

RESEARCH REPORT

**ZIMBABWEAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
THE ZIMBABWEAN INFANT CURRICULUM**

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**Abstract**

*This study reports the findings of a research project on Zimbabwean infant<sup>1</sup> teachers' perceptions of the curriculum for children in grades one, two and three. There was general consensus among infant teachers on what they believed to be the three most important subjects on their curriculum. A notable result of the study was that the subjects that children enjoy learning most are regarded as being the least important by their teachers. These subjects are allocated less teaching time than certain other subjects and teachers rarely keep records of children's progress in them. The study concludes that Zimbabwean infant teachers have been poorly socialized into the nature and purpose of children's curricula, and recommends that teacher training programmes for infant teachers be revised accordingly in this aspect.*

ISSUES ABOUT THE nature of the curriculum in general, and what children should learn in particular, are constantly being debated. The different interpretations of what is important in the education of young children are reflected in the proliferation of curricular philosophies and designs which have received widespread analysis and criticism. Barrow<sup>2</sup> discusses some of these approaches; among them Hirst's 'Forms of knowledge', Bantock's and Peter's concept of the 'intrinsic value', Rousseau's and Neil's views on the 'Child-centered curriculum', and Goodman's 'Deschooling'.

The importance of the role of teachers as curriculum implementers has been succinctly described by Girroux<sup>3</sup> when he states that no curriculum is teacher-proof. He concludes that teachers' perceptions of

<sup>1</sup> Infant is a term used in the Zimbabwean primary school system to refer to children in grades one, two and three — an age range of six to eight years. Infant teachers are teachers who are trained to teach in grades one to three. However, because of changing teacher education programmes over the years, the term can also refer to any teacher teaching in grades one to three.

<sup>2</sup> R. Barrow, *Common Sense and the Curriculum* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1976), 38–63.

<sup>3</sup> H. A. Girroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals* (Westport CT, Bergin and Garvey, 1988).

the curriculum are crucial to curriculum implementation because those perceptions guide the procedures and practices of teachers in their classrooms.

Studies on the nature of the infant curriculum and of teachers' perceptions and implementation thereof have been undertaken in a number of countries. The 'Plowden report'<sup>4</sup> conducted an extensive study of the British infant school including, *inter alia*, the nature and content of the curriculum and how it was implemented. The study reported that young children benefit more from an undifferentiated curriculum and insisted on the integration of subjects because knowledge does not fall neatly into separate compartments. In addition to this, the manner in which young children learn does not fit into subject categories. Although the Education 5-9 report<sup>5</sup> lent its support to both subject-segregated and integrated curricula for young children, it also reported that a substantial amount of the work teachers carried out could not be clearly categorized under discrete subject headings, and that teachers did attempt to link various areas of learning, where possible.

Another area under investigation has been the allocation of time to and the status of subjects on the infant curriculum. Goodlad<sup>6</sup> reported that most time was spent in teaching Language and Mathematics, and that the other subjects on the curriculum were allocated less time and status by the teachers themselves. Goodlad also found that more resources were channelled into those subjects that were allocated the most teaching time on the timetable.

Teachers' perceptions of the status and importance of a subject seem to affect the quality of their teaching of that subject.

The Education 5-9 report found that teachers of the early grades tended not to view Social Studies as an important subject, and this was reflected in the fact that tests were not set in the subject, and there were inconsistencies between the goals of Social Studies and what the teachers actually taught. Of particular note, however, was the status of Physical Education which was not even included on the curriculum in some primary school<sup>7</sup> programmes. Physical Education, as a subject, did not have workbooks or reading materials and no tests were set in the subject. There was also a notable difference between the ideals of Physical Education and

<sup>4</sup> B. H. Plowden [Chairman], *Children and their Primary Schools: A Report for the Central Advisory Council for Education (England)* (London, HMSO, 1967).

<sup>5</sup> *Education 5-9: An Illustrative Survey of 80 First Schools in England* (London, HMSO, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> J. I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York, McGraw Hill, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Infant grades refers to grade one to three, junior grades refers to grades one to seven (all grades inclusive).

how it was taught in schools. Instead of Physical Education *per se* there was an emphasis on learning and playing competitive sports instead of a concern for the development of motor skills and spacial awareness.

