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Editorial

Nithi Muthukrishna, Kathy Hall and Hasina Ebrahim

Recent debates on early childhood have challenged ways in which we have conceptualised childhood and marginalised children. We are challenged to question the perceptions we have of children and childhood, and how these influence and shape our assumptions and choices concerning children.

Breaking away from a developmental lens, perspectives from the sociology of childhood are creating new conversations about how we understand young children. The argument is that childhood is embedded in society, and children are actors in that society. This perspective views childhood or childhoods as shifting social constructions, and recognises the participation of children, in a transitory phase, as active beings in the present (James and Prout, 1997; Lee, 2000). There is a full recognition of children as persons in their own right, capable of acting on their social world, and articulating their experiences in different ways.

This reconceptualist stance sees the construction of childhood and children as intricately bound to complexity, uncertainty and to questions of race, gender, sexuality, class, culture, and many more constructions. There is a widespread call for rethinking relationships with young children by recognising them as beings with voice, agency and partial, shifting identities (Grieshaber and Canella, 2001; Canella and Viruru, 2004; Canella 1997; Knutsson, 1997).

Parallel to these developments, there is a growing recognition of the need to secure the formal rights of children. The belief in children's rights, that is, the right to be heard and participate in their lives has led to inclusion of children's voices in research. These underpinnings help position children as participants in research and talk of research *with* children in their lived contexts. The continued struggle for social justice in the lives of children is an integral part of the discourse. For example, attention has been drawn to the effects of political and macroeconomic policies on children, and the view that particularly in countries of the South, children have become the most vulnerable victims of global economic policies.

The papers in this special issue engage critically with the theoretical, political, and ethical reasons for rethinking the discourse on childhood and children.

The first paper in the volume by Radhika Viruru provides a rich theoretical contribution that challenges the dominant discourses in early childhood. Viruru questions the lack of uptake by early childhood education researchers of postcolonial theoretical perspectives. Her paper offers a helpful and critical overview of this theoretical field and explains how postcolonial theory offers a way of resisting control, 'unmasking power structures' and adopting an activist position in order to transform social life in ways that are more socially just and equitable. Clearly the other papers in this volume, while not necessarily versed in the subtleties of this theory, share this agenda. However, what Viruru's theoretical paper makes patently clear to us, editors, is that we need ethnographies and other empirically grounded studies of early childhood education that are located explicitly in postcolonial theoretical principles. Such studies, we also believe, could enrich the field of early childhood. If they view children as constructively critical social agents, they could along with other research based on similar principles raise the status of children and childhood in society or, at a minimum, challenge, their current lowly status in most parts of the world.

The paper by Salim Vally powerfully demonstrates the inadequacy and emptiness of the rhetoric of human rights, democratic citizenship, and common citizenship in current South African policy documents when it diverges so enormously from the lived experience of the vast majority of the nation's children. One example he offers is the policy of decentralising funding to school governing bodies. This policy, he shows, is responsible for producing gross disparities and inequities since, unlike affluent communities who can easily supplement the meagre state funding, poor communities have no such option and suffer from acute resource shortages, especially from lack of qualified teachers. The State's push to reduce the cost of personnel only exacerbates this scenario for poor communities. His analysis of the impact of this kind of decentralisation in particular, and the de-politicisation of education reform more generally, leads him to challenge the meaningfulness of the notion of 'common citizenship'. He affirms that social and economic rights should be seen as necessary conditions for citizens to exercise their civil and political rights.

Our own comparative paper shares this perspective. Staying with the theme of inequality and inclusion/exclusion, it attempts to describe and discuss

initiatives in both South Africa and Britain for combatting childhood poverty. A common feature across the two countries, despite their very different circumstances, is the privileging of the economic imperative over the social, the implicit assumption being that somehow if we get the economics right, social justice will follow for all automatically. We argue that in neither country is there evidence in practice of the rich notion of social inclusion identified in the research literature. Economic rationalisation policies have exacerbated initiatives to combat childhood poverty in South Africa, making the realisation of even the narrow notion of social inclusion extremely difficult. Several initiatives, in line with New Labour's Third Way political thinking, have been introduced in the United Kingdom with varying degrees of success in their own terms. While childhood poverty is no longer on the increase, as it was for years under Conservative governments, this remains at the narrow end of a social inclusion continuum.

Two papers in this volume address, in different ways, the research process and vulnerable children. Researching vulnerable children and their communities is the theme of the paper about HIV/AIDS as a barrier to education by Mary van der Riet, Angela Hough and Bev Killian. These authors describe the participatory research techniques they used to obtain informed consent, to negotiate confidentiality and to address beneficence and nonmaleficence as they sought to elicit children's understandings of their situation. Seeing children as social agents, they used a wide range of activity-based tasks, including projective techniques, drawing and ranking exercises within a four-stage focus group design, which they describe in considerable detail in this on-going, large-scale project. However, these were not without their ethical and data-analytic difficulties, not least the unresolved issue for them of using 'playful mechanisms' to probe issues as serious as illness, death and HIV/AIDS. We look forward to further reports of their research project in due course. Carol Aubrey and Sarah Dahl systematically review research studies about interviewing young vulnerable groups of children and they consider the influence of children's views on decisions taken about them. People who work with children will not be surprised at the finding that activity and computer-based techniques tend to be effective in eliciting children's views. Nor will they be surprised to learn that there is still little evidence of children's views actually impacting on decision-making about them. Their provocative title captures the message of their paper very well.

Both these papers are important because, in emphasising good methods of listening to children, they help raise the status of children and childhood and

they testify to the competence of children as research participators and partners in the research enterprise.

Peter Rule's historical case study of an early childhood development training organisation in KwaZulu-Natal (Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education, LETCEE) is the story of the tensions generated by the 'formalising' demands of the State and needs of the local community, as State intervention increased over that particular history. Drawing insightfully on Korten's theory of the various 'generations' that an NGO might typically go through in a life cycle, he highlights the dilemmas associated with dependence on official funding, on the one hand, and the consequences of this, on the other hand, for maintaining and exercising a critical voice. The question he poses is: can NGOs really challenge government policy and really push for the strengthening of community-based provision when they are so dependent on State funding for their survival? The history of LETCEE would suggest that this balancing act is extremely difficult, and may even be impossible. One thing Rule's analysis makes absolutely clear to us though is the significance of NGOs' direct experience of what is happening on the ground, and how such knowledge and experience ought to critically mediate and inform State initiatives. This article is a much welcome contribution to understanding some of the key developments in ECD in South Africa during the last ten years.

