poor community. The two schools would serve as the basis for providing insights into teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms.

The essence of the data analyses was to understand the data sets. This study is interpretive by nature. Hence, I could draw conclusions based on the themes teased out from the data sets such as interviews and observations. During the data analysis stage, some issues considered included consistencies and inconsistencies within and across cases. In the next, chapter, the results of the study will be presented on a thematic basis and in an interpretive manner.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analyses

Investigating teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana was the object of this study. Several themes emerged from the analyses within and across data sets of teachers' interviews. These themes were further validated by observational data of teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Metropolis. In this chapter, the findings are presented thematically on a case by case basis. Likewise, cross case school analyses of themes of the two schools are addressed. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers interpret and apply DAP in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context?
2. With what kinds of learning activities do teachers engage kindergarten children?
3. What instructional strategies do teachers use in a kindergarten classroom?
4. What factors and beliefs influence teachers' instructional decision-making in a kindergarten classroom?

In particular, the study's results are reported as follows: the case of two teachers at the southern school, Tata; the case of two teachers at the northern school, Kariba; and finally, a cross-case analysis.

4.1 Case Study Analyses of the Teachers at the Southern School (Tata)

4.1.1 Research Questions and Themes

The first case study was conducted at Tata School, which was sited in an urban setting. Based on the analyses of both teachers', Kate and Sophia, interview responses alongside

observational data captured, several themes were identified to address each of the four research questions: 1) interpretation and application of DAP; 2) learning activities and children’s development; 3) instructional strategies; 4) and instructional decision-making. A summary of the themes is indicated in Table 4-1

Table 4-1 Summary of Themes Regarding the Research Questions

RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	RQ 4
Interpretation and application	Learning activities and development	Instructional strategies	Instructional decision-making
Themes			
Practices focused on DAP	Understand their environment and the existence of God	Picture-walk	Professional factors
English Language	Become creative	Think-picture-share	Teaching experiences
Selection of learning materials	Holistic development	Play-based approach	Reflection in action
Storytelling	Understand content	Integrated approach	Reflection on action
Traditional songs	Planning of learning activities	Free play	
	Guided participation activities		

4.1.2 Analysis of Themes for Research Question 1

4.1.2.1 Interpretation and Application of DAP

At Tata School, both kindergarten teachers focused on developmentally appropriate practices, used the English language, selected appropriate learning materials and used stories or traditional songs as their means of interpreting and applying DAP in their kindergarten classrooms.

4.1.2.2 Practices Focused on DAP

In this public kindergarten located in an urban school, both teachers, Kate and Sophia, had a similar perception of DAP. For example, both believed that there was an element of child-centredness inherent in their practices. Kate explained that the reason she described her practices as child-centred was that “it involves a child or children participating in activities.” Sophia clarified that a child-centred approach meant “whenever I am teaching or explaining anything I let the child do the practical aspect by interacting with all the materials for the lesson.” Thus, child-centredness is believed to be developmentally appropriate because it provides room for children to engage in hands-on activities.

Nonetheless, the teachers differed regarding the kind of activities which they felt were likely to impact a child’s development in a kindergarten classroom.

Kate: In kindergarten classrooms, children learn through play, and they learn better when you get them involved. In our classroom, I make the setting in such a way that children benefit more from what they are doing than the teacher. It is through activity-based learning that I get to know the potentials of a child and the challenges that each child has.

Sophia: I provide children with the chance to come together and engage in activities and on individual basis engage in learning activities to help them develop.

It can be discerned from the excerpts above that Kate's perception of learning activities resembles Sophia's emphasis on activity as an appropriate practice. However, Kate further perceived a play-based approach as suitable for kindergarten children. Therefore, it appears, the only difference between the two is that Kate mentioned "play-based" as a description of the same activity that Sophia described. But both teachers gave credence to activity-based practices contributing to children's development. While Sophia, focused on the social condition of the activities in terms of group basis. Kate seems to specify the nature of the activities (play-based). Thus, it appears these teachers view activity based practices and play-based activities to be developmentally appropriate in nature because of their impact on children's development.

4.1.2.3 English Language as a Tool for DAP

Teachers at Tata School used English language as a tool for interpreting and applying DAP in kindergarten classrooms. Both Kate and Sophia perceived English language as an effective medium for helping children understand concepts taught in class. As they explained:

Kate: I use English Language in class because the children are coming from homes that they speak English already. And they go to day care centres where they are taught in the English language. There are children here who cannot speak their mother tongue.

Sophia: The children use the English language everywhere they go...with their parents at home when they go to church and when they come to school too. Also, they come from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, some are Ewes, some are Fantes and others are Ashantis. So, if I am to use a local language in class, it will be difficult for the children to understand what I will be teaching in class.

Thus, both Kate and Sophia acknowledged that the children at Tata School had strong English-speaking backgrounds because of the homes and communities from which they came.

Moreover, in a multilingual setting, as Sophia described the situation at Tata School, she believed that it is extremely difficult for kindergarten teachers to use one of the Ghanaian languages spoken in that community as a medium of instruction in a kindergarten classroom. Thus, the predominant language that most the children understood (English) served as the medium of instruction, in turn, it promoted children's understanding of concepts taught in class. Thus, it appeared appropriate for the teachers to use English language as a medium of instruction in that context.

4.1.2.4 Learning Materials as a Means for DAP

The teachers at Tata School believed learning materials were a useful tool for them when it came to interpreting and applying DAP in a kindergarten classroom. That is, Kate and Sophia revealed that their children's backgrounds guided their selection of learning materials. For example, they each explained the need to translate materials such as a conversational poster or environmental print (i.e. labels from children's everyday experiences).

Kate: I consider their background, and their background is English. So, it becomes the basis for selecting learning materials. For instance, if I'm teaching the speaking and listening aspects of literacy, I use NALAP materials such as a conversational poster which is written in Fante language with pictures depicting activities within the local context. But whatever I do in class concerning the poster, I have to translate it into English language before they can understand what I am teaching.

Sophia: I used materials that can be found easily in the children's immediate environment. But I have to translate the materials which are in Fante into the English Language before we can use them because the children see these materials in their environment, but they do not know what they are. If it is real materials that I'm using, I have to translate from Fante language into the English Language to help them understand the concept better. But as time goes on I use the mother tongue and the English language to explain concepts.

Interestingly, then, because their children did not understand the Fante language, these teachers saw the need to translate concepts contained within the materials from the Fante language into the English language. Thus, this allowed their children to draw meaning from whatever learning experiences they had in class, even though, the learning materials selected from the children's environment and supplied by the curriculum were meant to align with the children's sociocultural settings.

Both Kate and Sophia perceived that children's sociocultural contexts should serve as a basis for the selection of learning materials. However, the teachers perceived the impact of these contexts on children's development differently. For Kate, "it helps children understand their environment" while for Sophia, "children learn better if learning materials are selected from their immediate environment." Thus, Kate's perception about learning materials appeared to suggest that because children's environment informs the selection of learning materials, it helps them understand their environment, while Sophia, on the other hand, believed that the use of real objects helps children understand concepts taught in class. Overall, for Kate and Sophia, learning occurs in kindergarten settings when the teacher provides an opportunity for children to relate what they are currently learning to what they already know from prior experiences using familiar materials.

4.1.2.5 Storytelling as a Medium for DAP

Both teachers, from Tata School, believed that storytelling was an effective means of making learning meaningful and relevant to their children in kindergarten classrooms. For example, Kate perceived that storytelling "helps a child develop moral values which are

acceptable to a child's social context" and Sophia believed that storytelling "helps pass on the norms of society to the younger ones."

Indeed, for both teachers, storytelling was an effective means of promoting children's moral development because it provided an opportunity for children to make meaning of their daily experiences. Thus, storytelling provided an opportunity for children to see themselves through others by relating with the characters in the story and commenting on the characters' essential life experiences in relation to accepted norms of society.

However, the teachers saw the means of interpreting and applying storytelling in kindergarten classrooms differently.

Kate: I show them pictures for them to tell me the moral lesson connected to a particular episode in the story. If it is about unacceptable conduct such as a character using the left hand to collect something or greet someone, I ask the children to comment on the behaviour of the character.

Sophia: If the story is about 'Ananse and the wisdom pot,' some of the children would not know what an earthenware pot is about because they come from different homes. So, to make the story meaningful to them, I usually bring a pot to class. And as I narrate the story, I let them look at the pot and say something about it, and then I relate it to the modern version of the cooking pot which is common in homes where the children are coming from.

For Kate, children understand concepts taught in class better if the teacher does the explanation in such a way that there is a linkage between the concept and a corresponding physical entity that the child has previously encountered or is yet to encounter. Thus, for storytelling to have the desired impact on children's development, the teacher incorporated familiar physical objects to enhance and promote children's comprehension which in turn, impacted children's morals development. However, in the case of Sophia, when using

storytelling, she sought ways to provide an opportunity for the children to draw linkages between the items in the story (e.g. the pot) and their corresponding real-life objects so that they can understand the story.

Both Kate and Sophia perceived that a story could be meaningful to children if it is presented to them in inventive ways.

Kate: I dress and behave like the main character in the story and at every stage of the story.

Sophia: Storytelling helps the children to relate to their environment. For, example, one of the children might be sent to the market by someone to buy something, but in the market, the women will not be able to speak the English Language with him or her. But the child might see certain things that he or she wants to buy but cannot communicate with those in the market. So, I introduce Fante names of certain objects found in their environment into the stories so as they listen to the stories the names of these objects would be emphasised to help them become functional their environment.

Through imitation of traits of characters in a story, Kate promoted the development of her children. Sophia, on the other hand, enabled her monolingual children to relate with others in their community by explaining the English language version of certain concepts in the Fante language through stories thereby exposing her kindergarteners to the Fante language, in order to increase their functionality in their environment.

4.1.2.6 Traditional Songs as Means for DAP

Kate and Sophia used traditional Ghanaian songs as tools for interpreting and applying DAP in their kindergarten classrooms. While they agreed on the significance of songs to children's development, they disagreed on some specifics. For example, Kate and Sophia acknowledged the significant role traditional songs played in the children's acquisition of sounds of letter names in the English language.

Kate: Children who read without the sounds fumble with the pronunciation of words because they cannot break words into syllables and read. That is why in this class we do the beginning sounds and the suspending sounds or middle sounds so that the child can break the words into syllables and read. The traditional songs have a lot of English letter sounds in them. So, after I have gone through the songs with them, I ask them to come out with the sounds they heard.

Sophia: Most letter sounds are found in traditional songs. So, as the children sing the songs if it comes to writing the letters of the alphabet and pronunciation of words they can do it because it reflects in Fante traditional songs.

However, only Kate related the use of traditional songs with supporting children's moral development. She elaborated:

Kate: It imparts moral values in young children. For example, there is a traditional song which goes like this; 'the young hawk's mother is dead but instead of finding work to do she goes about hunting for chickens. The meaning of the song is that if one does not work hard, one will end up [leading a wayward life]. To make the moral values of the song more meaningful to the children, I relate it to the everyday experiences of the children in a classroom setting by telling them that if they don't do their homework or assignment, it means they do not want to move to the next level.

Finally, my observations revealed that the two teachers (Kate and Sophia) used traditional songs (in the Tata school kindergarten classroom) as a tool for integrating children's learning experiences across subject areas. The teachers incorporated traditional songs into a play-based activity on several different activities that had a bearing on a lesson taught in class. The song usually emphasises key issues that underpinned the lesson, and as they sang the song, the teacher and children danced to the rhythms of the song. By composing a traditional song (songs commonly sung in the children's environment) such as "Sansakroma" (i.e. a song where the hawk's mother is dead but instead of leading a useful life he goes about stealing) concerning the lesson, the teacher appeared to do so for the purpose of promoting the holistic (i.e. the physical, social, emotional and moral) development of the children.

Overall, then, evidence from the data appears to suggest that the socio-cultural context of children is a key determinant of what is appropriate for children to learn. However, to some extent, there exist diversity regarding how each teacher made learning relevant to children in this urban kindergarten settings, at the very least in the illustrative examples they provided.

4.1.3 Analyses of Themes for Research Question 2

4.1.3.1 Learning Activities and Children's Development

With respect to the second research question, the study's findings revealed that in Tata School's kindergarten classroom children engaged in a variety of learning activities. In particular, the kind of learning activities that these kindergarten teachers used to promote their children's development included those that provided an opportunity for the children to understand their environment and the existence of God; to become creative, to understand content, and to develop holistically. In addition, three broader themes emerged in relation to the kinds of learning activities which pointed to the basis (i.e. children's interests, the nature of children and how they learn, and the differences in children's abilities) upon which they planned learning activities and how they used guided participation to aid their children effectively engage in learning activities.

Both Kate and Sophia were of the view that classroom activities that were relevant to children's development were the ones that promoted children's understanding of their world. However, the teachers saw hands-on activities and observations as means of helping their children to understand their world in different ways.

Kate: I engage them in activities that help them to understand their environment. For instance, if I want the children to understand the existence of air; I engage them in

activities such as running around with a piece of cloth tied around their waist with both hands holding the edges of the cloth. I also instruct them to fill bottles with water for bubbles to pop up. I even go further to ask the children about the one who created the air because we believe in the existence of God as Ghanaians.

Sophia: To enable children to understand their environment and how they can relate to it, we usually tour the school environment. When we come back to class, I draw a chart and record whatever each of the children observed during our tour of the school environment. Before I do the recording, I ask them questions about what they saw in the environment. While others will mention the names of different plants, others will even pick dead insects.

For Kate and Sophia, the objects that children see around them in their immediate context might appear unfamiliar to them because of their limited experiences. But through classroom activities, which explore the children's immediate environment and the integration of their learning experiences (e.g. link between objects and teachers' explanations of how they came into being) children come to understand their world.

However, as both Kate and Sophia continued to discuss such activities, they further explained the importance attributed to linking God's existence with the children's everyday experiences:

Kate: And this adds a spiritual dimension to it because they will come to understand that it is not their daddy who did it so they must give credit to God because it is God who does everything. To illustrate this, I ask them to hold their noses tightly for a moment, but within seconds, you see them fidgeting because they cannot breathe. After the activity, I then tell them that the air around us is what we breathe in, and God, created the air, so there is the need for them to make God an important part of their lives.

Sophia: I even go further to find out from them about the one who created the things that they observed."

Also, both Kate and Sophia perceived physical hands-on experiences as effective ways of harnessing the creative potentials of children. Kate specifically named grafting (i.e. creating graphite rubbings of the object) as helping children become creative. She explained:

Kate: “The creative aspect of the lesson helps the children to manipulate things using their hands. For instance, we have a topic such as ‘grafting’ where we use varied materials around us such as leaves to create patterns on pieces of paper. The activities leading to the creation of a grafted product help the children to explore things with their hands. And this is what creativity does. It helps a child to become creative in what he does.”

In a similar vein, Sophia valued activities which provided children with the opportunity to act on objects, such as arranging natural objects in an orderly manner. She explained:

Sophia: I engage children in some hands-on activities to enable children to create patterns using various kinds of leaves. I always inform them what they are expected to do and how to go about it such as arranging the patterns in a sequence in any order of their choice. So, they should arrange the patterns on pieces of paper according to how they want it to be. These processes leading to the creation of a pattern help the children to manipulate objects with their hands and present them in a logical sequence [through the examples, I set for them].