In four studies reviewed by Alexander<sup>8</sup> it was noted that investigations carried out on primary school curricula seem to indicate that teachers consistently concur on the importance of Mathematics and Language as these two subjects feature on every list provided in the survey. There seems to be less consensus on the importance of the Creative Arts which are sometimes integrated into the curriculum and sometimes treated as a separate subject.

Questions of what should make up the core curriculum of the Infant grades have also been central to the general discussion of curriculum design for young children. However, with the increasing amount of knowledge demanded by our education system, infant pupils are being inundated with more information to assimilate as their teachers consider it essential to provide an educational base for each of the subjects their pupils will study in the future. For this reason, in spite of the increasing trend of differentiating the infant curriculum from the junior school curriculum, early grades have, therefore, ended up with the same range of subjects as the junior grades, making it difficult to distinguish between the core curriculum of the infant school and the compulsory curriculum of the junior grades.

Developing countries appear to follow the curriculum trends of developed countries. One can only assume that among the reasons for this is their lack of resources to implement studies that are indigenous in nature. Lack of support for the few indigenous curricula devised in the past, and sheer admiration for developed countries' curricula could also be possible reasons for this tendency.

The Zimbabwe infant curriculum is subject-based and any integration of content, skills and concepts is made through teachers' own initiatives. The subjects on the infant curriculum are identical to those in the junior grades, and the time-tabling and time-allocation are also the same in all grades. The only difference between the infant and junior grades is, therefore, probably only in the degree of complexity and level of comprehension in the subject required at a given grade. It would also be reasonable to assume that the perceptions of infant teachers regarding the aims and objectives of their curriculum are to some extent similar to those of teachers of the junior grades.

The purpose of my study is to examine infant teachers' perceptions of the Zimbabwean curriculum in order to serve as a basis for further research

<sup>8</sup> R. J. Alexander, *Primary Teaching* (London, Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1984).

on the infant curriculum in Zimbabwe in particular, and infant curricula in general. The study explores teachers' perceptions of the subjects on the Zimbabwean curriculum as reflected in:

- a) *their ranking of the subjects;*
- b) *their justification for their ranking;*
- c) *the amount of time that they believe should be allocated to teaching each subject;*
- d) *the amount of time they spend preparing for each subject; and*
- e) *the subjects for which they keep records on children's progress.*

Infant teachers' perceptions of school administrators' and parents' views of the Zimbabwean infant curriculum were also sought in an attempt to determine the potential influence of these perceptions on the teachers' stated priorities.

### METHODOLOGY

Eighty schools were randomly selected from three regions of Zimbabwe, yielding a total of two hundred infant classes. Questionnaires were sent to the teachers of these classes in 1991 and 114 responses were returned — representing a fifty-seven per cent response. Sixty-eight per cent of the respondents stated that they were trained infant teachers while 32 per cent were trained primary school teachers of junior classes. This means that all respondents had received formal training and were professionally qualified. A profile of the respondents is given in Table I.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections seeking the following information:

- a) *biographical professional data, including teaching experience, grade taught and professional qualifications;*
- b) *a personal priority ranking list of subjects on the infant curriculum, justification for that ranking, and time that teachers believed should be allocated to teaching each subject;*
- c) *implementation procedures as reflected in teachers' identification of the most demanding subjects in terms of preparation time, and the subjects for which children's progress records were maintained;*
- d) *teachers' perceptions of parents' and school administrators' views of the status of each subject;*
- e) *subjects teachers enjoyed teaching, and their perceptions of the subjects children seemed to enjoy learning.*

*Table 1*

## PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

<i>Decade of Training</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1950-1960	17
1961-1970	23
1971-1980	24
1981-1991	36
<b>Grades Taught</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
One	33
Two	40
Three	26
No response	1
<b>Length of Teaching</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
11 years or more	55
6-10 years	16
2-5 years	15
Less than 2 years	14

All subjects currently on the infant curriculum were included in the survey, as well as Creative Play, which was still being taught in some schools even though it had officially been phased out of the curriculum.

From the late 1970s through to the mid-1980s the Zimbabwean infant curriculum had included Creative Play, because of the realization that the infant child at school is being denied a natural characteristic: that of play. In the late 1980s, however, this subject was officially dropped from the formal curriculum in the hope that teachers would make play an integral instructional strategy across the curriculum. In practice this has not happened, so infants miss out on life-enriching activities and their total development is thus impaired. In addition to this, teachers regard as trivial those subjects that have an inherent play component in them and these are edged out of the day's activities.