One could be forgiven for interpreting Fraser Brown's and Sophie Webb's account of orphanages in Romania as a story of hopelessness. Yet nothing could be more inaccurate, for the evidence and arguments presented in their paper more than hint at the tremendous contribution of play on particular children who, probably, are the most play-deprived children in the world. The authors of this research and development project were able to identify the children's developmental progress even over the children's relatively short period in a rich, play environment. They also describe the principles of the kind of play environment they sought to facilitate. What we see in this paper is the necessity of warm interaction combined with basic nutrition and hygiene for human development – in line with the messages of most of the papers in this volume. What we also see, however, is the resilience and the recovery potential of the most abused and neglected children, who without attention to their most basic human needs, are consigned to institutions for the 'mentally retarded'. The broader point perhaps is that children may be perceived as developmentally incompetent, when it is social structures and social policies that deny them the opportunities to develop competence (Landsdown, 1994).

Set in more affluent circumstances, the research of Geerdina van der Aalsvoort, Mieke Ketelaars and Arjette Karemaker also testifies to the significance of play – this time what they call ‘social play’ – in the lives of school children, especially those who have been defined as having special educational needs, specifically, learning difficulties. What is revealing from this on-going experimental research project is the relatively greater benefits social play confers on the educational lives of those children defined as ‘at risk’ and attending special schools. Their line of enquiry is likely to yield further valuable evidence over the next few years.

As editors of this special issue, we trust that this issue will stimulate new questions and open up new possibilities for thinking and action amongst researchers, policy makers, and practitioners as we commit to the task of enhancing critical scholarship in the field of childhood studies.

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The impact of postcolonial theory on early childhood education

Radhika Viruru

Abstract

In this paper a key concept in postcolonial theory, an unmasking of the will to power, that essentializes diverse ways of viewing and living in the world, is related to the field of early childhood education. Drawing on the work of such scholars as Young (2001) who suggest that the adopting of an activist position that seeks social transformation is a crucial concept in postcolonial work, this paper briefly reviews the work of various scholars across the globe who have used postcolonial theory in their analyses and reconceptualization of early childhood education. Finally and perhaps most importantly a discussion ensues as to why, despite the powerful nature of the ideas it has to offer, as well as its relevance to the lives of young children, postcolonial thought has had only minimal if any impact on the field of early childhood as an academic discipline and even less on the daily practices of early childhood educators.

Introduction

Postcolonial theory has gained popularity within academic circles for over several decades now (Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Loomba, 1998), although as Moore-Gilbert has pointed out, its ideas predate the label by much longer. Although more of its scholarship has been in disciplines such as literature and history (Mongia, 1996), it has had some impact on fields such as education. In this paper, a brief summary of postcolonial theory is first offered, followed by an overview of some of the work of those scholars who have applied it to the field of early childhood education. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a discussion ensues as to why, despite the powerful nature of the ideas it has to offer, as well as its relevance to the lives of young children, it has had only minimal if any impact on the field of early childhood as an academic discipline, and even less on the daily practices of early childhood educators.

What is postcolonial theory?

Postcolonial theory is a difficult concept to define or to limit (Young, 2001; Dimitriadis and McCarthy, 2001). At the same time, despite its longevity (at least since the publication of 'Orientalism' by Edward Said in 1978), and its interdisciplinary appeal, definitions of what it means are frequently requested, which in itself is a reflection of the forces that led partially to its emergence: an insistence on definitions and the simplification of complex bodies of ideas into neatly labelled categories (Viruru, in press; Mongia, 1996). As Mongia has put it, "rather than offer prescriptive definitions of what should or does constitute postcolonial theory, I find it more useful to explore and interrogate the arguments of different positions, to see contemporary postcolonial theory as a sign that should be interrogated, a locus of contradictions" (Carby, 1987, cited in Mongia, 1996).

Young (2001) has suggested that since it originated in three southern continents, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, postcolonialism could also be called tricontinentalism. Whether labelled postcolonial or tricontinental, the purpose remains the same: addressing the legacy of colonialism imposed by western attempts to dominate the globe over hundreds of years. This particular 'will to power' is particularly remarkable as it attempted to essentialize diverse societies into one universal form, and to impose a narrow economic path on cultures that conceptualized not only economics but human experiences, from a range of diverse perspectives. As Said (1995, p.21) has described it, such visions of humanity included: "mankind" forming "a marvellous almost symphonic whole whose progress and formations, again as a whole, could be studied exclusively as a concerted and secular historical experience".

Mongia (1996) cites the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said in 1978 as a crucial moment in the emergence of postcolonial theory. The then revolutionary concept that the Orient was a European political, sociological, military, ideological, scientific, imaginative and discursive creation opened the door to many other such discursive analyses. The fundamental question of how knowledge was produced came to be asked in varied disciplines, with an emphasis on "race, colony, nation and empirehood" (Mongia, 1996, p.5). As Mongia points out, earlier analyses although critical of the relationships between colonizer and colonized and centre and periphery, still functioned very much within the knowledge structures that they were critical of. According to Hall (1996, p.247) postcolonialism "is obliging us to re-read the

very binary form in which the colonial encounter has for so long been represented. It obliges us to re-read the binaries as forms of transculturation, of cultural translation, destined to trouble the here/there cultural binaries for ever". Spivak's commentary on the politics of knowledge production further complicates this picture for as she points out, voice is not something that can be uncomplicatedly achieved. Attempts to let subalterns speak continue to subscribe to the binary concept of voice/silence, whereas she asks "with what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak" (1988, p.285)?