In addition, Kate spoke of how such creativity impacted children’s moral, social and skills development. She explained:

Kate: “The design of the curriculum is such that we have the hidden aspect and the skills aspect. Obeying instructions come under the hidden aspect, while the creative aspect falls under the skills aspect. The moral aspect directs the children regarding how to do things and how to relate to others while completing a task. So, as they are engaged in their creative activities, they develop the social and moral aspects of their lives. They interact with their peers during the lesson. I also ask them to come out with their sets of rules whenever I engage them in activities. As time goes on, they can come out with new rules such as ‘do not pour any colour on the table or on the ground’ to deal with emerging challenges.”

Moreover, Kate perceived that hands-on activities impacted children's moral development because when children could come up with their own rules during a creative art lesson, they were more likely to obey them. She explained:

Kate: "I ask the children to make the rules because I want to make the lesson child-centred. However, if I make the rules for them, they are likely to disobey them. But if they make rules themselves they will appreciate it and obey."

4.1.3.1.1 Understand Content

Kate and Sophia valued activities that assisted children to understand the subject matter as developmentally appropriate, for a kindergarten setting such as theirs. To illustrate, they each described an activity that involved sorting and classifying objects in math class, where sorting bottle tops by colour permitted children to gain knowledge that led them to recognise the "blue" colour elsewhere in their environment. Two elements (sorting by colour or length) were of significance to them, as Sophia indicated "If we are sorting by colour or length, the opportunity is given to children to engage in this activity." And as Kate revealed, "A child may be instructed to pick a bottle top which is blue in colour." This process helps the child identify any blue colour around him or her.

4.1.3.1.2 Holistic Development versus Content

Interestingly, the two teachers differed in their views about the type development they associated with certain activities. For example, Kate was of the view that activities that promoted the holistic of development children were the most valued ones. She explained:

Kate: I think activities should be organised in such a way that it will help children develop every aspect of the human person, such as intellectual, physical, social,

emotional, moral and spiritual as they engage in activities. So, I engaged the children in play-based activities [during every lesson].

She further explained how to realise children's holistic development through activity-based learning settings. Kate explained:

Kate...when I am planning the activities, I integrate various kinds of elements into a play-based activity which allows the children to emphasise key issues concerning the lesson as they sing or recite a rhyme.

For Kate, play-based activities provide children with the opportunity to interact with their peers, express their emotions and regulate their behaviour and be regulated by others.

On the other hand, Sophia valued hands-on physical activities that helped children understand the content of what they had learned in class because it helped them progress steadily in their learning. She explained:

Sophia: It is becoming increasingly difficult for some children to progress from the primary level of education to other higher levels of education because of the limited spaces in the schools or due to mediocre performance of students in public run examinations. So as a class teacher [it] is my duty to help children understand activities we do in this class. So I engage them in hands-on activities to ensure that they understand what we are doing in class.

Sophia further perceived that her conscious effort tended to impart in children the habit of learning. She explained:

Sophia...I always impart to children the desire to learn because I always tell them that they can only become important people in life and help others if only they are prepared to learn.

4.1.3.1.3 Planning Learning Activities

More generally, Kate and Sophia believed that for learning activities to impact children's development, the selection of these activities, should be planned. All the responses of the teachers indicated that the nature of children and how they learn constituted the basis for planning learning activities. For example, Kate perceived that the gradual nature of how children develop influenced her selection of learning activities in a kindergarten setting. She explained:

Kate: I think what helps me most to plan activities for the children, is my knowledge about how children develop. Children develop gradually, so usually, I introduce them to few concepts for some minutes, and after that, I introduce play-based learning activities concerning the lesson, and after that, the children go for a break.

Kate further reiterated how needs of children influenced her selection of learning activities. She shared: "I plan the curriculum because it helps me to take into consideration the needs of each [child as I observed] in class so that I can include activities that meet the needs of each one of the children."

Similarly, Sophia believed that her insights about how children learn and the uniqueness that each child brought to the learning context were factors influencing her selection of learning activities. She explained:

Sophia: I usually stick to the guidelines spelt out in the kindergarten curriculum. The guidelines consider how children learn and what I am expected to do as a teacher to promote their learning. I also consider...the time within which teaching and learning should come to an end, and the relevant activities [in which] children are expected to be engaged. Also, I consider the needs of every child when I am selecting activities for children.

Similarly, Sophia saw effective planning of learning activities in a kindergarten classroom as a function of many factors. For example, she explained:

Sophia: So, I also want to add that there are other activities that go on [in] this school which affect the planned activities that go on in this school such as staff meetings, PTA's meetings and statutory public holidays. So, I take all these factors into consideration when I am planning activities for the class.

It will seem then that, Sophia recognises that the larger school context influences her classroom context.

4.1.3.1.4 Guided Participation Activities

Although not discussed in their interviews, analysis of the field notes, documenting classroom observations, revealed that Kate and Sophia used guided participation to give their children insights into what they were expected to do while engaging them in mathematics, language, and literacy activities. These two teachers, at Tata School, used the whole class instructional format to provide such guidance. Interestingly, such a whole class instructional format indicated thematic linkages between math activities and language and literacy.

In one math and one language and literacy lessons observed, children were expected to complete specific tasks during the lesson. For instance, Kate, during the observed language and literacy class which focused on a story titled "The Lion and the Mouse", showed the children pictures depicting the various incidents in the story. The children were expected to describe and predict what was likely to occur in the next episode of the story as the teachers flipped through the story. The children in Sophia's class, during a math lesson which centred on sorting, the

children were tasked to sort various kinds of objects into colours and sizes. These activities occurred two weeks apart.

My observations during both these lessons revealed that the teachers' guidance to children included; directing their behaviour and showing them something. When directing children's behaviour issues such as rules concerning classroom conduct, and how to complete a specific task were emphasised. When providing information to the children, the emphasis was on telling and showing children something. In addition, in the language and literacy lesson, teacher also guided the conversation, whereby children were expected to reflect on an issue and predict what was likely to happen in the next episode of a story.

Overall, then, evidence from the data appears to suggest that these teachers engaged the children in a variety of activities, which aimed to impact children's development in diverse ways. That said, the teachers at Tata School also perceived that if teachers planned the curriculum and used whole class guided participation instructional format, it too could enhance, promote and improve children's learning.

4.1.4 Analyses of Themes for Research Question 3

4.1.4.1 Instructional Strategies

Concerning the third research question, the analyses of the teachers' interviews transcripts and observations from field notes indicated that the two teachers used similar instructional strategies to promote children's development in their kindergarten classroom. Interestingly, these participants' views regarding instructional strategies for children's language development, as well as those for their holistic development pointed to two types of themes

which were further validated by the observational data. The themes that emerged from these teachers' comments included those referring to specific strategies aimed to teach specific subject areas which included picture-walk, think-pair-share and free play as well as generic ones which comprised play-based pedagogy and an integrated curriculum approach. Nonetheless, the evidence from these teachers' responses is not enough for a conclusion to be drawn that either of them preferred play-based pedagogy or integration.

4.1.4.2 Subject Area Instruction and Children's Physical Development

Both Kate and Sophia perceived the development of children's language and literacy skills in a kindergarten setting as a function of the effective use of instructional strategies. However, they differed in their perceptions of the most suitable instructional strategy for doing so. For instance, Kate valued the use of a think-pair-share instructional strategy because "It helps children who are seated close to each other to talk among themselves about the subject matter before "I come in to ask a question."

Interestingly, Kate drew on her personal experience as a student to explain why she valued think-pair-share as an instructional strategy for supporting her kindergarten children's language and literacy development. Kate elaborated:

Kate: When we were in school whenever our peers explain certain concepts to us, we understood it better than that of the teacher. Even though the teacher might have done well but because we are peers and the language is within our level we understood their explanations better. ... [With think-pair-share] any time a child raises his or her hand to answer a question, he or she is confident that the answer might be right because the answer has already been talked about with a friend.

For Kate, the think-pare share is an effective instructional strategy for children's language development because it provided an opportunity for children to share ideas with their peers in class, thereby boosting children's confidence in responding to questions posed by the teacher in class.

Sophia pointed to picture-walk as an effective instructional strategy for teaching concepts in language and literacy class because it helped her to promote the development of the children's listening and speaking skills. She explained:

Sophia: Picture-walk instructional strategy in language and literacy uses a conversational poster to develop children's language skills, such [as] listening and spoken aspects. The poster contains different kinds of pictures depicting issues that children are expected to discuss in class. If the topic is about birthday celebrations, the pictures will help the teacher to initiate a conversation with the children by asking questions.

Sophia further elaborated on how a low-risk atmosphere, in conjunction with the clues the picture provide, increased participation, and in her opinion, contributed significantly to each child's socio-emotional well-being. For, example:

Sophia: ...If the topic is about birthday's celebrations, the child develops vocabulary about the celebrations. It also removes shyness from the children. It also makes the child have a feeling of being part of the class because when it comes to conversation children's contribution in class should not be turned down. So, whatever the child says is accepted, and we go ahead to applaud him or her so that the children will feel free to say whatever he or she wants to say in class.

For, Sophia, children actively participate in class activities if the views they express on issues in class are respected and appreciated.

In addition, Sophia perceived free-play as an instrument for promoting the physical development of children. She explained:

Sophia: As for me every week, I set a period aside for the children to go to the school's playground and engage in any play that they like. This type of activity is important for children because it promotes their physical development.

The analyses of the observation fieldnotes further revealed that Sophia played some supportive roles while the children were playing on the playground. For instance, before the children started playing, she talked to them about the various choices that were open to each of them and guided them individually to make their preferred choices. She stood at the edges of the playground moving back and forth and keenly observing what the children were doing without interfering. However, the teacher did take part in the play whenever she wanted to demonstrate to the children how to master a skill. Whenever she saw any of the children idling about, she prompted him or her by calling the child's name and entreating him or her to get involved in the activity. The teacher also made sure that every child actively participated in a play activity that was of interest to them. She applauded the children who were doing well in their various activities. She also provided opportunities for children to interact among themselves by playing in groups or beside each other. She also made interventions to prevent the children from harming themselves and gave assistance to the children whenever they encountered any difficulty starting a play activity.

4.1.4.3 Holistic Instruction

Kate and Sophia appear to have different views about suitable instructional strategies for the holistic development of children in kindergarten settings. While Kate preferred a play-based

approach, Sophia, valued the integrated approach. For instance, Kate valued play-based instructional strategies because as she explained:

Kate: I think at the kindergarten level children learn better when activities are in the form of play. For instance, anytime I am teaching, I give children the opportunity to play a game that is related to what we are learning in class. I know play is something that is of interest to children. So, in most of the activities [in which], I engage children, I introduce some element of play into it to arouse children's interests in what they are doing.

The data from the observation field notes further revealed that during language and literacy class when Kate was teaching the children four letters of the alphabet, the teacher engaged the children in a game. The purpose of the game was to use a creative, play-based way to help the children to identify the sound of the letter 'A' and the other letters of the alphabet (B, C, and D) in the midst of other letter sounds. The teacher then read a sentence that had the letter 'A' repeated three times in the sentence. The children were expected to listen attentively and identify the letter name that corresponds to the letter sound. A child who can match a letter sound correctly with a letter name scores a point. In the subsequent rounds of the game, the teacher repeated letter sounds of the other letters one after the other and the children were expected to match the sounds with the names. The children were put into groups of five to compete among themselves on the identification of the name of a letter name and its corresponding sound.

Sophia, valued the integrated approach to teaching in a kindergarten classroom because it situated learning in a real-life context. She explained:

Sophia: I use the integrated curriculum approach a lot when I am teaching certain topics in class because it provides a favourable learning environment for young children to learn. I think children by their nature learn through lived experiences within the home setting. So, when they are transitioning from their homes to school,

there is a need for me to give them similar learning experiences to help them learn better.

For the kindergarten child, the daily experiences of living and learning in the classroom are indivisible. Thus, in a kindergarten class learning should be structured in such a way that it becomes part and parcel of the total experiences of children's lives. From my observations, for Sophia, to make it possible for children to understand their world during teaching in kindergarten settings, she usually incorporated different, but obviously, connected curriculum areas into a single unit. For example, in language and literacy class, a story could become the basis for Sophia to plan integrated learning activities for the children. The characters and settings in the story (e.g. Ananse, the Confidence Trickster) provided a natural way for the teacher to introduce the children to various concepts in moral education, religious education, numeracy, environmental studies, natural science, and creative art.

In sum, from the data sets, it appears that the teachers from Tata School used a variety of instructional strategies to promote children's development in their kindergarten setting. However, the developmental needs of children informed the kind of instructional strategy that the teachers used in class. Specifically, evidence from the research suggests that the study's participants used think-pair-share and picture-walk instructional strategy to develop language skills of children while play-based and integration were used to promote children's holistic development. Moreover, through free play, the teachers provided an opportunity for children to develop physically.

4.1.5 Analyses for Research Question 4

4.1.5.1 Instructional Decision-Making Processes

Concerning the fourth research question, the two teachers revealed that they made instructional decisions before, during and after every lesson. In addition, the teachers' instructional decision-making processes appeared to have been influenced by professional factors (instructional strategies suggested in the curriculum, their professional education), the teachers' experiences, the teachers' reflection in action, and the teachers' reflection on action (Pedretti, 1996).

4.1.5.2 Professional Factors

While both Kate and Sophia valued instructional strategies suggested in the kindergarten curriculum and used them to inform their instructional decision-making process, both teachers further perceived their professional education as a basis for their instructional decision-making processes. The reader is reminded that Kate and Sophia completed a 4-year degree (B. ED) in early childhood education. Nonetheless, the two teachers saw the impact of professional factors on their decision-making in similar ways.

Kate: My professional training has broadened my knowledge about how [children learn] because it has helped me to know the various stages of children's development and how to handle them and at every stage. It has also helped me to know the behaviour pattern of children and what to do.

Sophia: My professional training helps me to take the age and the needs of the individual children into consideration when selecting learning materials because early childhood education has made me understand how children learn.

While both teachers felt that their professional education helped them understand how children learn, Kate appreciated how her knowledge about children's stages of development helped her know how to respond to children's behaviour in class whereas Sophia felt such knowledge permitted her to attend to learning needs of her children. Thus, the teachers' professional education backgrounds gave them different insights into how to make well-informed instructional decisions.

Moreover, Kate and Sophia further provided other reasons for how their professional education impacted their instructional decision-making.

Kate: This knowledge that I have about children helps me to select instructional strategies which are suitable for young children. Also, it has helped me to understand that children learn through hands-on experiences, so when I am teaching, I provide the needed learning materials for the children to interact with.

Sophia: Knowing the developmental stages of children help me to select topics and teaching strategies that are useful to the children.

For Kate, her knowledge about how children learn helped her make effective instructional decisions by selecting appropriate learning materials and instructional strategies for her lessons. Sophia, on the other hand, perceived that her knowledge about children's level of development helped her select topics and methods that were appropriate for children in her class.

4.1.5.3 Teaching Experiences

Both Kate and Sophia saw their instructional decision-making processes in a kindergarten classroom as a function of their previous teaching experiences (Kate: 25 years teaching K; Sophia: 19 years teaching K). However, there were similarities and differences regarding how both teachers perceived its impact.

Kate: My teaching experiences help me revisit my teaching. It helps me re-adjust my teaching by repeating some of the activities and methods to develop children's fine motor skills before I move further to the next topic

Sophia: My experiences in early childhood classrooms always guided me to select learning activities and methods of teaching which are useful for the development of young children.

Thus, for Kate, her experiences (both with these children and other previous years) gave her clues as to whether the teaching methods and activities she was using was effective or not. However, she modifies them whenever there was the need to do so, while for Sophia, her experiences served as a clue for selecting effective activities and instructional strategies during pre-lesson preparation.