All completed questionnaires were collected and the overall rank for each subject was obtained using a 10-point scale; the highest score being 10 points and the lowest zero. The scores for each subject from each of the 114 questionnaires were computed to achieve the overall subject ranking. A correlation was then run to find relationships among the variables.

Table II

## COMPOSITE SCORE MATRIX OF SUBJECT RANKING

<i>Subjects</i>	<i>Teachers' priority ranking</i>	<i>Proposed time allocation</i>	<i>Most demanding subject</i>	<i>Important subjects to keep records</i>	<i>Perceived school administrators' priority ranking</i>	<i>Perceived parents' priority ranking</i>	<i>Subjects teachers enjoy teaching</i>	<i>Subjects children enjoy learning</i>
English	1 095	946	1 057	1 187	1 137	1 119	952	419
Mathematics	1 079	800	1 047	1 030	1 066	1 124	1 050	473
Vernacular	977	899	898	971	1 002	886	826	394
Art and Craft	700	433	320	314	97	69	419	979
Religious and Moral								
Education	609	393	112	8	176	360	133	97
Social Studies	600	408	302	16	166	185	222	81
Creative Play	576	368	61	0	24	27	106	473
Environmental								
Science	554	402	337	53	201	178	272	77
Music	525	350	35	0	58	0	175	759
Physical								
Education	443	280	74	0	94	40	83	524
Home								
Economics	313	276	33	8	8	17	61	40

## RESULTS

Table II reflects relative consensus in teachers' ranking of the three most important subjects, and what teachers perceive to be the status accorded by parents and school administrators to the subjects on the curriculum. The top three subjects (English, Mathematics and the Vernacular) should, according to the teachers, be allocated the most teaching time, although they proposed more time for the Vernacular than for Mathematics. As expected, subjects that were given a low ranking such as Home Economics, Music, Physical Education and Creative Play, were allocated comparatively less time. A correlation between the status of the subject and the amount of time teachers allocate to teaching it was thus established as 0.9609 ( $p \leq 0.001$ ).

The reasons for ranking the top three subjects as they had done varied (see Table III). However, the majority of these reasons (85 per cent) were rooted in teachers' perceived utility of each subject. I group these reasons together as 'utilitarian' for the simple reason that each constitutes a means to some other end, rather than being an end in itself.

In my opinion the main goal of infant education should be to facilitate the total development of the child, including intellectual, emotional,

Table III

JUSTIFICATION FOR RANKING ENGLISH, THE VERNACULAR AND  
MATHEMATICS AS THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN THE  
CURRICULUM

<i>Justification</i>	<i>No. of responses</i>	<i>%</i>
These subjects develop children's basic literacy and numeracy	34	30
They lay a foundation for future study in the subject	30	26
They are necessary in everyday life	28	25
They are necessary in the total development of the child	6	5
Children enjoy learning the subjects	6	5
They are examinable at the end of the primary school	4	4
No response	4	4
Other reasons	2	2

Table IV

JUSTIFICATION FOR RANKING HOME ECONOMICS, PHYSICAL EDUCATION  
AND MUSIC AS THE THREE LEAST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS IN THE  
CURRICULUM

<i>Justification</i>	<i>No. of Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
These subjects are integrated in the top three subjects	18	16
They are the least demanding for children	14	12
There is no need for formal learning	26	23
They are not core curriculum subjects	20	17
Children can do without them	8	7
They are not important	8	7
They are not examined in the primary school	2	2
They are very demanding for children	1	1
Other	9	8
Non-response	8	7

physical and social development. However, only five per cent of teachers listed this as one justification when drawing up their ranking of the most important subjects. Teachers generally regarded the other subjects on the curriculum as unimportant, or thought that those subjects did not need to be taught formally at school as children could acquire skills in those disciplines informally in their daily life (Table IV).

The findings indicate that teachers consistently keep progress records in the top three subjects as well as in Art and Craft, and that the lower the priority of the subject, the less likely it is that progress records will be maintained in that subject. From Table II it can be seen that none of the respondents keep records in Creative Play, Music and Physical Education and that maintenance of records in subjects that have a low priority rank appears to be arbitrary. The correlation between subjects teachers rank as important and subjects in which teachers maintain records is 0,9488 ( $p \leq 0,001$ ).