In conclusion, as Young (2001, p.58) puts it, terms such as colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism adopt only a "critical relation to the oppressive regimes and practices that they delineate" whereas postcolonial thought goes further. If the post in postcolonial is interpreted as "the historical moment of the theorized introduction of new tricontinental forms and strategies of critical analysis and practice", it becomes apparent why postcolonialism continues to be a theory of hope for many. Thus, despite the complexities surrounding what it ought to be called and the dispute over whether or not it is truly independent of Western domination, it still offers a way to seek new possibilities and to resist forms of control, no matter how hidden or subtle they might be.

Why use postcolonial theory?

As the above analysis has demonstrated, postcolonial theory is not limited to the study of how nations have recovered from colonization but is more concerned with the adopting of an activist position, seeking social transformation. As Young puts it, such activism can

emerge on different sites in any region: the academic, the cultural, the ecological, the educational, the industrial, the local centre-periphery structure of the city and the rural hinterland, the marketplace, the media, the medical in all its different manifestations, the mainstream political, the rainforest, and the social sphere (2001, p.58).

Macedo (1999) has given several convincing arguments as to why scholars of education should take postcolonial theory seriously. Deconstructing the idea that postcolonial studies belong only in formerly colonized countries, Macedo (1999, p.xii) points out that the colonized experience is to be found "in the concentration camps without barbed wires that abound within the First World in the form of ghettos, rural mountains of Appalachia and Indian reservations"

and in the large scale human exploitation produced by the policies of neo-liberalism. Further as Macedo puts it, there are many similarities between colonial ideologies and the ways in which subordinated groups in Western cultures have been treated. Colonialism, according to Macedo, imposes 'distinction' as an 'ideological yardstick' against which others are measured and found wanting. Schools, as Macedo points out, are often the institutions through which such measuring and relegation is done. Macedo traces connections between colonial ideologies of distinction and superiority to the debate over bilingual education in the United States and the world wide clash between education based on Western heritage and multicultural ideas. As Macedo concludes, unless the legacies of colonialism are examined within the field of education, "our minds, if not our hearts will remain colonized"(1999, p.xv).

McLaren and Farahmandpur (2003) argue that global capitalism has become the new imperialism and that this form of imperialism has had an enormous impact on schools. As they put it, the term globalization has been deliberately depoliticized, and been imbued with calculatedly innocuous images such as standardized commodities. McLaren and Farahmandpur, however, see globalization as "a new combination of old-style military and financial practices as well as recent attempts to impose the law of the market on the whole of humanity itself"(2003, p.53). They point out too that the concept of democracy itself is colonized through the forces of the market, as it is "emptied of all its content that is dangerous for the smooth functioning of the market". Using education in the United States as their particular focus, these authors cite multiple examples of how life in schools is being impacted by the market:

- Transnational corporations are trying very hard to privatize educational systems in many countries, especially in the United States where public education is often viewed as promoting a tolerance for diverse points of view
- The 'businessification' of schooling is becoming prevalent, as Coca-Cola, McDonald's and Exxon provide financial help to public schools
- There has been a remarkable increase in advertising directed towards children, with two billion dollars being spent on that market
- The schools themselves are being invaded with commercial products, as corporations display their signs on school buses and distribute free book covers for textbooks

- The curriculum taught in school is being significantly impacted by corporations as companies like McDonald's teach about the world of work, and Hershey's about nutrition, while textbooks make numerous references to commercial products. Thus as new forms of colonialism emerge, it is important to present critical analyses of how these have a direct impact on the processes of education.

Thus there are many reasons why scholars of education should take postcolonial theory seriously. I turn now to a more detailed consideration of how postcolonial theory has been used in early childhood contexts.

Early childhood education and postcolonial thought

In this section, I would like to review briefly how scholars in the field of early childhood education have used and redefined the concepts of postcolonial theory. As will be evident, given the wide-ranging nature of the concerns that have been labelled as postcolonial, their early childhood education counterparts are similarly diverse. The selection of work described here is limited not only by constraints of space but by theoretical framework. There is a much larger body of work, much of it broadly known as reconceptualist, that has looked at how early childhood education can be recreated in ways that are most socially just and representative of diverse knowing (Cannella, 1997; Jipson and Hauser, 1998; Walkerdine, 1997; Steinberg and Kincheloe, 1997 to name but a few). However, in this paper, I have tried to look at work that specifically uses postcolonial theory as at least one of its theoretical bases. This is not to suggest that any of this other work is less valuable in the insights that it has provided. Other scholars such as Soto and Swadener (2002) have provided valuable analyses of the overall impact of such work. However, since the purposes of this paper were to look at the impact of postcolonial theory on early childhood education, the focus was necessarily limited. Although I have tried to classify these works into two different categories (eclectic works or those that use postcolonialism as one among other theoretical bases and works that focus on oppressive practices), these should not be interpreted as rigid boundaries. Many of the works cited in each section could traverse those limits quite easily.

Postcolonial eclecticism

In this section, I would like to review the work of those scholars who have used postcolonial theory alongside other theoretical frameworks in an early childhood context. Expressing what one might consider a common theoretical basis for this kind of work, Kaomea (2003, p.16) states that “if we are to meet the demands of postcolonial studies for both a revision of the past and an analysis of our ever-changing present, we cannot work within closed paradigms”.

Kaomea’s (2003, 2001a, 2001b) own work is reflective of the open paradigm she so eloquently describes. Some of her work has described the multiple readings that can be made of the native Hawaiian elder programme that has been implemented in some elementary schools in Hawaii. According to Kaomea (2003, p.17), this programme was started in 1980 to include instruction about the “native” culture of Hawaii in elementary schools, and includes regular visits by Hawaiian elders to schools to talk about Hawaii’s culture. Kaomea acknowledges the many positive aspects of the programme (such as its popularity among teachers, parents and children as well as the ways in which respect for and connection with elders has been re-established). However when looking beyond surface appearances, Kaomea found several deeply troubling aspects of this programme. Kaomea analysed work by elementary school students depicting the Hawaiian elder programme and found that although on the surface, positive cheerful images were conveyed, the erasures, and absences that characterized the student’s work conveyed realities much more troubling than the “polished, staged version of reality” that was immediately apparent, such as the pressure on the elders to be almost the sole representatives of Hawaiian culture in the schools, and the uncomfortable conditions under which they were made to work.