4.1.5.4 Teachers' Reflection in Action

Both Kate and Sophia also valued reflection in action (a means of making instructional decisions in the during teaching) as a means of instructional decision-making in their kindergarten classroom. However, they spoke of it somewhat differently.

Kate: If I am using a method which is making it difficult for the children to understand what I am teaching, I do change the method in the process of teaching."

Sophia: If the strategy I am using is effective, you will see the children contributing to the discussion. But if it is not their attention would be diverted from what we are doing in class.

Kate was of the view that she used children's lack of understanding of concepts during teaching as a cue for modifying her instructional strategies. Sophia, however, was of the view that the inattentiveness of children in the class was a signal that the instructional strategy she was using is not effective.

4.1.5.5 Teachers' Reflection on Action

Both Kate and Sophia valued reflection on action (a means of making instructional decisions after teaching) as an effective means of instructional decision making in kindergarten settings. However, the teachers described different feedback, written or oral, as cues for their reflections.

Kate: After I have taught a lesson I sit down to think about what I did in class. For example, we have some workbooks so after the activities when I mark their work, and they did not do well I reflect to see whether it was because of the method that they did not get the information right or not. So, when I come to class next time I revisit the topic.

Sophia: After a lesson, I reflect on whatever I taught in class. It helps me to know whether what I did was right or wrong. If I found out that they did not understand the lesson because they [could not answer the questions] that I asked them, I will ask myself whether I should teach the lesson again or part of it.

Both Kate and Sophia perceived that they assessed the effectiveness of a lesson that they had delivered in a class by reflecting on it. While Kate told us that the low scores of children in a class exercise suggested that the instructional strategy used during the lesson might not have been effective, Sophia, nonetheless, used the inability of children to respond to questions in class as a signal that the lesson was not well delivered.

In sum, evidence from the data appears to suggest that the instructional decision-making processes of these teachers in this study were directly and indirectly informed by their pedagogical training, experiences and reflective practices. Nonetheless, there were similarities and differences regarding how these factors impacted their instructional decision-making processes.

4.2 Case Study Analyses of Teachers at Northern School (Kariba)

The second case study was conducted at Kariba School, which was sited in a rural setting. As in the previous case, the analyses of both teachers, Ramatu and Akotia, interview responses alongside observational data captured, produced several themes which address each of the four research questions. A summary of emergent themes is shown in Table 4-2

Table 4-2 Summary of Themes Regarding the Research Questions

RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	RQ 4
Interpretation and application of DAP	Learning activities and development	Instructional strategies	Instructional decision-making
Themes			
Practices focused on DAP	Understand their environment	Picture-walk	Professional factors
Fante language	Become creative	Play-based approach	Teacher's experiences
Learning materials	Develop motor and fine motor skills	Integrated approach	Teachers' reflection in action
Interpretation and application of DAP	Learning activities and development	Instructional strategies	Instructional decision-making
Traditional songs	Unearth potentials of individual children		Teacher's reflection on action

RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	RQ 4
Traditional rhymes	Bridge gap between lived and planned experiences		
	Integrate learning experiences		
	Planning learning activities		
	Guided participation activities		

4.2.1 Analysis of Themes for Research Question 1

4.2.1.1 Interpretation and Application of DAP

At Kariba School, both teachers focused on developmentally appropriate practices, used the Fante language, selected appropriate learning materials, and used storytelling, and traditional songs or rhymes as their means of interpreting and applying DAP in their kindergarten classrooms.

4.2.1.2 Practices Focused on DAP

In this rural public kindergarten, each teacher, Ramatu and Akotia ascribed to the concept of DAP differently.

Ramatu: I consider their age and what each of them can do before I [engage] children in activities.

Akotia: My practices are activity –based. So, I engage them in a lot of activities for them to make meaning out of what they do in class.

For Ramatu the age of a child appeared to be a key determinant of what were appropriate learning activities in which to engage children in kindergarten classrooms. For Akotia, developmentally appropriate practices for young children involved hands-on activities.

In addition, both teachers, Ramatu, and Akotia spoke about several ways in which they ascribed DAP to their teaching.

Ramatu: Every child likes playing so in some of the activities; I engage them in play activities to make the lesson interesting to them. But I have to come to their level by behaving like them to help them understand what we are doing in class.

Akotia: Children learn better when activities are in the form of play. So, we act out most of the activities [in which] I engage the children. I also take part in the activities. So, if it is clapping of hands, we clap together. If it is dancing, we dance together. And if it is sitting on the floor with the children, we sit together. This so because if I do not put myself in their shoes they will not learn but if I act like them they will feel accepted, and this will encourage them to learn.

For both Ramatu and Akotia, play-based activities were one means of making learning relevant and suitable for children in a kindergarten classroom because it provided an opportunity to arouse children’s interests in a particular lesson. However, for play to have the desired impact on children’s development, the teachers believed they could not simply be bystanders as children engage in play activities but should be active participants because children take a cue from the teachers’ actions, in order to perform such activities.

4.2.1.3 Fante Language as a Tool for DAP

The teachers at Kariba School used the children's mother tongue (Fante language) as a basis for interpreting and applying DAP in their kindergarten classroom. For example, both Ramatu and Akotia perceived that Fante language promoted children's learning of the target language (English language).

Ramatu: I teach the children in their mother tongue because it helps them to master certain concepts in English language. I use Fante language to introduce children to the English language versions of Fante concepts, and this helps them to understand concepts in the English language. Also, the children feel comfortable and confident expressing their views in class.

Akotia: I use the mother tongue to develop the language skills of children in the English language such as the spoken and the written aspects. The children understand a lot of concepts in their mother tongue because it is a common language spoken in every part of their environment such as at home, at school, churches, mosques, and within their neighbourhoods. So anytime I teach them a concept in Fante, I bring in the English version of it, and this helps them to understand concepts in the English language.

Thus, Ramatu and Akotia immersed their children in a bilingual learning environment. As for Ramatu, valuing children's mother tongue as medium of instruction was appropriate because it was the language commonly spoken in their environment thus, it enabled the children to express their views in class regarding concepts taught in class. As Akotia pointed out, using children's mother tongue in conjunction with English helped them develop the target language(English language).

4.2.1.4 Selecting Learning Materials as a Tool for DAP

The teachers at Kariba School used learning materials as one means of interpreting and applying DAP in their kindergarten classroom. For example, Ramatu and Akotia believed that

children's socio-cultural contexts were one of the considerations that guided their selection of learning materials for their children. They explained:

Ramatu: I normally consider children's background by selecting learning materials which are common in children's environment. For example, many of the children help their mothers to sell vegetables and other items at the market. If the topic is about subtraction, I relate it [to] a market scene where the children help their mothers sell different kinds of vegetables such as tomatoes and garden eggs...As they engage in these activities in the market settings; they try to bring these experiences into the classroom context. And this helps them to understand concepts taught in class.

Akotia: I take into consideration the child's home environment because children learn better if learning materials used in class are familiar with them.

Moreover, Ramatu and Akotia perceived that children's socio-cultural contexts informed their selection of learning materials. Both teachers relied on their prior knowledge about the children, in selecting learning materials which are familiar to the children.

4.2.1.5 Storytelling as a Mechanism for DAP

The teachers from Kariba School perceived storytelling as a means of interpreting and applying DAP in a kindergarten classroom, although, they perceived its impact on children's development differently.

Ramatu: Storytelling helps to develop the retentive memory of children because as children listen to stories, they narrate it to others. And as they do that at a point they will be able to narrate the story exactly as they heard it. It also helps them to develop listening skills.

Akotia: I use storytelling to promote the moral development of children. In recent times, some parents have shirked their responsibility as agents of moral development. So, it is the duty of the school which is one of the social institutions for moral development of children to use storytelling as a means of instilling moral values in children. For example, after taking the children through a storyline using a conversational poster, I ask the children to assess the behaviours of the characters in the story to determine whether the actions and the reactions of the characters were right or wrong.

For Ramatu, storytelling supported children's cognitive development (i.e. the capacity to retain information) and listening skills. For Akotia, storytelling promoted children's moral development in kindergarten classrooms.

However, Ramatu and Akotia believed that there are inventive ways of presenting a story to maximise its impact on children's development. For example, Ramatu believed that storytelling could have the desired impact on children's development if the storyline is captured in a visual form. She explained:

Ramatu: I normally select stories from a book termed as 'the big book.' The book contains several traditional stories which are useful for children's moral development. The stories are in a pictorial form from one stage of the story to another. As I open the book, I ask them to describe the pictures and predict what is likely to happen in the next stage of the story [regarding the actions and inactions of characters in the story].

In a similar vein, Akotia perceived that stories captured in the form of picture imagery were both effective and appropriate for children's development. She explained:

Akotia: In this school, we have a book called 'the big book' which contains several traditional stories which are useful for developing certain values in children. The plot of the story is in a pictorial form with few inscriptions.

Thus, both Ramatu and Akotia perceived that storytelling impacted children's moral development, especially, if the plot of the story is presented to children in a developmentally appropriate manner through visuals.

4.2.1.6 Traditional Songs as Means for DAP

Both Ramatu and Akotia from Kariba School used traditional songs in interpreting and applying DAP in their kindergarten classroom. However, the teachers did so for different reasons.

Ramatu: I use traditional songs in class to help the children integrate their learning experiences because, at the end of every lesson, I select some key issues that I emphasise in the lesson and compose a song. As we sing the song we emphasise these issues, we jump, dance and shake our bodies in line with the lyrics of the song.

Akotia: It helps in building a child's vocabulary because while singing children role play some of the words in the song and this helps promote the language development of the children.

For Ramatu, traditional songs acted as a nexus for the integration of children's learning experiences because it provided an opportunity for children to use play-based activities to emphasise key concepts that characterised a particular lesson. However, Akotia believed that traditional songs promoted children's language development because it provided an opportunity for children to role play certain words.

Moreover, these teachers had different views regarding the kind of traditional songs that are effective for promoting children's development.

Ramatu: I think children are always eager to engage in activities which are of interest to them. So, I use traditional songs which are popular in the communities of the children. But I alter it a bit to suit the activity that we are doing in class to make the activity interesting so that I can get the children involved in what we are doing.

Akotia: ...It should have an element of activity in it so that the child can do the practical aspect of it by acting out the meaning of the words emphasised in the song and once the child does this he or she will always remember.

For Ramatu, using traditional songs which were popular in the children's communities made the activities in class appealing to the children. However, Akotia perceived that traditional song when acted out improved children's retentions. Thus, traditional songs appear to play attitudinal and conceptual roles in DAP.

4.2.1.7 Traditional Rhymes as Means for DAP

Teachers at Kariba School used traditional rhymes as means of interpreting and applying DAP in their kindergarten classroom, yet, the teachers, Ramatu, and Akotia spoke of varied reasons as to why this practice impacted children's development.

Ramatu: I use traditional rhymes a lot in this class because it makes lessons interesting to the children. It also gives them the opportunity to engage in activities which help them to understand what they are saying and what we are learning in class.

Akotia: In this class, we do subject teaching, but I use rhymes sometimes at the end of every lesson to help the children integrate their learning experiences. The children learn better when I use this approach.

For Ramatu, a rhyme was an effective means of promoting children's development in kindergarten settings because it aroused children's interest in a lesson and provided an opportunity for children to engage in activities to promote their understanding of concepts taught in class. For Akotia, a rhyme promoted children's understanding of concepts taught in class because it provided an opportunity to integrate their learning experiences.

Regardless, both teachers believed that a rhyme would have such a desired effects on children's development, only if it aligned with the social context of children.

Ramatu: Most of the rhymes we recite in the class have English origin, so I usually introduce certain cultural elements which are familiar to the children into the rhyme to enable them to understand what they are saying.

Akotia: For me to help children understand what they are saying in class and their environment. So, all the things mentioned in the rhyme should be things they see every day in their environment.

For both Ramatu and Akotia, a rhyme that children recited in a kindergarten classroom could only have the desired impact on children's development if the socio-cultural elements within children's immediate environment were integrated into it. They further perceived that the impact of such a rhyme on children's development was twofold; first, it helped children understand concepts taught in class, and second, it helped them understand their world (i.e. 'sasa').

Overall, then, evidence from the data appear to suggests that the socio-cultural context of children is a key determinant of what these teachers believed is appropriate for children to learn. However, there appears to be diversity regarding how each of teacher made learning relevant to children in this rural kindergarten setting, at the very least in the illustrative examples they provided.

4.2.2 Analyses of Themes for Research Question 2

4.2.2.1 Learning Activities and Children's Development

Concerning, the second research question, the study's findings revealed that at Kariba School kindergarten classroom, the teachers believed learning occurred when children engaged in certain types of activities. In particular, the kind of learning activities teachers used to promote children's development included those that: promoted children's understanding of their environment; provided children with the opportunity to become creative; promoted children's understanding of content; developed their motor and fine motor skills, integrated their learning experiences; and unearthed their potentials. In addition, these two teachers believed activities

connecting children's in-school experiences, and out-of-school experiences optimised learning. A related theme that emerged from the interviews concerned the basis upon which teachers planned learning activities (e.g. children's interests; children's attention span in class) in their kindergarten classroom and how they used guided participation activities to help their children effectively engage in them.

4.2.2.1.1 Understand their Environment

Both Ramatu and Akotia valued classroom activities that impacted children's understanding of their environment. For example, Ramatu believed that children came to understand weather patterns through observation. She explained

Ramatu: I use environmental studies lessons to help the children understand their environment. If the topic is 'sources of Light' I take the children outside the classroom for them to observe the sky. If it is cloudy, the children will be able to tell me that the weather is dark so they cannot see the sun. If it is sunny, they would also be able to tell me that it is sunny. Based on what they have seen, I will tell them that the sun is the source of natural light.

Ramatu further explained her thinking about why children might need to be engaged in such activities in order to understand their environment.

Ramatu: It helps them to relate to the environment and understand the environment because all that they know is that we have light in the room, and we put it on and off. But they do not know that the sun as a source of light. So, it is a topic such as this that I use to make them understand the sun as a source of light, and during the daytime, it gives us light.

Akotia also valued learning activities, which provided children with the opportunity to observe their outdoor environment. For example, she described a weather activity, which spanned across the children's school and home experiences.

Akotia: During environmental studies lessons, I take the children outside the classroom to observe objects in their surroundings because it is not a class-based activity but an outdoor one. For example, once I was teaching about the weather, so I took them outside the classroom to observe the sun and the clouds. Then I asked them to observe the weather in the evening when they go home and take note of the differences between the two weather patterns. At times, some of the activities cannot be completed at the school, so I usually instruct them to go home and continue with the activities and come back the next day and share their experiences with the class.

Indeed, Akotia valued such activities in kindergarten settings because it “helped children value nature and understand their world”.

Thus, Ramatu provided examples of creative hands-on activities children were engaged while Akotia tended to describe more context related activities.

4.2.2.1.2 Develops Children’s Creativity and Content Knowledge

However, both teachers, Ramatu and Akotia recognised that different learning activities(i.e.creating artefacts, sorting by colour or size) afforded learning outcomes related to their children’s creativity and knowledge acquisition.

Ramatu: In a creative art lesson such as artefact making we engage the children in hands-on activities. We use materials such as waste papers or clay to help the children create any artefact of their choice. If we are using waste papers, I engage the children in series of activities such as soaking the papers in water and pounding it in a mortar with a pestle. After that, I guide the children to add glue to the product that we obtained from the papers. If we are using clay, I also guide them to pound it in a mortar with a pestle. After a while, we add water to it to make it soft and malleable so that the children can create any artefact that they want.