Table V

## TEACHERS' RANKING AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF PARENTS' AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' PRIORITY RANKING

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Teachers' priority ranking</i>	<i>Perceived parents' priority ranking</i>	<i>Perceived school administrators' priority ranking</i>
1	English	Mathematics	English
2	Mathematics	English	Mathematics
3	Vernacular	Vernacular	Vernacular
4	Art and Craft	Religious and Moral Education	Environmental Science
5	Religious and Moral Education	Social Studies	Religious and Moral Education
6	Social Studies	Environmental Science	Social Studies
7	Creative Play	Art and Craft	Art and Craft
8	Environmental Science	Physical Education	Physical Education
9	Music	Creative Play	Music
10	Physical Education	Home Economics	Creative Play
11	Home Economics	Music	Home Economics

*Note:* This table was derived from the composite score matrix in Table II.

Teachers believe that school administrators attach more importance to English, Mathematics, and the Vernacular than they do to any of the other subjects; Music, Creative Play and Home Economics being considered the least important. Environmental Science, which teachers rate eighth, is ranked fourth in their perceived school administrators' ranking order. Art and Craft is ranked fourth by the teachers but seventh in their perceived school administrators' ranking (see Table V). The correlation between the

teachers' ranking and their perception of school administrators' ranking of the three most important subjects is 0,9410 ( $p \leq 001$ ).

Parents are assumed to view Mathematics as the most important subject on the infant curriculum, and to place a certain degree of importance on the moral and social development of their child. For this reason, teachers place Religious Education and Social Studies in the top half of the perceived parents' priority ranking. Likewise, as teachers do not think that Art and Craft, Music, Creative Play, Home Economics and Physical Education are considered to be important in the parents' priority ranking, these subjects receive a similar ranking to that ascribed to school administrators, as seen in Table V. Results of the survey reveal a correlation of 0,9375 ( $p \leq 0,001$ ) between teachers' own opinions and their perceptions of parents' views on the importance of the top three subjects; the relationship between the perceived parents' ranking and the perceived school administrators' ranking being correlated at 0,9857 ( $p \leq 0,001$ ).

From Table II it is evident that the three subjects which teachers enjoy teaching most are Mathematics, English and the Vernacular, in that order. It is interesting to note that although teachers acknowledge the importance of these subjects, they believe parents and school administrators attach most value to them. Consequently, teachers allocate the most preparation and teaching time to these subjects, which are also the only ones in which children's progress records are consistently maintained. The relationship between subjects that teachers most enjoy teaching and those that take most of their preparation time was established by a correlation of 0,9856 ( $p \leq 0,001$ ).

Teachers report that children appear to enjoy learning Art and Craft, Music and Physical Education most. All three subjects are ranked at the bottom of the parents' and school administrators' perceived priority ranking, in spite of the fact that the teachers themselves rank Art and Craft fourth. An insignificant negative correlation was established between the subjects children appear to enjoy learning and the parents' perceived ranking. There was no correlation between the subjects that children enjoy learning and any of the other ratings, i.e., the teachers' priority ranking, subjects that demand most of the teachers' preparation time, the subjects in which teachers maintain children's progress records, the school administrators' perceived priority ranking, parents' perceived priority ranking and subjects that teachers enjoy teaching. Teachers do not even keep records in three of the four subjects that they perceive children to enjoy most.

The results of the study raise some interesting issues, the most significant of which are as follows (see also Table V):

- a) There is some similarity in the rank order of subjects on the infant curriculum between teachers' own views, and their perceptions of both administrators' and parents' views. The most significant results show unanimous agreement on those subjects considered to be the three most important subjects, as well as the fact that Physical Education, Creative Play, Music and Home Economics predominate in the lowest positions in all rankings.
- b) Home Economics appears in either tenth or eleventh positions in all the ranking lists, i.e., second from the bottom or bottom of the list. Reasons for the poor rating cannot be inferred from this study, since no reasons were requested for the ranking of individual subjects. It might, however, be relevant to note that Home Economics is the newest subject on the infant curriculum, having been introduced in 1990. The low rating of this particular subject might, therefore, be due to the fact that teachers do not understand what is required of them in the teaching thereof.
- c) Those subjects that teachers know children enjoy learning (Art and Craft, Music, Physical Education, and Creative Play) receive a poor rating across the board, and are also viewed as demanding the least of the teachers' lesson preparation time.
- d) Teachers seem to allocate more preparation and teaching time to, and maintain children's progress records in, subjects that they assume are considered important by parents and school administrators.