Kaomea (2001a) has also used postcolonial theory to discuss her own situation, as an “indigenous academic” working in early childhood (Smith, 1999; Said, 1993; Spivak, 1990). Kaomea insists on maintaining a distance from what she calls methodological purity, which she sees as “consistent with the logic of post-colonialism and its declining emphasis on grand theories and narratives”(p.68), using Marxist, Foucauldian as well as postcolonial ideas in her analyses. Kaomea quotes the work of Prakash (1992, p.184) who urges post-colonial intellectuals to “hang on to two horses, inconstantly” as one of the bases for this decision.

Other scholars have also used postcolonial theory as one among a range of theoretical positions they adopted while looking at diverse aspects of early childhood. For example, Tobin has talked about the missing discourse of pleasure in early childhood education. While he uses postmodern perspectives to support his argument, he also refers to postcolonial theory to contextualize what he calls “the rise of consumer desire in contemporary early childhood settings” (2001, p.17). Post-colonial citizens, he suggests, in this age of hyper capitalism, experience pleasure as a commodity, to be consumed rather than produced. Tobin’s (2000) other works utilize postcolonial theory in his analysis of how children respond to media images, analyzing their reactions to popular movies. Tobin recorded the conversations of 7- and 8-year-old children’s reactions to the movie *Swiss Family Robinson*, and found that the children were able to read deeper meanings into the plot of the movie than one might expect. For example, even though the pirates who attacked the Robinson family were shown as Asians and Polynesians disguised as pirates, the children continually referred to them as ‘Indians’ as in Native Americans, indicating that they read it as part of the larger narrative of colonialism.

Some postcolonial studies of childhood have been historical such as De Alwis’ (1991) account of how British and American missionaries tried to impact the lives of Ceylonese women in the early nineteenth century, on the grounds that those women in turn would reshape their domestic worlds, including children, into proper citizens (even if second class) of the empire. Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) have also looked at the relationship between colonialism and children, stating that to European colonizers, Black Africans were seen as being very much like children and women, in that they exhibited uncontrolled passions and irrational behaviour. Thus, as Stephens (1995) and Loomba (1998) point out, early modern notions of childhood, as a stage characterized by irrationality and uncontrolled passions, is heavily influenced by colonial experiences. Zornado (2001, p.103) has looked at children’s literature in the Victorian era, and remarks upon the openness with which the right to dominate native people was expressed, with absolute conviction about civilizational, moral and racial superiority. This model, according to Zornado, is based on the relationship between parents and children during Victorian times: the physically dominated and the physically dominant. Thus “Victorian child rearing pedagogy – a fully fledged ‘black pedagogy’ in its own right – reproduced imperialist ideology on an individual basis, one child at a time”. Zornado shows how such popular works as Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* are representative of this ideology of childhood subservience to adult authority.

Postcolonial studies of oppressive practices

Various scholars have also used postcolonial theory to study the ways in which young children as well as early childhood professionals in various contexts have been subjected to oppressive conditions, and explored ways in which postcolonial theory can serve as a tool to combat that oppression. In my own work (Viruru, in press; Cannella and Viruru, 2004; Viruru, 2002; Cannella and Viruru, 2002; Viruru, 2001; Viruru and Cannella, 2001), I have tried to show how early childhood education world wide has been heavily influenced by dominant Western discourses about young children.

These dominant discourses draw heavily from the work of theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky, Western discourses, and in contemporary contexts are embodied by the document(s) put forward by the National Association for the Education of Young Children in 1987 and 1997 that discuss the concept of 'Developmentally Appropriate Practice'. These ideas have dominated and some would say colonized the world of early childhood education (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Stephens, 1995; Burman, 1994). Dahlberg *et al.* (1999, p.160) suggest that the "imperium of the United States is the latest phase of Minority World dominance in relationships with the Majority world, which started several hundred years ago with expansion and colonialism". The core of this dominance has been based on ideas of linear progress and development, objectivity, universality and totalization. These ideas, according to Dahlberg *et al.*, have provided the basis for colonization and hegemony (Young, 1990). These colonizing ideas have internalized themselves into the 'life-ways' of those who live in colonized countries. A more detailed discussion of how discourses of child development are considered limiting would not only be redundant, considering the widespread discussion that this idea has already generated (Cole, 1996; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999) but beyond the scope of this paper. However, the fact remains that this is the discourse that heavily dominates the field and that has been the most resistant to questioning and change. The idea that children develop in a universal, linear sequence that all children must undergo to achieve maturity is one that very few early childhood educators are willing to forsake. Thus as Penn (1997) observed, in early childhood institutions in South Africa:

the written curriculum and pedagogy for the black nurseries were mainly provided by NGO's, almost all of it in English whatever the first language of the recipients. Despite the discrepancies in catchment, funding and organization of the black and white centres, the curriculum literature and training materials were all derived from western sources, mainly

adaptations of Montessori and High Scope methods. Although materials may be adapted for use in educare centers, the western tenets which inform them are generally assumed to be universal. There is perceived to be little or no ambiguity about what constitutes appropriate “intellectual” or “social” behavior (quoted in Dahlberg *et al.*, 1999, p.162).

Other writers about Africa (Serpell, 1993) have expressed similar concerns as well as authors such as Cole (1996), Myers (1992) and organizations such as Save the Children United Kingdom (Molteno, 1996).

As my work in Hyderabad, India has shown, educators there, even though they engage with children in work that is thought-provoking, and designed to meet the needs of children within that culture, both feel and are told that the work they do is inappropriate, since it does not conform to Western (mostly play-based methods). My ethnographic work in India (Viruru, 2001) gives details about such methods of education. Although when I began this ethnographic work, I did not consider the study as operating through a postcolonial framework, the concerns that emerged from it led to its adoption. My work discusses how Western notions of childhood resemble Western notions of the Orient: based only partially on fact, but mostly on a fiction created through a combination of desire and the needs of the marketplace. This study also comments on the discourses of materialism that have invaded early childhood education, where the doctrine of children learning by doing, is interpreted more and more as justifying the need for material things in classrooms. Such an obsession with materials not only creates a larger market but also denies children the opportunity to create meaningful and self-directed social relationships among themselves.