Akotia: In a math lesson, if I am teaching a topic such as sorting, I engage the children in a lot of hands-on activities to help them understand what we are doing. For instance, I bring some real objects such as bottle tops of varied sizes and colours to class for the children to sort them into colours first and then into sizes later.

We see then that Ramatu valued activities which provided opportunities for the children to become creative through hands-on physical experiences such as producing of artefacts. Akotia, however, valued activities that provided children with the opportunity to understand content through hands-on physical experiences where they creatively sorted materials.

4.2.2.1.3 Develops Children's Motor Skills

Also, both teachers, Ramatu and Akotia perceived that hands-on activities impact children's motor skills development.

Ramatu: The series of activities leading to the creation of artefacts develops children's gross motor skills because the activity of pounding involves the use of larger muscles. Also, the activities leading to the creation of artefacts helps the children develop their fine motor skills because they use their fingers to engage in hands-on activities which involve the use of the smaller muscles.

Akotia: "I think these activities help the children to manipulate the objects with their hands, which helps them develop their fine motor skills because it involves the use of the muscles of the fingers.

As such both teachers perceived that hands-on activities supported children's development of gross and fine motor skills through the necessary manipulation of objects inherent in them.

4.2.2.1.4 Integrate Children's Learning Experiences

When further considering the kinds of learning activities they perceived as developmentally appropriate, Ramatu described activities more generally, in terms of providing an opportunity for children to integrate their learning experiences. She explained:

Ramatu: I think one useful thing that I can talk about is creating an opportunity for children to incorporate what they learn in class to other learning experiences they

might have gone through so that they can see linkages and differences in whatever they learn in class.

She further elaborated her thinking behind the need to organise learning activities in such a way so that children can integrate their learning experiences when, she shared:

Ramatu: I think children should be taught in such way that they can reconstruct what they already know to fit a new learning situation that is like what they already know.

4.2.2.1.5 Activities which Address Different Developmental needs of Children

On the other hand, Akotia described learning activities that consider the differences regarding the uniqueness that each child brings to the classroom setting, and explained how she organised lessons to address the needs of individual children in class. She shared:

Akotia: “I think children come to the classroom with different abilities, so I usually provide various kinds of learning activities for children to explore their talents. Also, when I am selecting the activities, I include activities that are challenging and those that are less challenging to meet the needs of different ability groups.

4.2.2.1.6 Linking in-School and out-of-School Experiences

Finally, it was Ramatu who believed that connecting children planned in-school experiences and lived out-of-school experiences optimised learning in kindergarten settings. She explained:

Ramatu: I am always guided by the activities that have been spelt out in the kindergarten syllabus before I engage children in activities in class. But at times, I go beyond the activates that [are] specified in the syllabus by bringing in activities that go on within the child’s environment such as a market scene, hospital scene and so on.

Ramatu further explained that in and out-of-school experiences that children go through in class helped them make connections between their daily experiences within their immediate environment.

Ramatu: As a teacher, it is my responsibility to bring into the classroom setting other experiences that children go through outside the classroom context to enable each of them to understand their environment and draw linkages and differences between what they already know and their current experiences. To help children draw the linkages, I have created different learning centres in class such as shop, hospital, science and so on in this class.

4.2.2.1.7 Planning Learning Activities

With regard to, planning of learning activities which have the desired impact on children's development, of course, both teachers, Ramatu and Akotia, recognised that the selection process had to be strategic. In their interviews, these teachers revealed that their children's interest and ability constituted the basis for the selection of learning activities. For instance, Ramatu perceived that children's interests served as a basis for selecting learning activities that she believed would appeal to them. She explained:

Ramatu: "Sometimes I am guided by what children like doing. What I have observed over the years is that some of the children will do one activity repeatedly. At times, I direct some of them to a different activity, but at a point, they come back to engage in the same activity again."

Akotia, on the other hand, was of the view that the length of time children could concentrate in class was a determining factor in how she planned learning activities in class. She shared:

"As we saw today, usually in the morning the children are more active in class when I assign any task to them. But in the afternoon, it always seems as if they have lost

interest in the activity that they have been tasked to do. But rather what this reveals to me is that the children are getting tired. So, I schedule most of the activities in the morning when they are very active and full of energy. But there are some days I do not assign any task to them.”

4.2.2.2 Guided Participation Activities

Although these teachers did not discuss it in their interviews, analysis of the observational field notes revealed that Ramatu and Akotia used guided participation to give children insights into what they were expected to do while engaging them in math and language and literacy activities. These two teachers, at Kariba School, used whole class instructional format, to provide such guidance. Interestingly, whole class instruction within math activities and language and literacy activities pointed to commonalities for this theme.

In one math lesson and one language and literacy lessons observed, the children were expected to complete specific tasks during the lesson. For instance, during the observed language and literacy class, which focused on a story titled “Ananse and the Wisdom Pot” Ramatu, showed the children pictures depicting the various incidents in the story. The children were expected to predict what was likely to happen in the next episode of the story as the teacher flipped through the pictures. In Akotia's class, during a math lesson that centred on sorting, the children sorted out diverse kinds of objects into colours, shapes and so on. These activities occurred at various times.

My observations, during these lessons, revealed that these teachers' guidance to children included directing their behaviour, and showing them something. When directing children's behaviour, issues emphasised included; rules concerning classroom conduct, and how to complete a specific task. While presenting “information”, the issues included telling and showing

children something. Finally, the issues involved in guiding children's "conversation" included reflecting on an issue and predicting what is likely to happen in the next episode of a story.

Overall, then, evidence from data appear to suggest that these teachers engage the children in a variety of activities, which aimed to impact children's development in diverse ways. That said, the teachers at Kariba School also perceived that if teachers planned the curriculum and used guided participation as an instructional format, it too could enhance, promote and improve children's learning.

4.2.3 Analyses of Research Question 3

4.2.3.1 Instructional Strategies

Concerning the third research question, the analyses of the teachers' interviews transcripts and the observations field notes indicated that the two teachers used similar instructional strategies to promote children's development in their kindergarten classroom.

These included; picture-walk; play-based approaches; and integrated curriculum approach, with the former strategy sepecific to content development.

4.2.3.1.1 Subject Area Instruction

While Ramatu and Akotia saw the development of children's language and literacy skills as a function of the effective use of a picture-walk instructional strategy, nonetheless, they differed in how they perceived its impact.

Ramatu: When I am teaching a topic such as the 'family' in language and literacy class I use picture-walk and role-play. First, I paste a conversational poster which has pictures depicting activities that go on in a family setting. As I flip through the picture, the children take turns to describes incidents in the pictures and predict what is likely

to happen in the next picture. After this activity, I call the children one after the other to role play some of the chores their mother or siblings engage in at home. These activities help children to talk in class.

Akotia: I use picture-walk in language and literacy class to promote children's moral development. If the lesson is storytelling and it is about how tortoise beat the overconfident hare in a competitive race, I take the children through a conversational poster that has pictures depicting the various stages of the race. As I flip through the poster, I ask the children to comment on the various episodes of the story and the moral lesson that they can draw from it. By the time, I finish going through the pictures with them; they will be able to narrate the whole story.

For Ramatu, then, picture-walk provided an opportunity for children's oral language development, while Akotia, saw picture-walk as a means of developing children's moral values through storytelling.

That said, both teachers, Ramatu and Akotia identified additional ways picture-walk impacted children's learning.

Ramatu: It helps children develop their oral skills, observational skills, and coordination skills because the children have to observe incidents depicted in the pictures before they can talk about them with their peers in class.

Akotia: I think it helps children develop the ability to imagine things, follow the sequence of events and predict their likely outcomes.

Thus, Ramatu spoke to skills development, while Akotia pointed to cognitive development as key outcomes of an instructional strategy such as picture-walk.

Interestingly, Ramatu further explained what she meant as a coordination skill and its relevance for the children, within the social context of Kariba School. She explained:

Ramatu: When I talk about coordination skills, it is the movement of the eyes from left to right during reading. In this school, some of the children attend Arabic classes after school. In Arabic classes, children write from right to left. So, such children are often

confused as for how to write in formal classroom settings. So, I use the inscription on the conversational poster, and with the aid of flip board, I help them understand how to read from left to right.

Thus, for Ramatu, because some of the children in her class have to adjust to two diverse ways of writing (i.e. Arabic & English), she is cognizant of how using picture-walk can help the children overcome this challenge if the differences are made explicit.

4.2.3.1.2 Holistic Instruction

Both Ramatu and Akotia valued instructional strategies which promoted the holistic development of children in kindergarten settings. For, instance, Ramatu valued a play-based approach to learning in a kindergarten classroom because it promoted the social, emotional and cognitive development of children. She explained

Ramatu: I use play-based approach to teaching a lot in this class because I have a strong feeling that the child's world is centred on the play. So, I rely on play-based activities to give children the opportunity to interact with their peers, express their emotions and develop their imaginative abilities.

Akotia, however, valued the integrated approach to teaching because it promoted the social-emotional and cognitive development of children. She explained:

Akotia: I often used the integrated approach a lot in this class. In this country, the goal of the kindergarten curriculum is to help the child become a well-balanced individual. So, in this class, I provide an opportunity for the children to interact with others, express their emotions, develop moral values, and develop their imaginative abilities and their motor skills.

The observation field notes further revealed that Akotia used an integrated approach during a language and literacy class which focused on a story entitled “The Lion and the Mouse”

In this lesson, Akotia took the children through a conversational poster, which depicted the plot of the story in a pictorial form. The pictures highlighted episodes of the ungrateful nature of the lion. The children were expected to predict the consequences of the lion's actions and inactions. In addition, however, the teacher (Akotia) used the setting of the story to introduce concepts such as the number of animals in the story, the types of plants in the environment, the creator of the animals, and the number of plants they saw in the environment. Finally, the children were asked to draw one of the animals depicted in the story. Thus, the plot of the story, the setting of the story and characters in the story served as the basis for Akotia to use a literature-based integration, to introduce children to new concepts that cut across different subject areas.

In sum, from the data sets, it appears the teachers from Kariba School used a variety of instructional strategies to promote children's development in their kindergarten setting. However, the developmental needs of children informed the kind of strategy each teacher used in class. Specifically, evidence from the study suggests that the study participants used picture-walk instructional strategy to develop language skills and moral values of children while play-based pedagogy and integration were used to promote the holistic development of children.

4.2.4 Analysis of Research Question 4

4.2.4.1 Instructional Decision-Making Processes

As regards the fourth research question, the analyses of the teachers' interviews transcripts indicated that these two teachers made instructional decisions before, during and after every lesson. Indeed, professional factors (instructional strategies suggested in the curriculum, teachers' professional education), the teachers' experiences, the teachers' reflection in action,

and the teachers' reflection on action appeared to have informed the teachers' instructional decision-making processes.

4.2.4.2 Professional Factors

Both Ramatu and Akotia valued instructional strategies suggested in the mandated curriculum and used it to inform their instructional decision-making process not only because doing so was useful in planning their curriculum, but also because they also felt comfortable using the strategies.

However, both teachers indicated that they modified the instructional strategies suggested in the kindergarten curriculum whenever there was the need to do so.

Ramatu: But the strategies are suggestions because when they were researching into them, they use a different environment. So, the strategy might not be useful in our situation. So, I use a different strategy if the one suggested in the syllabus is not working.

Akotia: Some of the teaching strategies outlined in the curriculum such as think-pair-share is good for language and literacy lessons in schools where children are allowed to express themselves freely. So, they are not timid. But the children in this school are coming from homes where parents take all decisions. So, when they come to school, and I [use] such a strategy, the children would not even contribute. So, as a class teacher, I know the children in my class better than any other person. So, I will not go in for such a strategy but will look for a strategy that will be effective in our case.

Both Ramatu and Akotia perceived that the socio-cultural contexts which informed the design and development of the instructional strategies might not align with the socio-cultural contexts of the children they teach. So they modified the strategies to suit their contexts when they judged it necessary do so.

In a similar vein, both Ramatu and Akotia perceived that their professional education impacted (3-year diploma in ECE) their instructional decision-making process. Nonetheless, there were similarities and differences inherent in how they perceived it.

Ramatu: I did early childhood education, so it has helped me to understand how children learn and what I am expected to do in class to enhance their learning.

Akotia: I know how children learn so this knowledge that I have about children help me to select learning materials and methods of teaching that are suitable for young children.

For both Ramatu and Akotia, their insights about children, gained through their education programmes, enabled them to understand how children learn. Akotia further elaborated how she used her insights about children to promote their development. Nevertheless, Ramatu connects ‘how children learn’ to specifics like the selection of learning materials and teaching methods.

Indeed, Ramatu further explained how her insights into how children learn and how she was expected to relate to the children in class impacted her instructional decision-making in her kindergarten setting. She elaborated:

Ramatu: In this class, I engage the children in a lot of hands-on activities. But as a means of encouraging them to learn, I always make sure that they see me as one of them because when I come to their level, they will feel at home and this will enhance their learning. So, in class, I behave like them, sing like them and dances like them.

For Ramatu, teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms was more effective if a kindergarten teacher created a learning environment which recognised children as partners in the teaching and learning process.

4.2.4.3 Teaching Experiences

Both Ramatu and Akotia perceived that their teaching experiences impacted their instructional decision-making processes (i.e. Ramatu, 9yrs teaching K; Akotia, 7yrs teaching K).

Both teachers had a similar perception of its impact.

Ramatu: The experiences that I have had in teaching young children help me to choose the right learning materials for the children. Children would only understand a concept if the learning materials I am using is familiar to them. So, as I interact with them, I get to know the materials to choose for them.

Akotia: [My experiences] help me select learning materials which are familiar to the kids because they can easily relate to those materials. If I am teaching about fruits and cite grapes as an example, the children will not understand because it is not familiar to them. But if I use mangoes as examples, the children will understand because they have eaten it before, so it is familiar to them.

For both Ramatu and Akotia, their previous teaching experiences (both with these children and others in previous years) informed them that learning materials which are familiar to children tended to be effective in class and this, in turn, influenced their selection of learning materials in subsequent lessons.

4.2.4.4 Teachers' Reflection in Action

Both Ramatu and Akotia pointed to reflection in action (a means of making instructional decisions during teaching) as a means of instructional decision-making in a kindergarten setting.

Ramatu: When I am teaching, I get feedback from the children. The feedback I get from the children will tell me whether the instructional strategy I am using is working or not. If it is not working, there is the need for me to use a different strategy. But as a teacher, I know that it is not helpful for me to rely on only one teaching strategy. So, during pre-lesson planning, I consider two or more other strategies so that if the one I am using is not working, I can go in for a different one.

Akotia: As I teach, I evaluate the lesson to see whether they are getting what I am teaching. For example, I might ask one or two questions as I am teaching to find out if

they are getting what I am teaching. This process would help me determine whether the strategy I am using is helping them or not.

Thus, both Ramatu and Akotia used cues from the children to assess their level of understanding of the concepts taught in class. While Ramatu speaks of feedback from children, she did not explicitly reveal the nature of the feedback and whether or not it was related to children's understanding. However, Akotia specifies that she assessed the children's understanding (by asking questions) and implied that the lack of correct answers signalled that her instructional strategy was not working. These teachers, therefore, perceived that it was their actions and decisions, that impacted children's learning. As such, it would seem that Ramatu and Akotia did not subscribe to the deficit model of the child.

4.2.4.5 Teachers' Reflection on Action

Also, Ramatu and Akotia spoke of reflection on action (a means of making instructional decisions after teaching) as another means of instructional decision-making.