#### DISCUSSION

The perceptions of teachers of the infant curriculum, as reflected in this study, indirectly raise several questions about the infant teacher training programme in Zimbabwe.

Firstly, in a system of education that purports to be child-centered, considering the interests of the child to be central to all learning strategies, the negative relationship between the teachers' ranking lists and the subjects that children seem to enjoy learning is cause for concern. Children seem to be learning in environments, both at home and at school, that do not regard what they enjoy doing as important. At school children spend very little time learning the subjects they enjoy most, and at home it would be safe to assume parents pressurize children into studying those subjects they least enjoy because of the perceived importance of these subjects to future success. Thus, both learning environments are not serving the needs of the young child as well as they might.

If we accept the fact that teachers and school administrators are professional people who know what is worthwhile and for this reason consider, coincidentally, those subjects that children enjoy learning as

less worthwhile activities than certain others, teachers should still ensure that they adequately prepare for and maintain children's progress records in all subjects on the curriculum. Teachers have an obligation to support and nurture all interests of the child as far as possible, especially in those subjects children enjoy. A system of education that claims to recognize the interests of the child should also regard the development of that child as a process of realizing his or her potential. From the results of this survey, failure to nurture and encourage the natural interests and talents of the child appears to be a serious omission on the part of the Zimbabwean infant education system.

Secondly, the reasons given by teachers for their ranking of the top three subjects reflect a serious deficiency in the Zimbabwean infant teacher training programme in that subjects are ranked as such on purely utilitarian grounds. This would suggest that teacher trainees are taught that the main emphasis of education in these formative years should be on academic achievement and not on promoting and encouraging natural curiosity and interests. This attitude ignores what is widely accepted to be the major goal of education in the early years, namely, to encourage the total development of the child. Accepting this as our guiding principle, the importance of different subjects should be assessed in terms of 'maximum contribution' to the total development of the child. In spite of this, only five per cent of teachers made any reference to the subjects' contribution to the total development of the child, or to the fact that children enjoyed learning particular subjects.

Rousseau warns educators of young children against deciding on the importance of subjects on the basis of utilitarianism when he says:

What is to be thought . . . of that cruel education which sacrifices the present to an uncertain future, that burdens the child with all sorts of restrictions and begins by making him miserable, in order to prepare him for some far off happiness which he may never enjoy?<sup>9</sup>

The preoccupation of many teachers with the basic preparation of children for future learning is, in my view, misplaced. Utilitarian considerations in infant curriculum design, although necessary, should not overshadow the focus on the all-round development of the child. English, Mathematics and the Vernacular already dominate the curriculum at the expense of other learning experiences higher up the educational ladder. For this reason, the difference between teaching in the infant school and at higher levels of education should be reflected in the focus

<sup>9</sup> J. J. Rousseau, *Emile* (1911) trans. by B. Foxley (London, Dent, 1955), 423.

on the child rather than on the subject in the early years, the subject only serving as a vehicle for developing the child. Alexander refers to this difference as the 'Child not subject hypothesis'.<sup>10</sup> In the infant classes, the focus should be on the child, and

The Expressive Arts (Art and Craft, Music and Physical Education) should play an important role in early education by virtue of their inherent capacity to enhance a child-centered approach and provide 'maximum contribution' to the total development of the child. Nevertheless, infant teachers still consider these subjects to be the least important. The Expressive Arts formed an integral part of the early Froebelian kindergarten curriculum and were accorded pride of place because of their ability to develop the 'total child', particularly by encouraging self-expression.<sup>11</sup>

Conversely, the mode of instruction in the top-ranked subjects tends to be teacher-dominated because of the emphasis on imparting new concepts, skills and knowledge. This means that no creativity is afforded the individual child who becomes a mere receptacle for all the information coming from the teacher. In addition to this, children's progress records tend to focus on cognitive achievement, to the exclusion of other areas of development, because of the preoccupation with checking the child's understanding of specific concepts in that subject.

In other words, the Mathematics teacher records quantitative totals and assesses the quality of the child's work in the subject utilizing standards external to the child. In the Expressive Arts, however, such totals are not possible because the criterion is based on the standards coming from within the individual child. According to Spodeck<sup>12</sup> the Expressive Arts lend themselves to all-round development because the creativity and self-expression inherent in them are pervasive in all areas of development.