In my later work (Viruru, in press; Cannella and Viruru, 2004), my co-author and I have tried to look at early childhood education as a discipline and subject it to the kinds of analysis postcolonial theory suggests all disciplines should undergo: critical looks at the past, contextualization, as well as scrutiny as to how the knowledge that forms a part of it was produced and what are the complexities that surrounded this knowledge production. Drawing on earlier reconceptualist work (Kessler and Swadener, 1992; Bloch, 1992; Cannella, 1997; Jipson, 1991), in our work we suggest that the study of childhood and early childhood education has been heavily influenced by the will to reason that characterizes the Enlightenment period during which dominant discourses about childhood first emerged. This will to reason, combined with the efforts to colonize the globe, which occurred around the same time historically, has had an enormous impact on how academic disciplines are constructed, as well

as ways in which human beings have come to see the world.

Disbelief and disavowal

As the above very brief, and limited review has shown, postcolonial theory has been used by many early childhood educators and other scholars to draw attention to parts of the educational process that have hitherto been overlooked. The idea of colonialism, as has been pointed out, can be said to have been modeled on particularly authoritative and repressive models of child rearing. Furthermore, dominant ideologies of how children grow and develop have become another of colonialism's truths that permit no questioning, and that is imposed unhesitatingly upon people around the world for their own good. The idea that 'real' truth exists somewhere far away, that the privileged can visit, learn and take back home continues. And perhaps most disturbingly of all, the idea of binaries remains: a person, a profession, a field is either good or bad, going in the right or wrong direction, permissive or authoritative. There is little room for ambiguity and 'indeterminacy', for thinking about deeper levels of meaning, that as Tobin has shown, 7- and 8-year-old children seem to be able to engage in effortlessly. In this final section, I would like to consider why most of the reactions to the introduction of postcolonial theory into early childhood education circles has been so uninhibitedly negative. This is not to suggest that this is always the case, but it has certainly been a common reaction. Most times, there appears to be a complete unwillingness to engage with the idea, to even pause and consider the idea for a moment. There are several possible explanations for this, which I would like to consider in more detail.

Liberal strategies of exclusion

The title of this section is taken from Uday Mehta's essay 'Liberal Strategies of Exclusion'. In this essay, Mehta (1997) discusses one of the most interesting paradoxes in the history of liberalism. As a philosophy on the one hand, it has prided itself on its "universality and politically inclusionary character". However, according to Mehta (1997, p.59) it is also unmistakably characterized by the "systematic and sustained political exclusion of various groups and 'types'". Mehta's analysis of liberalism as a philosophy acknowledges that as a doctrine, it is committed to freedom and that it has tried to limit the reaches of political power by defining rights for human

beings that cannot be taken away from them. According to Mehta such an orientation, however laudable it may appear, contains inherent problems. As Mehta points out, such a philosophy of human life, is based upon certain universal assumptions about human beings. All humans, according to liberal philosophy are born equal, free and rational. What liberalism does not recognize is what Mehta (1997, p.62) calls the “specific cultural and psychological conditions woven in as preconditions for the actualization of these capacities”. Rather it portrays itself as having recognized truths that transcend history, culture and race, based on claims about the universality of the human condition. Freedom, equality and rationality, according to philosophers are states into which all humans are born, simply by virtue of being human. As I have discussed in other work (Cannella and Viruru, 2004), no matter how universally appealing this idea of their being a natural law and order for all humans might appear, this kind of philosophical position continues to be oriented towards the idea of there being particular truths that are universal, a claim that many postcolonial scholars would rebut vigorously. As Mehta (1997, p.65) puts it,

For although, no doubt liberal institutions limit and give to the expressions of human freedom a measure of order, they are themselves never secure from the threat posed by the possibility that their authorizing consent will be withdrawn by anyone who thinks that the order is no longer just and therefore no longer binding.

It may be difficult to see how freedom and equality can be seen as exclusionary ideas, when they are extended to include all humanity. However, they remain one particular culture’s notion of what it means to be free and equal, and thus demand a kind of cultural allegiance for them to be valid. Freedom, equality and rationality are also set up as part of a dangerous binary: either one believes in them, or there is chaos and complete disorder. Ultimately they are truths that cannot be questioned, for to do so is to lead society in dangerous directions.

I would suggest that the situation of discourses of child development enjoy a similar status in the field of early childhood education. Its ideals are similarly laudable: a belief in every child as a unique human being, progressing gradually through stages, as they attain complete personhood. The kinds of programmes based on these philosophies similarly seem difficult to question, for example, many opportunities for children to play and experiment and ‘discover’ their world. However, this remains a culturally grounded belief. Furthermore, the claim that these processes are universal is exclusionary for it

does not admit other possibilities. Similarly, just as ideas about freedom, equality and rationality are ideas that cannot be questioned, as to do so invites chaos, it appears that questioning ideas about child development is similarly forbidden, as it too is linked to fundamental concepts about individual freedom and progress. Scholars such as Walkerdine (1984) have shown how Piaget's theories of child development in particular were heavily influenced by the need to create a rational world, in which such horrors as World War II could never happen again. Obviously, postcolonial ideas are not welcome in such situations.

The principle of indeterminacy

As the above section has perhaps made evident, dominant discourses in early childhood education are not open to dialogue with perspectives that question fundamental realities. The alternatives offered by postcolonialism too, may have something to do with this rejection. As the work of many of the scholars quoted above has shown, children's lives have many complex dimensions and cannot be reduced to a simplistic formula. Postcolonial theory's insistence on and acceptance of multiplicities and ambiguities thus stands in stark contrast to commonly accepted ideas of how children grow and develop. They offer no neatly packaged formulas or universally applicable laws. Also, analyses such as those of Moore-Gilbert (1997) have discussed the fact that the term postcolonial has been associated with so many different time periods, countries, cultures and practices that it is seen as being in danger of imploding from within. Thus, it is often seen as a 'field' lacking in coherence and focus. However, scholars such as Anzaldúa (1999) refer to the need to tolerate the ambiguity that colonialism has created in the world, bringing diverse cultures into close contact with one another. For many people around the world, their situations resemble that of the *mestiza* that Anzaldúa (1999, p.101) describes:

In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior: these patterns are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode) to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.