Ramatu: After I have taught a lesson, I reflect to see if I did the right thing. When I realised that the lesson was not well, taught I look for information from different text books to help me teach the lesson again. For example, if I did not say something I should have said, I make sure that I teach the lesson again.”

Akotia: Anytime I finish teaching a lesson; I sit down to think about it to see if there was something I did not do right. If I realise that there was something I needed to do during the lesson, but I did not do, I prepare for the following week and teach the lesson again.

Both Ramatu and Akotia acknowledged that they always assessed the effectiveness of every lesson they deliver in a class by pondering over whether it was successful or not.

Interestingly, both speak of right and wrong and seem to relate it to “missing information.”

Moreover, both teachers use a remedial lesson to rectify the situation. While Ramatu was explicit about how she prepared for the remedial lesson, Akotia was not.

Overall, then, evidence from the data appear to suggests that the instructional decision-making processes of the participants in this study were informed by their professional education backgrounds, their experiences and reflective practices. However, there were similarities and differences regarding how these factors impacted their decision-making.

4.3 Across Case Analyses: Teachers' Practices at Tata and Kariba Schools

To further understand the ways in which kindergarten teachers perceived developmentally appropriate practices, across-case analyses (by school) is reported next. As might be expected, some of the themes reported within each case were unique to that case. However, most themes were shared by all four teachers in the study, regardless of the school setting in which they taught (see Table 4-3). Thus, to consider the analyses of the four teachers' (i.e. Kate and Sophia at Tata School, Ramatu and Akotia at Kariba School) perspectives, with respect to the the four research questions: how teachers interpret and apply DAP; learning activities and children's development; instructional strategies; and instructional decision-making processes, the themes derived from within-case analysis were collated and served as the basis for the cross-case-school analyses. Thus, the summary of the research questions and their respective themes across the cases are presented in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3 Themes of Teachers' Practices Across the Two Cases

Interpret and Apply DAP	Learning Activities and Development	Instructional Strategies	Instructional Decision Making
Practices focus on DAP	Understand their environment & existence of God	Picture walk	Professional factors
English language (T)	Become creative	Think-Pair-Share (T)	Teaching experiences
Ghanaian language (K)	Develop motor skills (T)	Play-based approach	Teacher's reflection in action
Selection of learning materials	Understand content	Integrated approach	Teacher's reflection on action
Storytelling	Develop language skills	Free play (T)	
Traditional songs	Bridge lived and planned activities (K)		
Traditional rhymes (K)	Unearth potentials of children (K)		
	Integrate learning experiences(K)		
	Planning learning activities		

Interpret and Apply DAP	Learning Activities and Development	Instructional Strategies	Instructional Decision Making
	Guided participation activities		

Note T; Tata School, Southern Cape Coast, K; Kariba School, Northern Cape Coast. When T or K appears in parentheses, it indicates that theme is peculiar to that case.

4.3.1 Interpretation and Application of DAP

Themes that characterised how these kindergarten teachers interpreted and applied DAP across the cases were common to both schools, except for the specific language of instruction and the use of rhymes. That said, across both cases, the teachers expressed divergent and convergent views.

Practices of all the four teachers focused on DAP. For instance, In Tata School, located in the southern part of Cape Coast, both teachers perceived DAP as child-centred whereas, in Kariba School located in the northern part of Cape Coast, both teachers perceived DAP as play-based. However, Ramatu emphasised age appropriateness and a child’s ability as essential elements of DAP. Akotia, on the other hand, saw activity-based features as key to DAP. Thus, across cases, the teachers perceived the concept of DAP differently. The analyses of the teachers’ views about their practices in the kindergarten classrooms across the cases indicate that the teachers understood what is appropriate for children to learn but, the children’s socio-cultural contexts determined what is appropriate for the children to learn.

All 4 participants in the study perceived that children’s socio-cultural contexts determined the language of instruction that kindergarten teachers are required to use in

kindergarten settings. However, for helping the children understand the concepts taught in class, the participants used multiple mediums of instructions in kindergarten classrooms. For instance, while the teachers at Tata School used the English language, the teachers at Kariba School, used the Fante language. That said, looking at both cases, the language of chosen aligned with the teachers' perception of the language that was most familiar to the children. And since, it is more likely that Fante would be the dominant language in the rural settings, and English likely commonly spoken in urban settings, it would seem that the location of the kindergarten was a key determinant of the language of instruction that should be given much emphasis in kindergarten settings. This seems to explain why the teachers in Tata School and those in Kariba school used a different language of instructions in their classrooms.

Likewise, participants in the two cases perceived that children's socio-cultural contexts constitute the basis for the selection of learning materials for kindergarten classrooms. To help children understand concepts taught in class, the teachers in both cases took similar factors into consideration when selecting teaching and learning materials. For instance, Kate and Sophia at Tata School, as well as Ramatu and Akotia at Kariba School, shared that children's out-of-school experiences informed the selection.

Looking across both cases, three teachers out of the four, saw storytelling as a means of promoting the moral development of children within the kindergarten settings. For instance, the participants from Tata School, Kate and Sophia, as well as Akotia from Kariba School, valued storytelling because of its impact on children's moral developments whereas Ramatu at Kariba School perceived it as a tool for the development of children's retentive memory and listening

skills. Thus, the responses of the teachers suggest that storytelling impacted children's learning in diverse ways.

The participants across the cases had different and specific reasons for valuing traditional songs but, regardless of the context, (Tata School or Kariba School), the participants saw traditional songs as important. However, it appears that for teachers in an urban setting (Tata School), traditional songs provided a context in which to support children's language learning. Teachers in the rural setting (Kariba School) appeared to view traditional songs as a means to integrate children's learning experiences. It, therefore, appears that traditional songs have a twofold impact on children's learning across the cases. Interestingly, teachers at Kariba School spoke of traditional rhymes separately from songs, although, they believed that they supported children's development in similar ways.

4.3.2 Learning Activities and Children's Development

With regard to these teachers' perceptions of learning activities in relation to children's development, cross-case analysis indicated that in both rural and urban school settings teachers tend to focus on learning activities that support children's holistic development, including their understandings of their environment, content-related and language specific skills as well as harnessing their creative potentials. Nonetheless, within the urban school (Tata), Kate and Akotia linked learning activities to children's understanding of the role of God (as creator) and as a means of addressing children's spiritual development. This emphasis appears less related to the urban location and more to do with the Christian beliefs of these teachers and partly due to the content of the kindergarten curriculum which emphasises moral and religious education in kindergarten settings. That explains why, at one point, Kate attributed such a 'spiritual' focus to

culture, when she claimed: “as Ghanaians, we believe in the existence of God, so I go further and ask them who created the air?” Interestingly, since Kate at Tata School is the only participant who mentions promoting young children’s moral and social development, examining this theme across the cases raises the possibility that such an emphasis may be due to an individual teacher’s orientation. Overall, when choosing learning activities to address children’s developmental needs, analyses across these two cases revealed that these teachers used three sources, namely, the recommended curriculum, children lived experiences and specific needs of individual children such as cognitive.

The participants in both cases valued planning as an effective tool for maximising the development needs of individual children in kindergarten classrooms. However, the teachers had different ways of planning their learning activities. When examined, cross cases these teachers reported idiosyncratic priorities and considerations when it comes to planning. Although three of the teacher's used aspects of the children (their interest, attention span, and individuals need) to inform their work, the fourth teacher relied heavily on curriculum guidelines, whereby Sophia strictly adhered to the centralised curriculum demands.

4.3.3 Instructional Strategies

For further insights into the kinds of instructional strategies the teachers used in their kindergarten classrooms, a cross-cases analysis is reported under this section. As envisaged, some of the themes reported within each case were peculiar to that case. Nonetheless, most of the themes were common to all four teachers in the study despite the school setting in which they taught. (see Table 4-3)

The participants across cases valued play-based and the integrated curriculum approach as effective instructional strategies for the promotion of children's development in kindergarten classroom settings. As well, the picture-walk instructional strategy was common to all four of the teachers. However, they perceived its impact on children's development differently because, while Sophia at Tata School and Ramatu at Kariba School linked language learning to picture-walk, Akotia at Kariba School saw its value more generally regarding developing children's imagination. But across cases, a pair of teachers valued the play-based approach (Kate and Ramatu), and two valued the integrated approach (Sophia and Akotia). Thus, it appears that the choice of instructional strategy is based less on context and more on individual teacher's choice. Interestingly, looking at the cases then, we see that children in each classroom were exposed to both play-based and integrated approaches, by virtue of having pairs of teachers.

4.3.4 Instructional Decision-making Processes

With regard to kindergarten teachers' perceptions about their instructional decision-making processes, across-case analyses (by school) indicates that all the themes reported in each case were common to all four teachers across the cases, notwithstanding the school setting in which they taught. (see Table 4-3)

Across the cases, the participant's valued professional factors (strategies suggested in the curriculum and professional education) in their instructional decision-making in kindergarten settings. Irrespective of context, all four teachers used the strategies suggested in the curriculum in their decision-making. Moreover, the role of socio-cultural contexts while apparent in both cases, Tata School and Kariba School, it was Kate and Sophia at Tata School and Akotia from Kariba School who linked it to the selection of teaching methods. Likewise, the participants in

the cases believed their knowledge about how children learn in kindergarten settings impacted their practices. Regardless of context, all the four teachers used their insights about how children learn during their lesson preparation. While those teachers at Tata School reported that it served as the basis for selecting instructional strategies, the teachers at Kariba School, on the other hand, perceived its impact differently. While Ramatu linked it to the selection of learning materials, Akotia, however, saw it as means of creating learning environments that see the teacher and the children as partners in the teaching and learning process.

Across cases, teachers believed their previous, and current teaching experiences impacted their instructional decision-making in their kindergarten classrooms. However, at Tata School in an urban setting, the teachers' spoke of its impact on the selection of teaching methods while Sophia further linked it to the selection of learning activities. In Kariba School, such experiences informed the teachers' selection of learning materials. Thus, in both cases, the teachers perceived its impact on their decision-making differently.

Across cases, the participants valued reflection in action as one of the means of instructional decision-making in kindergarten classrooms. Regardless of context, the four teachers used it to assess the impact of their practices on children's learning. While Kate from Tata School and Ramatu from Kariba School, spoke of modifying their practice based on such reflection, this was not overly discussed by Sophia and Akotia from Kariba School.

Likewise, reflection on action as one of the effective means of instructional decision-making processes was apparent in kindergarten classrooms across cases. Irrespective, of the school setting, the teachers used such reflections. While all four teachers spoke of determining

the effectiveness of their practice by such reflection, it was only Kate at Tata School who reported the low scores of children in class assignments as a determinant of an ineffective lesson.

In summary, then, comparisons of the emergent themes across the two cases, and thus across all 4 Kindergarten teachers indicate only minor differences based on the rural and urban contexts in which these classrooms were located. Likewise, no distinct patterns could be seen with regard to years of experience or level of education. However, the findings do point to nuanced reasoning and beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices associated with individual teacher's perspectives. Thus, while many commonalities with each other, the mandated curriculum, and the interpretations of DAP in the broader ECE literature, existed, the ways in which each teacher illustrated and articulated her perceptions point to subtle discrepancies that are worthy of further investigation.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Implications

This chapter seeks to clarify further the major findings that emerged from the study. Moreover, the discussion serves to establish the links between this study's findings and the reviewed literature, offers key conclusions from the study as main take aways; and the implications of the study on theory, curriculum and practice and future research. The discussion further elaborates on the key findings from Chapter 4 in relation to literature and the field in general. The structure of the discussion in this chapter, as in Chapter 4, is guided by the study's four research questions, which are stated at the opening of each section, and which also, serve as a reminder to the reader of what the study is about. The conclusion section highlights what I consider to be take aways from the study. Lastly, the implications section briefly responds to the question: what do the study's findings mean to theory, curriculum and practice and future research.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Interpretation and Application of Developmentally Appropriate Practices

How do teachers interpret and apply DAP in kindergarten classrooms within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context?

As the findings revealed, these four Kindergarten teachers' perceived their practices to be developmentally appropriate and observations, albeit limited, point to fidelity with their application in the classrooms. While the ways in which the teachers interpret and apply DAP in these two kindergarten classrooms varied with regard to specifics, a common thread running through the 5 themes (i.e. language of instruction, selection of learning materials, and storytelling, traditional songs, and traditional rhymes) was the inter-relationship between DAP

and the children's socio-cultural context . These teachers, whether urban or rural, appeared to choose the medium of instruction(English or Fante language), particular learning materials, and specific oral traditions (e.g. storytelling, rhymes and songs) because of their perceived impact on making learning relevant and meaningful to children. This, in turn, suggests that these kindergarten teachers seemed to interpret DAP as those practices that are both informed by and support children's development.

As the findings revealed, the dominant language of instruction in the urban and rural kindergarten differed accordingly, with the teachers at Tata School using English and the teachers at Kariba School using Fante. More specific to DAP, it appears that the teachers immersed their students in a language culture that was commonly found in the children's environment. As such, these teachers' interpretation and application of developmentally appropriate practices align with Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that the predominant language within a particular sociocultural context serves as a basis for initiating young children into the culture of any given society. Indeed, these teachers recognized that using the language that is "commonly spoken in the children's immediate environment," (Kate & Sophia, Tata school) allowed the children to articulate their views on issues they discussed in class, a view which parallels Vygotsky's (1978) theory that expressing an idea is essential for real understanding. We see here then that these teachers were familiar with the theories underlying DAP and readily invoked them to bolster their interpretation and application of DAP.

Of interest also is the impact on instruction related to the teachers' DAP. For example, the participants acknowledged that most of the instructional materials relating to language and literacy were written in the Fante language. Thus teachers in the urban school had to translate the

inscriptions from the “Fante language into the English language before the children would understand certain concepts” taught in class. Thus their decision to honour their children’s English development, they took on additional work. In contrast, teachers in the rural school (Ramatu and Akotia from Kariba School) used the children’s mother tongue, the Fante language as a medium of instruction and thus no additional translation was needed. Thus, the current study suggests that a developmentally appropriate medium of instruction may not necessarily be the mother-tongue, but rather the community used language that matters. As such this study’s findings both concur and contest the assertion that mother tongued-based instruction presents a more worthwhile learning environment for children because learning within the school setting in effect is an extension of their experiences at home (Igamu & Ogiegbaen, 2007).

While the dominant language in each classroom differed, in both cases teachers offered their children a bilingual learning environment. As such, these teachers’ interpretation and application of DAP when juxtaposing within the framework of the language policy in Ghana warrants further discussions. According to Rosekrans, Sherris and Chatry-Komarek (2012) and the Ministry of Education (2013) the National Literacy Acceleration Programme (NALAP) is a bilingual medium of instruction which is designed to do two things: provide guidance on mother tongue instruction and also to facilitate children’s transition into using the English language. As detailed in Chapter 2, the policy also specifies that children from kindergarten to primary three should receive instruction in Language and Literacy in both their mother tongue and in the English language at the same time. At the kindergarten level, the children, are expected to spend 90% of their time learning through their first language (L1, Fante). In part, this may explain why the teachers at Kariba School put so much emphasis on the Fante language and less on using the

English language in their classroom. However, at Tata school, the opposite was the case. Consequently, it appears bilingual education was practised in these two kindergarten classrooms in Ghana because it promotes children's development, and less so because of policy. Both sets of teachers used the child's more commonly spoken language to support their success while incorporating the other language in ways to assist students' understanding. That is when English was the main language, teachers pointed to Fante posters, etc. and assisted the children in seeing the connection with the English counterpart. While attending to children's language strengths is laudable, this finding also points to the complicated nature of policies which attempt to restore or revitalise mother-tongue in nations, where colonialism and globalism have diminished its value. It was unclear from the data how strongly committed the teachers in urban centres were to this goal. Likewise, in the rural setting, these teachers raise the complexity of valuing and supporting a mother-tongue when indeed in their jurisdiction the children spoke many different dialects/languages aside from Fante and English in their communities. And thus in these early childhood setting meaning making requires a sensitivity to the individual child's development.