Thirdly, the allocation of time on the infant curriculum should also be based on the principle of 'maximum contribution' to the total development of the child. The Expressive Arts should be allocated at least as much time as is devoted to the top three subjects. However, the actual amount of time allocated to these subjects on the Zimbabwean infant curriculum in no way even vaguely affords the Expressive Arts this amount of time.

In theory, each of the Expressive Arts is allocated a maximum of one hour in a twenty-hour week, while English, the Vernacular and Mathematics each have a total of four-and-a-half hours per week. In practice, however,

<sup>10</sup> R. J. Alexander, *Primary Teaching*.

<sup>11</sup> B. Spodeck, *Teaching in the Early Years* (Englewood Cliffs N.J., Prentice Hall, 1985), 206.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-8.

because of their low ranking by teachers, the one hour allocated is rarely used for the Expressive Arts, and is often used instead for further work in Language and in Mathematics. This means that the child is totally deprived of experience in the Expressive Arts, thus creating an imbalance in the child's intellectual growth and development. Theories of child development emphasize that a deficiency in one area of development will create a deficiency in another.<sup>13</sup> As Alexander found in his study, Physical Education periods often become supervised recess periods.<sup>14</sup> Current educational practices cannot, therefore, be said to be focusing on the total development of the child.

The argument developed so far suggests that the process of ranking certain subjects as more important than others, and of deciding on the allocation of preparation and teaching time for individual subjects, should be relative to the extent and quality of the contribution these subjects make to the overall development of the child.

It is also my belief that the current 'misconceptions' regarding the most important subjects on the infant curriculum may be a result of the fact that the infant curriculum is subject-based. Apart from the suitability of an integrated curriculum for young children, as outlined by the 'Plowden' and Education 5-9 reports, an integrated curriculum might refocus the teachers' attention on the original goal of infant education.

Integrated curricula do not emphasize the content of the subject for its own sake but act rather as a vehicle for the total development of the child who then learns through active participation and 'discovery'. The learning experience is carefully orchestrated by the teacher to enable the child to arrive at the appropriate conclusions, but the child takes a more active part in the entire process than he would were the teacher simply providing information. The discipline or theme to which the child is exposed right from the beginning serves as a means for nurturing the development of the child and not as an end in itself. However, teachers tend to view the content of the subject as an end in itself when the curriculum is subject-segregated. This approach is more suitable at higher levels of learning.

My analysis of curriculum organization implies that the infant curriculum should follow an integrated approach and that the purpose of infant teacher training programmes should be to broaden teachers' views

<sup>13</sup> See H. W. Maier, *Three Theories of Child Development* (New York, Harper and Row, 3rd edn., 1978), 254-5; P. H. Miller, *Theories of Developmental Psychology* (San Francisco, Freeman, 2nd edn., 1986), 440, 433-4; D. E. Papalia and W. S. Olds, *Human Development* (New York, McGraw Hill, 3rd edn., 1986), 7; S. S. Ashburn and C. S. Schuster, *The Process of Human Development: A Holistic Life-span Approach* (Philadelphia, Lippincott, 3rd edn., 1992), 24, 39-44.

<sup>14</sup> R. J. Alexander, *Primary Teaching*.

of the role of infant education to focus on the total development of the child, as opposed to concentrating merely on the cognitive development of the individual.

While on one hand teachers do not appear to share the same views as those they assume parents and school administrators hold regarding priorities in the education of the infant school pupil, they are still powerfully influenced by their perceptions of these views in their classroom practice. For example, teachers believe that Art and Craft is ranked as the least important subject on the curriculum by parents and school administrators, and yet it appears in fourth position in the teachers' own rankings. Creative Play is assumed to be ranked as ninth and tenth by parents and school administrators respectively, while it is seventh in the teachers' lists. Consequently, while teachers may be blamed for using Expressive Arts' time for the top three subjects, the reason for this could partly be attributed to the pressure to align with perceived parents' and school administrators' priorities.

In conclusion, an education system that purports to be child-centred should ensure that the needs and interests of the child are paramount, and that there is consistency between the goals and practice of the system. To date Zimbabwean teacher training programmes for infant education have focussed on a curriculum that is subject-oriented. It may be time to reform the curriculum in an attempt to reduce the current emphasis on cognitive skills and instead promote a greater emphasis on the all-round development of the child. Teachers need to be made aware of the different types of infant curricula, not only to provide them with an insight into the proliferation of educational theories and practices in force over the years, but also to broaden their perspective on the nature and purpose of the education of young children and thus furnish them with alternatives to curriculum implementation.