Thus, when the question is asked, if not child development then what,

postcolonialism's answer (if one could narrow down it to one answer) might resemble Anzaldua's statement. This, to a field that is based on principles of scientific study and the search for universal truths, can seem not only unintelligible but frightening and chaotic. However, I believe that it offers infinitely more possibilities for social justice.

Civilized oppressions

To many professionals in the field of early childhood education, the very idea that theories of child development can be perceived as instruments of oppression is ludicrous, and therefore not worthy even of a moment's consideration. Oppression is associated with the denial of freedom, yet dominant Western modes of thinking about children emphasize more than anything else, the importance of freedom and choice in children's lives. Child development theories in particular are often seen as standing in opposition to those who would impose greater regulations on children's lives (such as an increased focus on academics in the early years), and as advocating for a child's right to enjoy the freedom from responsibility that childhood ought to entail. How then can these be considered oppressive? Harvey's (1999) work titled *Civilized Oppression* is particularly helpful in considering this question. As Harvey points out, the word 'oppression' is associated with images of abductions, torturings, lynchings, death and destruction. It is assumed that oppression is instantly recognizable and visible. However, according to Harvey (1999, p.1), there are forms of what he calls "civilized oppression" that are "by far the most prevalent in Western industrialized societies". Oppression is something that can "be buried in day to day incidents of no obvious significance" (Harvey, p.2). Harvey suggests that the analyses of civilized oppression includes studying the mechanisms through which power is wielded, how perceptions and information are controlled, as well as the kinds of harm that are done.

Harvey develops the example of the concept of humour to illustrate what he means by a civilized form of oppression. According to him, having a sense of humour is a very important quality in many Western societies. People are commonly expected to both demonstrate as well as appreciate humour: those who do not exhibit these skills are made to pay the price. Yet, humour functions as a civilized form of oppression, as it remains one of the few socially acceptable forms of attack on the already disadvantaged. Humour is seen as symbolizing a form of character and an approach to life that are highly

desirable. People who have a sense of humour are considered enjoyable to be around, as well as possessing the right kind of sense of proportion about their lives. They are also seen as possessing a flexible rather than dogmatic approach to life. As Harvey points out, all of those qualities are highlighted by the undesirability of their binary opposites. Furthermore, he sees two problems with them: what he calls their individual basis (such as a quality that allows one to handle personal failures well, as having self esteem without being egocentric) and the drawing of sweeping generalizations about desirable behaviour on the basis of the lives of those who are socially privileged. Thus for the socially privileged, the kinds of failures they encounter may be the kind that humour can help in dealing with. For those who are struggling to make do under difficult circumstances, this is not always the case and it may not be something that has a humorous dimension. Yet, given the dominant idea that a sense of humour is a desirable quality, people who fail to exhibit this necessary quality can be cruelly judged upon this basis and consequences can be attached to that judgment. Thus, the insistence upon possessing a sense of humour can be a form of oppression.

I would suggest that although Harvey's work is not explicitly labelled as postcolonial, the concerns he expresses are very much in line with postcolonial theory. Invisible forms of oppression are no less destructive than overt forms, they are just elusive and harder to isolate, in that simplistic conclusions about causes and effects are harder to draw. Thus too, when particular kinds of beliefs about children are imposed in diverse cultural locations, I would suggest that a similar form of civilized oppression is enacted. The civilized and convoluted nature of this oppression can obscure its presence, which is often an hindrance in combating it. Thus one of the reasons that postcolonial theory has not enjoyed much popularity in early education circles could be that it often focuses on these hidden and civilized forms of oppression.

Gripes and grievances

Scholars of postcolonial studies also point out that contrary to popular belief (at least in academic circles), postcolonial criticism does not enjoy full recognition as a legitimate mode of inquiry even in fields with which it has historically been connected. As Moore-Gilbert has said, many recent accounts of 'modern' literary criticism ignore postcolonial studies altogether or refer to it only in passing. In this field too, it has had a somewhat hostile reception in

some circles, with texts like Said's (1993) 'Culture and Imperialism' being dismissed as a symptom of a culture of "gripes and grievances" (Conrad, 1993, cited in Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Thus, postcolonial concerns in different fields have been affected by the backlash against 'political correctness'. This echoes some of the reactions that various scholars of education have had to endure when talking about postcolonial theory and early childhood education. As some advocates of developmentally appropriate practice in particular have said, the 1997 version of what it constitutes is substantially different from the earlier version, in that culture has been incorporated as a dimension of what constitutes developmentally appropriate practice. The implication is that the problem, if it existed at all, has been identified and fixed, and all these other allegations are nothing more than 'gripes and grievances'. The idea that in some cultures, equating childhood with development is culturally inappropriate, is not considered.

Another common criticism of postcolonial studies has been that its advocates are straying into places that they do not perfectly understand (such as a literary critic like Said commenting on anthropology as an instrument of colonialism). Jacoby (1995) has also questioned the ability of postcolonial scholars to integrate disciplines:

As they move out from traditional literature into political economy, sociology, history and anthropology, do the postcolonial theorists master these fields or just poke about? Are they serious students of colonial history and culture or do they just pepper their writings with references to Gramsci and hegemony? (p.32)

This too may be one of the reasons why postcolonial theory and early childhood education have enjoyed such a disharmonious relationship.

Concluding thoughts

Despite the criticisms that have been discussed above, there is no circumventing the fact that the questions that postcolonial theory raises in the field of early childhood are questions that need to be dealt with if the field is to move in directions that represent all children. The unmasking of power structures is not a comfortable process but a necessary one, if real change and representation are considered desirable. Paying attention to the concerns of postcolonial scholars could be vital part of this process.