As explained by the participants in both cases, children's background constituted the basis for the teachers' selection of some of the teaching and learning materials. In doing so, it appeared they believed that teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms become relevant and useful to children if they are focused on children's sociocultural contexts (Copples & Bredekamp, 2009). All four teachers reported using learning materials such as bottle tops, shells, clay, and leaves from various kinds of plants to engage children in various learning activities. They argued, as they did for the language of instruction, that if they used learning materials that are familiar to children, it helps them understand the concepts addressed in class. However,

unlike when discussing the language of instruction, these teachers did not explicitly state whether these specific materials were indeed commonplace in individual's homes and communities but rather were perceived to be familiar (i.e. child-friendly). In addition, in the rural school (Kariba), using such materials appeared to be somewhat influenced by a lack of commercial resources (e.g. coloured counters). By using materials readily available in both settings, these teachers tend to provide a familiar learning environment for their children which in turn, further suggests that these teachers seemed to recognise at least, tacitly that "clear grounding in a location gives us the confidence to engage with knowledge from other locations as we deconstruct and reconstruct with our purposes" (Canagarajah, 2005 p.15). In addition to these materials being developmentally appropriate from a socio-cultural perspective, these teachers also revealed that they used learning materials that are "familiar to the children to promote their understanding of their environment". Igamu and Ogiegbean (2007) claim that it is detrimental to provide children with an education that has no bearing whatsoever on their lives or which does not enhance their understanding and dominion of their environment. Thus, these teachers' use of context-appropriate materials in reciprocal ways with their children, at the very least, implicitly enhance and promote children's development. Moreover, the teachers' use of such familiar learning materials in the classrooms underscores the teachers' interpretation of DAP whereby they provide opportunities for the children to engage in hands-on physical activities to promote their development. This finding concurs with the assertion by Kamii and DeVries (1993) that young children are more mentally active when they are physically engaged in learning content as they try to figure out how to accomplish a task.

All the four participants of the study identified storytelling as a means of helping children develop morally. However, Ramatu further linked storytelling to children's cognitive development, and thus indicated one way they interpreted and applied DAP in their classrooms. In particular, this finding points to the significant role developmentally appropriate practices play in children's moral development in Ghanaian Kindergarten classrooms. Indeed, it appears, these teachers guided children's moral development, in both the rural and urban settings, by the coding of traditional values into stories, the discussions that ensue after a story has been told, and the narration itself. However, in a religiously pluralistic society like Ghana, the issue of how to inculcate moral values into young children in kindergarten settings has been a contested one for a very long time. More recently, based on research (Hunter & Elder, 2010) showing that storytelling impacts children's moral development, early childhood educators and other stakeholders such as kindergarten teachers have incorporated storytelling, which is a cultural practice within traditional Ghanaian settings, as a pedagogical tool in the kindergarten curriculum in Ghana. Thus, it is not surprising that these teachers would identify it as such, because of the individual commitment of some of the teachers (e.g. the teacher who dressed like one of the characters in the story). However, what is striking regarding the current study was that only one of the participants (e.g. Ramatu) pointed to the link between storytelling and children's cognitive development:

Storytelling helps to develop the retentive memory of children because as children listen to stories, they narrate it to others. And as they do that at a point they will be able to narrate the story exactly as they heard it.

While it remains unclear why moral implications of this developmentally appropriate practice overshadowed the cognitive, it appeared associated with the value accorded it in the larger socio-cultural context in which these teachers and children lived.

As revealed by the participants of the study, traditional songs served as developmentally appropriate means of enhancing and promoting children's development in multiple ways. However, the developmental needs of their children determined how the teachers used the songs in kindergarten settings. For instance, traditional songs which had English language letter sounds embedded them provide an opportunity for the teachers at Tata school to use a developmentally appropriate means to introduce certain sounds in the English language to their children, which in turn enhanced their pronunciations skills. While the use of traditional songs, which highlighted the consequences of people's actions and inactions to promote children's moral development is less surprising, it again points to the sociocultural relevance of this teacher's (Kate) developmentally appropriate practices. In contrast, however, only the participants from Kariba School, spoke of traditional rhymes as a means of promoting their children's development in diverse ways. Interestingly, although, the rhymes were traditional English rhymes, these teachers perceived the rhymes as developmentally appropriate for integrating children's learning experiences as well as arousing children's interests in the lesson. Of importance here, is how these teachers introduce culturally relevant elements into the rhymes (i.e. things they see every day in their environment) to enhance their appropriateness. Modifying and generating rhymes this way then supports the long-held notion children's interests should be one of the bases for designing learning activities for children in kindergarten settings (Bredenkamp, 2014). Whether differences in teachers' experiences or compliance with the mandated curriculum and the

developmental needs of these children, explains why these teachers incorporated storytelling, traditional songs and rhymes in these kindergarten classrooms, they did so in culturally respective ways based on what appeared to be and intimate knowledge of their children's lives.

5.1.2 Learning Activities and Children's Development

With what kinds of learning activities do kindergarten teachers engage children?

As detailed in the findings chapter, all four kindergarten teachers described various learning activities they used to promote their children's development (e.g. a science lesson about air; using plants to show patterns), elaborating at times with respect to additional foci they believed to be relevant. Accordingly, the themes that emerged (i.e. understand their environment and the existence of God, understand content, become creative, develop fine motor skills, or develop holistically) seemed to delineate "the kinds of activities" in terms of the broader aims associated with them. While there were differences regarding how these teachers viewed these developmentally appropriate learning activities, one common thread appeared to be the inter-relationship between children's in-school and out-of-school experiences.

Indeed, analyses of the reported and observed learning activities revealed these participants explicit and implicit recognition of the importance of linking children's in-school-experiences with their out-of-school experiences in order to attend to and support children's development. This particular finding then points to the significance of children's lived experiences (inside and outside of the classroom learning environment) when planning and implementing effective teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms. Within the two classrooms in this study, such connections were found to occur at two levels, namely engaging

children in real-life learning activities and inter-relating children's classroom and at-home experiences with particular respect to the Ghanaian sociocultural contexts.

As the four participants elaborated, the promotion of children's understanding of concepts taught in class is tied intrinsically to children's sociocultural contexts (out-of-school experiences). Children's experiences within their social and cultural contexts point to the kinds of learning experiences that they bring to the kindergarten settings and in turn, impact how these experiences enhance and promote their development. Hence, culturally situated learning experiences are paramount. For instance, within the Ghanaian cultural settings parents mentor their children into roles that require children to learn and apply norms and values within real-life contexts as they interact with their peers and adults within their social settings. The experiences that children gain from such interactions provide opportunities for them to construct their understandings about their world (as shown in this current study's finding). This, in turn, suggests interactions between children within the classroom provide further opportunities for them to learn from each other, regarding their sociocultural settings. Nsamennang (2008) succinctly articulates the essence of children's interactions with their peers when he asserts that within " the African context, a child is seen as a cultural agent of his or her development from an early age" (p.2). This is significant because it suggests that learning is not limited to only the school (Kindergarten) context but extends beyond it, in that in the Ghanaian sociocultural context, young children are believed to be actors of their development, beginning with experiences gained from daily interactions with peers and adults. Moreover, the value these teachers placed on, and the familiarity they seemed to have with their children's out of school experiences point to their recognition of learning as a continuous process (Pinar, Reynolds,

Slattery, & Tubman, 1995) between home and school. To further complicate this perspective, it is important to bear in mind the occasions when teachers' perceptions of children's everyday experiences may have positioned the learner at a disadvantage or unduly limited the kinds of learning activities offered to children. For example, Akotia indicated that she would not use think-pair-share because children in Kariba school would not be familiar with expressing their opinions because they "are coming from homes where parents take all decisions". While respecting her children's "out-of-school" context influences her to choose more familiar hands-on learning activities to assure their success, it raises the question as to whether these children would/should benefit from expressing themselves in the kindergarten setting (if not at home). Of course, an answer to such a question is complex and goes beyond the scope of the current study.

When considering the engagement of children in real-life contexts, the close link between children's spiritual development and particular hands-on activities the two teachers, Kate and Sophia at Tata School described are noteworthy. Although, the data collected, precludes us from knowing the extent to which these young children may understand the theoretical implications of the concept of a creator (God) in their daily lives, the connections these teachers addressed within learning activities (e.g. the presence of air around us) concerning children's daily lives (e.g. the essence of breathing) provided contextualized opportunities for them to understand such a complex phenomenon. Arguably, then, this particular finding, whereby these Kindergarten teachers infuse an overt appreciation of how the things children see around them came into existence into lessons about their environment, calls our attention to ways in which learning activities and children's spiritual development might be connected in certain settings, which appears unreported in previous research into DAP. That said, teaching young children a

phenomenon such as the existence of a creator, appears to related to these teachers' understanding of the philosophical basis of kindergarten curriculum in Ghana (MoE, 2007) and possibly, Carter's (2013) activity theory. For instance, the kindergarten curriculum in Ghana (MoE, 2007) emphasises the use of developmentally appropriate means to lay a foundation for the development of a well-balanced human person, who in the long run would appreciate the existence of a creator and how one is expected to lead a life worthy of emulation. Thus, while this suggests that within the Ghanaian contexts under study children's spiritual development is valued, its development appears to depend on a teacher's creativity and the kinds of learning activities with which the children are engaged. Even though the participants from Tata School engaged their children in natural science activities, the dexterity with which the Kindergarten teachers in the urban setting (Tata School) used these activities to develop a concept such 'spirituality' is revealing and intriguing. For example, it appears all four teachers believed, as Carter (2013) asserts, that it is through the active participation of children in a variety of activities that they can make meaning of their experiences yet for Kate and Sophia, the meaning included both the scientific and the creationist perspectives:

Kate. ... To illustrate this, I ask them to hold their noses tightly for a moment, but within seconds, you see them fidgeting because they cannot breathe. After the activity, I then tell them that the air around us is what we breathe in, and God, created the air, so there is the need for them to make God an important part of their lives. (pp.124).

What remains unclear from the study, however, is why the teachers in the urban setting used context appropriate learning activities to inform and support their children's spiritual development when those in the rural setting did not.

When considering the theme, “understand content”, all four participants reported engaging their children in different forms of activities meant to promote the children’s cognitive development regarding the acquisition of different forms of knowledge. The extent to which learning activities focused on children’s cognitive development was also apparent from the observations of several learning activities within both settings. In contrast to research which emphasises a proclivity towards providing opportunities in kindergarten settings for young children to construct knowledge (Bredekamp and Copple, 2009), in the current study, teachers in both schools included teacher-centric activities. In doing so, they seemed to perceive such direct teaching as developmentally appropriate, and to a limited extent, the evidence seemed to support their view. For example, Piaget’s (1952) assertion that children acquire socio-conventional knowledge when they are taught names of objects and symbols could be conceived as a support for these teachers’ direct teaching of letters of the alphabets and number names during literacy and numeracy lessons. Likewise, activities wherein these teachers guided their children’s manipulation of objects (e.g. hitting a ball or a stone against a wall to determine if and how they react differently when acted upon) could be construed as complying with Piaget’s (1952) assertion that children acquire physical knowledge when given opportunity to see how objects move and function in space. And since DAP originated from Piagetian theories of learning, adherence to such principles would readily reinforce the notion that such actions are developmentally appropriate. In turn, drawing from Vygostkyian underpinnings of DAP, the teachers’ direct teaching and explicit guidance during such activities can readily be seen as the necessary mediation by the significant others that allows for inter-psychological development. That said, within these adult controlled activities there seemed to be a focus on in-school

experiences (i.e. reciting letters in isolation; throwing a rock against a wall) to the exclusion of out-of-school experiences (e.g. children's funds of knowledge (oral language, properties of balls and rocks from play), which stands in contrast to what was previously discussed with respect to other themes. Bearing in mind, however, that these teachers peppered their interviews with descriptions (some cursory, others detailed) of a variety of activities (some teacher-centric, others much less so) used to help children "understand content", a more elaborated analysis would be needed to ascertain to what extent this was isolated to a few, or prevalent across most, of them.

5.1.3 Instructional Strategies

What kinds of instructional strategies do teachers use in a kindergarten classroom?

In the current study, these four teachers believed using diverse forms of instructional strategies promoted children's development. While there were differences and similarities regarding their individual choices, a common thread running through the strategies the participants reported (i.e. play-based & integrated pedagogy; picture walk& think-pair-share) was a focus on children's needs. That is, as detailed in the findings chapter, the teachers at Tata School and those at Kariba School indicated that they used these various instructional strategies in order to address the different developmental needs of their children. Indeed, the strategies, namely play-based and integrative pedagogies, think-pair-share, and free play, to which these teachers pointed, are commonly found throughout the early childhood literature and closely aligned with DAP (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). Likewise, these findings, at the very least, indicate that teachers, in both settings (i.e. rural and urban), were equally conversant with both

generic (e.g. play-based, integrated) and specific (e.g. picture walk) developmentally appropriate practices promoted in Ghana's mandated curriculum.

Interesting, only two of the four teachers, namely Sophia, from Tata School and Akotia, from Kariba School, spoke of integration as an effective teaching and learning approach for kindergarten classrooms. As observed, each of them relied heavily on learning centres to integrate their children's experiences into the classroom and promote their children's holistic development. Although the data collected was not conclusive, it appeared that these teachers' previous successful experiences with integration through learning centres influenced their instructional strategy choice. Of particular note was the similarity between their approach and that of Hauser, Olsen and Faidel's (2010) activation principle, which situates learning within the context of what the child already knows in order to facilitate the child's understanding of related concepts. Indeed, Sophia captured the integration of everyday experiences with those at school when she stated:

“I think children by their nature learn through lived experiences within the home setting. So, when they are transiting from their homes to school, there is a need for me to give them similar learning experiences to help them learn better.”

This then suggests that these teachers believed such integrated learning activities positively impact children's learning, as was the case for young children in McMullen, Elicker, Wang, Lee, Lin and Sun (2005). What remains unclear from the data, however, is whether this approach to integration, which Sophia and Akotia focused on in their separate interviews, was one of many approaches to integrating children's learning experiences, a dominant/preferred approach or these kindergarten teachers' only approach to integration. There were insufficient

probes within the semi-structured interviews to fully determine the extent of their knowledge and understanding of how to interpret and apply other means of integration, and thus, the reader is cautioned not to assume it was a one-size-fits-all philosophy, without further research.