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Citizenship and children's education rights in South Africa

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Abstract

This article attempts to understand citizenship and children's human rights in the context of poverty and inequality in South African society. It reviews some of the policy texts pertinent to Early Childhood Development, particularly Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education and White Paper 6 on Special Education. The article speaks to the discrepancy between the existing normative framework of society and its reality. It seeks to do this through a discussion of the 'glossy rhetoric' of education policies and legislation informed by human rights, social justice and a democratic citizenship discourse and the actual realization of this promise.

Introduction

In the book 'Upside Down', the South American writer Eduardo Galeano in his usual lyrical style, writes of the abominations confronting children today as he divines another possible world, one which has its priorities right, a world which should be put 'right side up' (Galeano, 1998). He explains how today's world hands down a death sentence to thousands of children every hour through hunger and disease. Galeano laments that the poor are mostly children, and children throughout the world are mostly poor. "Among the system's hostages, they have it the worst. Society squeezes them dry, watches them constantly, punishes them, sometimes kills them; almost never are they listened to, never are they understood" (Galeano, 1998, p.13). They are manual labour on farms and in cities or domestic labour at home, serving whoever gives the orders. They are little slaves in the family economy or in the informal sector of the global economy where they occupy the lowest rung of the world labour market.

South African children are not an exception. Nearly 60% (11 million) of all children in South Africa live in dire poverty on less than R200 per month

(Berry and Guthri, 2003). For these children, the noble and admirable words in our Constitution that grandly proclaims that every child has the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care and social services is often hollow. In Southern African countries a new cruel twist has been added through the HIV/AIDS pandemic, infecting and affecting millions of young lives.

Karl Eric Knutsson (1997) in his seminal book *Children: Noble Causes or Worthy Citizens?* also makes the salient point that if we wish to understand the situation of a substantial number of children today, we need to look at childhood in all relevant contexts, including processes which influence the conditions of childhood. For Knutsson, the starting point is the environment of 'many poverties'. The landscape of these poverties embraces knowledge, health, and the lack of power over one's own life, social relationships, deficient habitats and the poverty of damaged environments. Knutsson emphasizes "these poverties contribute to the poverty of confidence and the poverty of self-respect and dignity" (Knutsson, 1997, p.20).

In 1998, the Poverty and Inequality Hearings (Chisholm, Motala and Vally, 2003) heard verbal testimonies and received written submissions that provided new insights into the problems confronting children in South Africa. It provided evidence that the inability to afford school fees and other costs such as transport, learning materials and uniforms, were major barriers to formal education for a significant number of families. In one of these submissions, Marcus Solomons, once a political prisoner on Robben Island, and now working for the Children's Resource Centre, argues that children learn primarily through play and yet that activity "which is essential for the development of the child, is for the majority of the children in South Africa, accomplished in the most unhealthy, increasingly dangerous and most unstimulating of environments" (Chisholm, Motala and Vally, 2003, p.472). Solomons points out that the Cape Peninsula has twelve impeccably groomed and manicured golf courses ranked amongst the best in the world. Yet there are no parks for children on the Cape Flats that even come close to the quality and facilities of these golf courses. He indignantly concludes that "what this in effect means is that the average white South African male in the Cape Peninsula (with a few black males joining them of late) has much more playing space than the average black South African child. We cannot think of a better example to demonstrate the immorality of the situation in this country at present" (Chisholm, Motala and Vally, 2003, p.472).

The historical neglect of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in South Africa continues ten years after the first democratic election. According to the South African Human Rights Commission's Fifth Economic and Social Rights Report, "There is nothing in [the Financing Review of Public Schools] on the funding of [ECD] for ages 0 to 6. Currently only 13% of children have access to this crucial level of education, which, according to international research, is vital in preparing learners for subsequent success. [Ad hoc] pilot schemes and vague undertakings made by the DoE to comply with the Education for All targets are not enough" (SAHRC, 2004, p.28).

Many studies have revealed the pedagogical importance of pre-primary education and the correlation between its absence and school failure, dropout and high repetition rates (see for instance Halpern and Myers, 1985; International Development Research Centre, 1983). The lack of access to quality ECD not only impacts negatively on children's development, but also on the ability of the primary caregivers (usually women) to pursue their own income earning, educational and other activities. Despite this understanding, provinces continue to devote meagre resources to ECD. It is also unconscionable that the previous minister of education, Kader Asmal, in his *Tirisano* statement of educational priorities, ignored ECD. The relegation of ECD was consistent with Asmal's confident assertion that, "We in the Ministry are convinced that success in our new policy areas such as ABET and ECD depends much on our success in getting basic education right. We must concentrate on the schools . . ." (ANC, 1998, p.12).

Many thought that Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (DoE, 2001a) heralded a new dawn for ECD. A critical analysis of this White Paper is thus necessary.

Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education

This White Paper suggested a national schooling system of provision based on a Reception Year for children aged five. A small community-based component was also mooted. Subsidies would be allocated on the basis of 70% of the cost per learner of public primary schools or 54% of the cost per learner in public secondary schools. The White Paper also proposed that all children entering Grade 1 by 2010 would have participated in an accredited Reception Year programme.

In a comprehensive analysis of the White Paper and the policy process leading up to it, Porteus (2001) argues that an unresolved tension between two models of ECD provision existed from the beginning of the formal policy process. These models are:

- Community-based and multi-aged, based on integrated intersectoral provision, and
- School-based emphasizing the provision of a Reception year for one age group.

For Porteus, these two models represent profoundly different ways of conceiving of ECD services. She also questions the way in which the decision to base ECD provision largely in schools and around one age group was made. Prior to the White Paper, a national audit to quantify the scope and nature of ECD service provision and a national pilot project based on the audit was embarked upon. Porteus points to various conceptual weaknesses in the audit and implementation limitations in the pilot. The auditing process focused on verifying the existence of sites from outdated lists rather than aggressively seeking to identify services previously not registered. The audit found that 83% of the 23 482 sites were community based, and almost the same number multi-aged (3-5 years). A mere 17% were school based (DoE, 2001a). Despite these findings, the National ECD Pilot Project was restricted to considering reception year services for five-year-olds and minimal state funding. The criteria for choosing sites in the pilot excluded most services in informal settlements and rural settings. Those sites that were not registered with the government and those that did not have at least 50% of children in the 5-6 year-old age range were eliminated from the pilot. Also, sites that received welfare grants and were part of the nutrition scheme (targeting the lowest income groups) were excluded. Despite the research bias in favour of Reception year programming, over a three period most provinces agreed on the importance of the community, intersectoral support, the non-institutional nature of quality services, multi-age models and the central role of community practitioners.