In contrast, all four participants spoke of play-based pedagogy as central to developmentally appropriate ways of promoting children's' development in diverse ways. More specifically, they indicated that to do so, activities which specifically address the learning needs of individual children are designed to enhance, promote and improve certain areas of children's' development. Indeed, observational data documented various learning activities which these teachers engaged the children, in both settings, in diverse play-based experiences. For example, Kate and Sophia at Tata designed an activity, they labelled "wizard counter", to promote their children's' socio-emotional development while Ramatu and Akotia's (search and find) aimed to develop children's' socio-physical aspects of their lives. Of note is that for the most part, these teachers used context-specific and relevant play-based activities to address certain perceived needs of their children. As such, then, these kindergarten teachers appear to interpret developmentally appropriate play-based pedagogy as teaching that is both informed by and supports children's' individual needs. It would seem then that all four teachers concur with Bredekamp (2014) who argued that children's' holistic development (socio-emotional, intellectual and moral) can be effectively supported through play-based pedagogy because of the various forms of activities it encompasses. In addition, these teachers, as Ramatu reported, seemed to value the resonance such an approach has with children's' inherent capacity to learn from and through play:

Ramatu: “I use play-based approach to teaching a lot in this class because I have a strong feeling that the child’s world is centred on the play. So, I rely on play-based activities to give children the opportunity to interact with their peers, express their emotions and develop their imaginative abilities.”

However, it is not surprising that these teachers point to the effective use of play-based pedagogy because their teacher education backgrounds and experiences would have included knowledge regarding such developmentally appropriate means of promoting children’s holistic development. That said, I argue that their nuanced understanding speaks to the participants’ ability to make connections between such theoretical knowledge and practice, readily pointing to personal ways in which they apply DAP within their classrooms. It is also noteworthy that this study of Ghanaian teacher’s perceptions regarding developmentally appropriate practices corroborates the beliefs and practices of Japanese participants (six nurseries and four kindergarten teachers) gathered through interviews in Hedge, Sugita, Crane-Mitchell and Averret’s (2014) study.

The underlying thread of, taking into consideration differences in the children’s developmental needs when designing learning activities also arose, when the participants in this study elaborated on developmentally appropriate features of “supporting” instructional strategies (e.g. picture-walk & think-pair-share). A central component of these strategies was the use of visuals (e.g. conversational posters) as developmentally appropriate tools for making learning meaningful and relevant to young children in these kindergarten settings. Since the visual resources, themselves were supplied by the Ministry, and strategies such as picture-walk were mandated in the curriculum, it was difficult to ascertain if these teachers’ compliance with the curriculum signalled that they too saw the relevance and value of such interventions. That said

since these teachers perceived such supporting strategies (e.g. think-pair-share, picture-walk) as practices that they might personalise in order to promote and improve their particular children's development, it suggests these teachers recognised the valuable role surrounding pictures/imagery with productive conversations could have in developmentally appropriate practice.

Interestingly, a substantial body of research literature (Palermo, 1970; Pressley, 1977; Migliorini & Rania, 2017) points to a viable role picture-imagery plays in children's language development. For instance, based on observation of [kindergarten] children in [Italy], Migloorini & Rania, (2017) argue that picture imagery aids children's language development because it serves as the basis for initiating a discussion with children which in turn, develops their oral language skills. Of note then is that the current study's observations (and interviews) provide similar evidence from a Ghanaian context, whereby children and teachers (both rural and urban) readily engage in talk about the conversation posters, with children drawing on their previous experiences to form their reflections on and response to the topics. As indicated throughout this discussion, because the centralized kindergarten curriculum in Ghana and these teachers' university education and professional development is heavily infused with DAP (e.g. these teachers are expected to use picture imagery to teach language and literacy) it is challenging to discern when and if the teachers' simply expressed views which defer to these authorities. That said, the ease with which these teachers illustrated how developmentally appropriate, such strategies were and how they used the instructional strategies in context-specific ways (see details in the findings chapter), suggests that the needs of the child being addressed were

somewhat “localized”, and not entirely dictated by universal, and/or Westernized definitions associated with DAP.

5.1.4 Instructional Decision-Making Processes

What factors and beliefs influence teacher’s instructional decision-making in kindergarten classrooms?

As the findings of the current study revealed, these four kindergarten teachers believed that instructional decision-making was based on diverse factors including reflective practice, While there were differences and similarities regarding how these informed their practice, theories of teaching was a common thread. Interestingly, these teachers comments pointed towards both explicit theories (professional factors; instructional strategies suggested in the curriculum, teacher education backgrounds) and implicit theories (teachers experiences, reflection on action and reflection on action) of teaching, guiding their decisions, before and during lessons.

As elaborated by all participants, effective instructional decision-making before the commencement of a lesson in their kindergarten classrooms was linked closely to explicit theories of teaching. This suggested that teachers’ ability to make a well-informed instructional decision before the start of a lesson is dependent to some extent on instructional strategies outlined in the kindergarten curriculum. This is not surprising because Ghana practices a centralised and controlled curriculum, whereby these teachers were expected to make their instructional decisions within the bounds of the frame of the curriculum. Teachers’ professional backgrounds are implicated in instructional decision-making before the commencement of a

lesson to the extent that it provided theoretical knowledge, understanding and insights into the usefulness of strategies they would find in the curriculum documents. For example, the kindergarten curriculum in Ghana outlines the content, learning activities, lesson objectives and assessment procedures that are significant for the evaluation of a lesson. In this vein, the professional background of the teacher to some extent plays a significant role in the interpretation of the curriculum for instructional decision-making. However, as these kindergarten teachers attest, teaching experience also contributes to their interpretation of the curriculum, especially, regarding the selection of instructional strategies which have proven effective and have aligned with their children's sociocultural contexts of children they have taught in previous years. Thus, while research informed the designing of the kindergarten curriculum, it is challenging for such a curriculum to take into consideration, the differences regarding children's specific social contexts. For instance, as revealed in the current, study, teachers' critical analyses of the prescribed curriculum when determining which instructional strategy to choose might reveal its ineffectiveness in a particular kindergarten setting thereby, resulting in the the teachers' use of an alternative one. Thus, drawing on personal repertoires of knowledge and experiences, these kindergarten teachers tended to interpret curriculum materials to both inform and support effective teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms. As such, these participants, even in a centralised education context (i.e. a top-down curriculum model), did not perceive the curriculum materials as cast in stone, but rather as something they can modify when there is the need to do so. In this vein, explicit theories, namely those that were explicated from outside sources such as their professional training, the mandated curriculum and their years of experience, guided them to contextualise such prescriptions in developmentally

appropriate ways. What remains unknown is the weight individuals might afford one or another of these in circumstances where the theories were not aligned.

Also, these four participants indicated that implicit theories of teaching were instrumental to effective teaching and learning in these kindergarten classrooms. Accordingly, during and after instruction, these Kindergarten teachers used certain cues as a means of addressing some impediments that they believed were mitigating against effective delivery of their lessons. For example, cues such as children's lack of attentiveness in class and low scores in classroom assignments were indicators of the ineffectiveness of their lessons, even when they were peculiar to a few individual children and not the entire class. Thus, these teachers use such cues in reciprocal ways by assessing children's level of understanding and taken the needed remedial when necessary, which in turn, implicitly enhanced and promoted individual children's understanding of concepts taught in class. This points then to the significance of these teachers' reflective practices in making informed instructional decisions while teaching (and afterwards). It would appear then these Ghanaian teachers' practices align well with the premise that in early childhood settings individualised teaching should be emphasised because children's abilities differ (Copple, & Bredekamp, 2009; Bredekamp, 2014). Indeed these teachers descriptions of effective instructional decision-making during and after their lessons coincide with views that a kindergarten teacher is expected to function in multiple ways, by assessing grounds of failure and taking remedial measures to deal with the situation at hand and in subsequent lessons (Spodek, 1988b; Mathew, 2012). Indeed, the current study 's emerging evidence of these teachers' reflection-on-action and in-action points to a role early childhood teachers' implicit

theories of teaching (i.e. garnered through experience and reflection) play in their instructional decision-making processes.

5.2 Conclusion

Based on the major themes discussed above, some key points were notable about the nature of teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. For instance, it is apparent from the study that the socio-cultural backgrounds of the children and their contexts (language, learning materials, traditional songs, rhymes, curriculum and pre-designed materials) influence on how developmentally appropriate practices(DAP) were interpreted and implemented in kindergarten classrooms. However, within this, there exist diversity and difference. It is also clear from the study that engaging children in a variety of learning activities impact on the holistic development of children in kindergarten settings. Moreover, the teachers are expected to take into account the needs of individual children when planning the kindergarten curriculum. For example, it was evident from the study that children cannot separate their everyday lived experiences in their immediate environments from what they learn in their kindergarten classrooms. Thus, it appears that for instructional strategies to have the desired impact on children's development, the lived experiences of children should be the driving force. It is also apparent from the study that two major factors appear to inform the instructional decision-making processes of the teachers, and these included teachers' explicit theories of teaching and their implicit theories of teaching.

5.3 Implications for Theory

The study's findings have implications for future adoption and adaptation of instructional models such as DAP that are often brought to contexts different from where they were

formulated. Moreover, the alignment that was detected between DAP and the sociocultural practices of Ghanaian Kindergarten teachers is a course for calibrated approach to embracement of foreign authored models! In other words, the success of DAP elevates the broader understanding and application of child centred theories of learning including Piaget's (1972) constructivist theory and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory for understanding and developing student learning experiences. The broader success of DAP points to the process of flexibility in how we might adopt and adapt other unfamiliar models to local Ghanaian contexts. Moreover, the study has enlightened how we understand the nature of children, how they learn and the corresponding teachers' practices that promote effective teaching and learning in kindergarten classrooms. Thus, employing the theoretical frameworks to explore teachers' practices within the Ghanaian socio-cultural context is likely to provide future researchers insights into how DAP is interpreted in different social-cultural contexts such as Ghana.

5.4 Implications for Curriculum and Practice

Developmentally appropriate infused-kindergarten curriculum is recognised as an effective means of harnessing children's potentials in kindergarten settings. Considering the adoption of DAP-infused curricular in many kindergarten settings globally, nevertheless, empirically based evidence regarding its impact on children's learning in Ghanaian kindergarten settings is limited. This study's findings provide insights into how DAP can be interpreted, adapted and applied in kindergarten settings to support the development of children from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. Further, this has implications on how DAP-based kindergarten curriculum is organised and implemented in kindergarten classrooms with attention to the local sociocultural context. The study's findings bring to our awareness the richness of sociocultural

contexts in curricular opportunities for teachers to engage children in kindergarten classrooms activities which would enable children to understand what they are learning which would, in turn, develop children's problem-solving abilities. Thus, the study's findings reinforce and in a limited way extend the constructivist theories that consider sociocultural contexts of children as key determinants of kindergarten curriculum content and the way it is taught.

5.5 Implications for Further Research

The present study broadens our knowledge and understandings of how kindergarten teachers interpret and apply developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in kindergarten classrooms within a specific Ghanaian sociocultural context. This study provides insights into future research questions concerning teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms in other socio-cultural contexts within and beyond the Ghanaian context including and the West Africa sub-region as well as around the world. Even though the participants in this study were from a particular social setting in Ghana, the information they provided is still useful for us to understand teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms such as the kind of learning activities teachers engage kindergarten children and the instructional strategies teachers use in other kindergarten settings in Ghana. However, more research is needed with more teachers in various parts of Ghana or any country within the West African sub-region to determine similarity and differences which exist in diverse settings.

As the findings of the present study illustrate, kindergarten teachers in both rural and urban settings used the predominant language within a particular cultural setting as a medium of instruction in their kindergarten classrooms. However, additional studies are needed to determine, for example, which medium of instruction teachers use in kindergarten classrooms in

communities (Ghanaian or otherwise) where children of refugees (i.e.Ivorian) in Ghana attend school.While exploring teachers' practices through interviews and observations over an extended period, as in the current study, provided insights into the practices of these teachers, it is believed that a longitudinal study with more teachers participants, would provide additional data necessary for us to further understand and gain better insights into the kinds of learning activities that teachers engage children in kindergarten classrooms. Moreover, the current study used a qualitative research approach to explore teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. Hence, a quantitative research which explores the correlates between teachers' practices and their beliefs in kindergarten classrooms may further establish the relationships between teachers' beliefs and their practices implied herein. In concert with the current study, future research would enable us to understand better how teachers' beliefs influence their selection of learning activities and instructional strategies in their kindergarten classrooms. Also, the current study explored teacher' perceptions about developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten classrooms. In concert with the present study, future research should explore teachers' perceptions of developmentally appropriate practices in other regions of Ghana, to provides us better insights into the nature of teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms in other regions of Ghana.

5.6 Significance of the Study

Keeping in mind the exploratory and descriptive nature of this case study, the findings regarding these four Kindergarten teachers' perceptions and practices offer a window into two Ghanaian classrooms, one in a rural and the other in an urban setting. Giving voice to these two pairs of teachers within the Cape Coast Metropolis, with respect to their interpretation and

application of Developmentally Appropriate Practices, adds to the limited research available on recent curriculum reform in Ghana while providing evidence of DAP within a cultural context under-represented in the broader early childhood education literature.

Accordingly, this study's findings provide early childhood educators, researchers, and other stakeholders (e.g. curriculum developers) insights regarding how children's sociocultural contexts can and do influence what teachers deem appropriate for their children to learn in kindergarten settings. Since much of what these teachers shared aligned with the curriculum, these findings provide evidence to policy makers in Ghana that individual teachers, with differing educational backgrounds, appear to interpret and apply DAP as intended. Likewise, though, it is significant that these teachers felt sufficient agency to modify and adapt the centralised curriculum in ways they believed made sense locally. Thus, this study suggests that while originally, a Western (U.S.), middle-class measure of what was appropriate development for children underscored DAP, as it continues to be applied throughout the world, nuanced understandings of what is appropriate for whom and when may be evident at the classroom level. In addition, unique aspects of development pertaining to children's moral and spiritual development in Ghana Kindergarten classrooms, shown in the current study, appear to contrast what might be expected in many other contexts worldwide, where the school is considered more secular. Finally, the significant contribution of this case study lies in the various themes, and the threads running through them, that emerged which point to key issues surrounding DAP requiring further research, as shared in the implications.

5.7 Concluding Thought

In today's global context, where phenomena, like Developmentally Appropriate Practices, expand beyond their countries of origin into countries with different (sometimes conflicting) political, economic and historical factors affecting curriculum policy and implementation, it behooves us to investigate in as many contexts, with a vast array of methodologies, in order to better understand the complexities teachers and children experience. Determining and applying appropriate practices that are informed by and promote children's development in culturally responsive ways, although challenging, is paramount so that adults, whether they be parents, teachers, administrators, government officials, or researchers, do not underestimate children's funds of knowledge. While the current study is a step in that direction, it is preliminary and serves but to foreshadow the much needed critical analyses of this data and additional studies stemming from it to fully recognise the constraints and affordances of DAP for the Majority world.

5.8 Epilogue

As stated earlier, developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) have been adopted and adapted to suit the socio-cultural imperatives within the Ghanaian context. The elements that currently define DAP, however, do not adequately reflect the depth of understanding and insights that Ghanaian cultural values should offer early childhood curriculum in terms of content, pedagogy and other funds of knowledge (Moll, et al.,1992) that teachers and children bring to early childhood settings. However, the issue around what is developmentally appropriate practice is further complicated by global (and local)

market forces which to a considerable extent determine curriculum content. On one hand, it appears that, in order for a learner to become functional in an increasingly globalised society, there is a need for curriculum to be designed in such a way that it can prepare children to fit into the world of work and its attendant competitive spirit. Indeed, such a human capital perspective (Becker,1993), is internationally pervasive. However, there is more to learning than just the mere acquisition of employable skills and the learner also, needs to understand the essence of life and knowledge forms embedded in other cultures. Whether a DAP infused curriculum, originally conceived of in the Western context (e.g. USA) meet the unique needs of other cultural contexts, such as Ghana, requires further reflections.

For instance, it seems likely that, curriculum experts who designed the early childhood curriculum in Ghana, considered and debated how to strike a balance between harnessing children's potentials through play-based emergent curriculum, and preparing them to become competitive in the world of work, through a content-focused curriculum. Likewise, it seems equally likely that they grappled with how to provide space through curriculum reforms to redirect teachers' and children's energy and effort towards the quest to discover what indigenous cultures have to offer (the world) in terms of medicine, creativity, values, and the essence of life on earth. Indeed, the four teachers in the current study, reiterated that they recognised significant role culture plays in young children's development particularly, with respect to knowledge, attitude, values, spirituality, and fortitude. Furthermore, they believed that the mandated curriculum was flexible enough to support indigenous culture and knowledge.

And yet, however, making traditional funds of knowledge an integral and critical part of our Ghanaian public education system, beginning with kindergarten education, appears somewhat paradoxical, preparing the young learner to be competitive and successful in a global economy, typically conceptualised through western consumerism. To accomplish both seems to require considerable flexibility, insight, knowledge and the ability to maintain a critically reflexive stance on the part of teachers. In their quest to design a child-centric and culturally relevant curriculum, the Ministry of Education in Ghana incorporated Ghanaian cultural elements promoting Fante as the language of instruction, interspersed throughout the curriculum. Despite the acknowledgement of local culture, knowledge and language, however, the thrust, overall was for children, to begin to acquire knowledge that is worthwhile in the world of work. However, there is the need for curriculum developers in Ghana to strike a balance between traditional funds of knowledge and knowledge which is driven by market forces because it would enable learners to maintain cultural knowledge and identities while also, acquiring the knowledge and skills to be competitive in the global economy. Therefore, going forward, curriculum developers in Ghana need to develop ways and means to value and maintain local cultures and knowledges while simultaneously supporting children in acquiring the knowledge and skills that allow them opportunities to participate globally. Indeed, curriculum developers and policy makers in Ghana might benefit from decolonising efforts (Andreotti (2011) in Canada and elsewhere which seeks to legitimise local knowledge and practices and to incorporate them into curriculum and pedagogy.

As in many countries, there indeed, a complicated and difficult conversation to be had about valuing and maintain the local while learning to participate more globally and to benefit from it. But complexity appears to be an enabler because it compels us to contemplate and question the status quo and reflect on the ways forward. For example, in the Ghanaian context, traditional proverbs have the potential to become, a tool for developing critical thinking at all levels of education. Such critical thinking would seem essential in order for us, the Ghanaian people to adopt and adapt ideas and knowledges from somewhere that will benefit us culturally, economically, politically and socially, while fiercely guarding and maintain our own culture, knowledge and practices that support our children (individual and collective) achieving their full potential.

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Appendices

Appendix A Letter of contacts

A.1 Letter of Contact for Principal



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

To: Principal

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

**Title: Teachers' Practices in Kindergarten Classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis,
Ghana**

By Ann Anderson (Principal Investigator) & Mumuni Thompson (Co-Investigator)

My name is Mumuni Thompson, a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. Dr Ann Anderson (**Principal Investigator**), a Professor of the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, UBC and I (**Co-Investigator**) are conducting a study to explore teachers' practices in

kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, the study aims to explore teachers' approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms.

Two of your teachers will be invited to participate in this study because we recognise the role teachers play in the education of young children. Thus, teachers sharing their understanding and experiences of their practices in kindergarten classrooms will be beneficial because it will give us insights into how teachers contribute to young children's development.

If you are interested in participating in this study, we ask that you read the enclosed Consent Form and take time to consider the details provided carefully. After doing so, kindly return the signed copy of the consent form to the co-investigator, Mumuni Thompson. Only schools for which the principal has provided written consent will be included in the study.

We thank you in advance for your time and willingness to consider our invitation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ann Anderson".

Dr Ann Anderson, Professor

Mumuni Thompson, PhD student

A.2 Letter of Contact for Teachers



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

To: Principal

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Title: Teachers' Practices in Kindergarten Classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana

By Ann Anderson (Principal Investigator) & Mumuni Thompson (Co-Investigator)

My name is Mumuni Thompson, a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. Dr Ann Anderson (**Principal Investigator**), a Professor of the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, UBC and I (**Co-Investigator**) are conducting a study to explore teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, the study aims to explore teachers' approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms.

Two of your teachers will be invited to participate in this study because we recognise the role teachers play in the education of young children. Thus, teachers sharing their understanding and experiences of their practices in kindergarten classrooms will be beneficial because it will give us insights into how teachers contribute to young children's development.

If you are interested in participating in this study, we ask that you read the enclosed Consent Form and take time to consider the details provided carefully. After doing so, kindly return the signed copy of the consent form to the co-investigator, Mumuni Thompson. Only schools for which the principal has provided written consent will be included in the study.

We thank you in advance for your time and willingness to consider our invitation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ann Anderson".

Dr Ann Anderson, Professor

Mumuni Thompson, PhD student

A.3 Letter for Contact for School District



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

To: The Metropolitan Education Director

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

**Title: Teachers' Practices in Kindergarten Classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis,
Ghana**

By Ann Anderson (Principal Investigator) and Mumuni Thompson (Co- Investigator)

My name is Mumuni Thompson, a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia. Dr Ann Anderson (**Principal Investigator**), a Professor of the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, UBC and I (**Co-Investigator**) are conducting a study to explore teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms. Specifically, the study aims to explore teachers' approaches to learning in kindergarten classrooms.

We wish to recruit teachers from two basic schools under your supervision to participate in the study. Four kindergarten teachers will be invited because we recognise the role of teachers in the education of young children. Thus, teachers sharing their understanding and experiences of their practices in kindergarten classrooms will be beneficial because it will give us insights into how teachers contribute to young children's development.

If you agree for us to recruit participants from schools under your supervision, we ask that you read the enclosed Consent Form and take time to consider the details provided carefully. After doing so, kindly return a signed consent form and a cover letter on the district's letterhead to the co-investigator, Mumuni Thompson. Only teachers who provide written consent will be included in the study.

We thank you in advance for your time and willingness to consider our invitation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ann Anderson".

Dr Ann Anderson, Professor

Mumuni Thomson, PhD student

A.4 Consent Form for Principal



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

To: Principal

Research Consent Form

Teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana

Purpose of the Study: The study seeks to explore teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast, Metropolis. More specifically, how kindergarten teachers promote children's development in classrooms.

Recruitment: Dr. Ann Anderson (Principal Investigator) and Mumuni Thompson (Co-investigator) seek your permission to recruit two participants from your school by taking 10 minutes of teachers' break or lunch time to explain the study to those who are interested, its benefits and the need to complete a consent form to participate in teachers' interviews (45 minutes to 1 hour each). Teachers' decision to participate in the study is voluntary.

Procedures: Four kindergarten teachers will be interviewed and observed. Two experienced teachers from two different schools selected for the study will be interviewed in pairs for 45 minutes to 1 hour at one of their schools. Two less experienced teachers from the two schools will also be interviewed in pairs for 45 minutes to 1 hour at one of their schools. Subsequently, the teachers will be interviewed individually on three different occasions for the purpose of probing certain issues further. All the interviews will be audio recorded. The teachers will also be observed individually for 30 minutes in class on three different occasions to ascertain how teachers apply their knowledge about appropriate practices in their daily teaching context. Field notes will be used to document teachers' practices as they unfold in classroom contexts. We, therefore, seek your permission to hold the interviews in your school, if chosen by the participants and to visit the participants' classrooms.

Confidentiality: Identities of participants and the school will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be assigned to participants in the study for identifying data sources and reporting of results. The results will only be used for academic publication(s) and conference presentation(s). The data acquired from the study will be stored in a password protected computer or a locked cabinet for five years after which the data will be destroyed.

Findings: Findings from the research have direct implications for the future of early childhood in Ghana. Finally, the study findings will be used to write a PhD dissertation.

Risks and Benefits: There are no expected or known risks for the role of participants in this study. You are also free to decline granting this permission to recruit and carry out the study without giving reasons and without any consequences. Your teachers' decision to participate in this study is voluntary. Participants will be remunerated.

Contact information: If you have any concerns or complaint about your rights as a research participant and/ or your experiences while participating in this study contact the Research

Contact information for Investigators: If you have any concerns about your rights as participants in this study you can contact the Principal Investigator, [Ann Anderson], and the Co-Investigator, [Mumuni Thompson].

A.5 School Principal's Consent

I understand that my assistive role and the use of my school, in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may decline to perform or withdraw from playing the assistive role at any time without jeopardy to my status. I may refuse to answer this request without any consequence.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

I **agree/do not agree** (circle one) to grant permission to recruit kindergarten teachers to participate in the study and to carry out the study in my school: **Teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana**

Sign: _____ Date: _____

Designation: _____

School Name: _____

PLEASE KEEP THIS COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS

A.6 School Principal's Consent

I understand that my assistive role and the use of my school, in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may decline to perform or withdraw from playing the assistive role at any time without jeopardy to my status. I may refuse to answer this request without any consequence.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

I **agree/do not agree** (circle one) to grant permission to recruit kindergarten teachers to participate in the study and to carry out the study in my school: **Teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana**

Sign: _____ Date: _____

Designation: _____

School Name: _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGNED COPY TO THE CO-INVESTIGATOR

A.7 Consent for Teachers



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

To: Teachers

Research Consent Form

Teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana

Purpose of the Study: The study seeks to explore teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast, Metropolis. More specifically, how kindergarten teachers promote children's development in classrooms.

Recruitment: Dr Ann Anderson (Principal Investigator) and Mumuni Thompson (Co-investigator) are recruiting two teacher participants from your school. I will provide a 10-minute briefing during the teachers' break (or lunch time) to explain the study, and its benefits, and the need to complete a consent form to participate. If you volunteer, you will be expected to participate in teachers' interviews (45 minutes to 1 hour each time), which will take place at one of the schools selected for the study. Your decision to participate in the study is voluntary.

Procedures: Four kindergarten teachers will be interviewed and observed. Two experienced teachers from two different schools selected for the study will be interviewed in pairs for 45 minutes to 1 hour at one of their schools. Two less experienced teachers from the two schools will also be interviewed in pairs for 45 minutes to 1 hour at one of their schools. Subsequently, the teachers will be interviewed individually on three different occasions for probing certain issues further. All the interviews will be audio recorded. The teachers will also be observed individually for 30 minutes in class on three different occasions to ascertain how teachers apply their knowledge about appropriate practices in a real-life teaching context. Field notes will be used to document teachers' practices as they unfold in classroom contexts.

Confidentiality: Identities of participants will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants in the study for identifying data sources and reporting of results. The results will only be used for academic publication(s) and conference presentation(s). The data acquired from the study will be stored in a password protected computer or a locked cabinet for a period of five years after which the data will be destroyed.

Findings: Findings from the research have direct implications for the future of early childhood in Ghana. Finally, the study findings will be used to write a PhD dissertation.

Risks and Benefits: There are no expected or known risks for participants' roles in this study. You are free to decline participation in the study or to withdraw from the study without giving reasons. Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. Participants will be remunerated.

Contact information: If you have any concerns or complaint about your rights as a research participant and/ or your experiences while participating in this study contact the Research

Contact information for investigators: If you have any concerns about your rights as participant in this study you can contact the Principal Investigator, [Ann Anderson], and the Co-Investigator, [Mumuni Thompson].

A.8 Teacher Consent

I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary and that I may decline to participate or withdraw from participating at any time without jeopardy to my status. I may also refuse to answer the question(s) during the interview, without any consequence, or decline to be observed.

I acknowledge I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

I agree/do not agree (circle one) to participate in the study: **Teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana**

Sign: _____ Date: _____

Designation: _____

School Name: _____

PLEASE KEEP THIS COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS

A.9 Teacher Consent

I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary and that I may decline to participate or withdraw from participating at any time without jeopardy to my status. I may also refuse to answer the question(s) during the interview, without any consequence, or decline to be observed.

I acknowledge I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

I **agree/do not agree** (circle one) to participate in the study: **Teachers' practices in kindergarten classrooms within the Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana**

Sign: _____ Date: _____

Designation: _____

School Name: _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS SIGNED COPY TO THE CO-INVESTIGATOR

Appendix B Interview Protocol

Collapsed Version of the Interview Protocol

The following questions will constitute the basis for eliciting responses from teachers about their practices in kindergarten classrooms;

1. How might you describe teaching practices you employ in a kindergarten classroom?
2. What are some key learning activities you do engage your children?
3. Are there specific instructional strategies/ decisions you use to motivate/engage your children?
4. What are some factors and beliefs that you think influence your instructional decisions?
5. Do you view your teaching as developmentally appropriate? What do you do that you feel fits that terminology, if any? What about the term culturally responsive, do you believe that your practice is CR? Why or why not?

B.1 Interview Protocol

The following questions will guide the interview session but it is not my intention to ask all the questions during one session, but many of them will be asked if /when a teacher needs to be redirected.

Interpretation and Application of DAP in Ghanaian Socio-Cultural Context

1. Tell me about yourself, your education and years of experience and any other information you will like to share.
2. How would you describe your practices? (Tell me more about that)

3. Tell me how you consider the socio-cultural backgrounds of children when planning your learning activities. (How does this influence your curriculum planning? In what ways or way? Tell me more about that)
4. Please, share any benefits you experienced from teaching practices you use in kindergarten classroom settings? (Why do you see such practices as useful? Tell me more about that)
5. Tell me some of the challenges you have encountered as a teacher in the course of teaching in kindergarten classrooms. (Why do you see these things as challenges? Tell me more about that).
6. Tell me how your undergraduate degree or diploma in early childhood education been helpful in the course of interpreting and applying your practices in kindergarten classrooms? (Why do you see your qualification as useful? Tell me more about that)

Learning Activities in Which Teachers Engage Children

7. Tell me the kind of learning activities in which you often engage kindergarten children? (Why do you see these learning activities as beneficial? Tell me more about that)
8. As a kindergarten teacher, have you experienced any benefits for engaging children in such learning activities? Why do you see these learning activities as useful? Tell more about that)
9. Tell me how young children respond to the learning activities in which you engage them? (Why do you see these reactions as useful? Tell me more about that)

10. What sort of factors and beliefs influence your selection of learning activities? (Which factors do you see as beneficial? Why? Which factors negatively impact on your selection? Tell me more about that)

Instructional Strategies of Teachers

11. Tell me the sort of instructional strategies you often employ in kindergarten classrooms?
12. As a kindergarten teacher, have you experienced any benefits of using instructional strategies in a particular lesson? (Why do you see these instructional strategies as beneficial? Tell me more about that)
13. Tell me the sort of challenges you have encountered as a teacher in the course of implementing these instructional strategies? Why do you see these as challenges? Tell me more about that)
14. Tell me the kind of steps you often take to deal with these challenges? (How useful have any of these steps been in dealing with the challenges? Tell me more about that)

Instructional Decision Making Process

15. Tell me how you make instructional decisions about the physical environment? (Why do you see this process of instructional decision making as beneficial? Tell me more about that)
16. Tell me how you make instructional decisions about the social environment (Why do you see this process of decision making as useful? Tell me more about that)

17. Tell me how you make instructional decisions about instructional strategies in the course of a lesson? (Why do you see this process of instructional decision making as useful? Tell me more about that)
18. Tell me how individual differences influence your instructional decisions? (Why do you see this process of instructional decision making as beneficial? Tell me more about that).
19. Tell me how your beliefs influence your instructional decisions? (Why do you see this process of instructional decision making as useful? Tell me more about that).