Contrary to these findings, the ECD policy as conceptualized in White Paper 5 revolves around Reception Year provisioning. This prompted Porteus to speculate that a decision was made before the research was complete and that the proposals in the White Paper undermine “. . .the best advantages of community based centers . . . (the mobilization of community energies) . . .” and embraces the worst aspects of community ECD provision “. . . the low

costs (reflecting neglect rather than purpose) . . .” (DoE, 2001a, p.16). The latter refers to the most problematic aspect of the community based sector, that of systematically underpaid practitioners. The White Paper also does not explore alternative models such as the Impilo Pilot Project in Gauteng, which put forward a financially viable proposal for intersectoral, and multi-age community based family and child centres, providing a model for comprehensive ECD service provision - a model which UNICEF’s ‘State of the World’s Children Report’ saw fit to recognize.

Education White Paper 6: Special Education-Building an Inclusive Education and Training System

Published in July 2001 this White Paper (DoE, 2001b) was preceded by a National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and a National Committee on Education Support Services. Based on deliberations by these bodies, the Education Ministry released a Consultative Paper on Special Education in 1999. White Paper 6 is informed by various submissions made as a result of the Consultative Paper. The proposals in White Paper 6 are directed toward establishing an inclusive education and training system providing more support within mainstream schools for learners with mild to moderate disabilities. Such ‘full-service’ schools will be phased in over time, beginning with the districts involved in a national district development programme. The intention is to convert, in a phased way, approximately 500 out of 20 000 primary schools to full-service schools. It is envisaged that learners who require low-intensive support will receive this in ordinary schools and those requiring moderate support will acquire this in full-service schools. Those who require highly intensive support will continue to receive this in special schools.

Although White Paper 5 mentions a ‘special programme’ targeted at four-year-old children from poor families and/or infected by HIV/AIDS, White Paper 6 is silent on this issue. This is a serious omission given that studies have shown the vulnerability of children below the age of five. It is estimated that the infant mortality rate below five will more than double by 2010 to stand at 99,5 per 1000 (Berry and Guthri, 2003).

Despite the vision of an inclusive system which goes beyond narrow categorization of medical disabilities and learning needs arising from physical, mental or neurological impairments, and now encompasses socio-

economically deprived learners, its implementation is in doubt. Implementing the limited proposals of White Paper 6 still entails considerable costs. Funding implications include the recruitment of about 280 000 out-of-school learners, sustained advocacy, the provision of necessary physical and material resources to convert schools to 'full-service' and, most importantly, the requisite professional development of staff. Given the emphatic dismissal of additional funds to the national education budget in the fiscus, a fully inclusive system is not feasible in the short term. The Department thus proposes a time frame, which will only fully realize its objectives by the year 2021.

Evidence in other countries that have moved toward integration and inclusion suggest that these policies have not produced the kind of changes envisioned (Tshoane, Tleane, Vally and Jansen, 2001). Nor have they sufficiently satisfied the disability rights movement, who see the changes as piecemeal and limited primarily as a result of insufficient resources to accommodate students with disabilities in regular classrooms. Also, the focus of attention is the individual child and not on the education system as a whole, which perpetuates disadvantage. Failure to address these issues results in depoliticising education reform and converting decision making into technical problems to be resolved by experts. These issues are even more acute in South Africa where general inequality is rampant and schooling even for 'able' learners perpetuates unequal social relations which shape and sustain injustice.

Citizenship in South Africa: legislation and policies

Since 1994 a plethora of policies such as the two White Papers discussed above, and legislation have been formulated and which speak to issues of children's human rights and democratic citizenship. While I outline some of the egregious policies that encapsulate the official conceptualization of citizenship, I examine whether these notions address the power relations that saturate society and its educational provisions, the 'storylines' that help shape who we take ourselves to be and become and whether our differences become inequality and hierarchy (Walker, 2001).

Education policies in South Africa, to a lesser or greater extent and through various permutations, encompass and reflect elements of social justice, the need to be internationally competitive (with emphasis on science and technology to develop requisite 'productive' skills) and the imperatives of fiscal restraint (expressed as cost-containment measures and the increasing

marketisation of education). These directly relate to global trends and have the effect of undermining social justice in education often framed in a human rights and democratic citizenship discourse.

A founding principle of our Constitution is common citizenship and the equal enjoyment of an array of citizen rights including freedom of belief, religion and opinion, expression, assembly and association. A range of socio-economic rights including education and the rights of children are emphasized. One year after the first democratic elections the White Paper on Education and Training promised the overhaul of curricula. The new curriculum emphasizes “common citizenship” and the learning area ‘Human and Social Sciences’ aims to produce “responsible citizens in a culturally diverse, democratic society”. A specific outcome in this learning area is active participation in the promotion of a democratic, equitable and just society. Another is that learners will be helped to exercise their responsibilities and rights as citizens.

Enslin (2003) writes that schools are to contribute to citizenship and democracy education through more than the formal curriculum. The South African Schools Act provides for democratic governance of schools with educators, learners and primarily parents working in partnership with the state in deciding the policies and rules that govern their schools. Also relevant to the preparation for citizenship was the initiative of the Minister of Education that established a working group on Values in Education in February 2000. It identified six core values to be encouraged in learners: equity and equal rights, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour.¹ Based on a report of this group, a Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy was issued the following year by the Department of Education. The Manifesto articulates a framework for values in education which is both attentive to citizenship and strongly focused on the constitution.

Enslin’s analysis does not take into account the disjuncture between the policy as text and the reality as lived. Furthermore, a few educationists have compellingly shown how Curriculum 2005 has worked “counter to its transformatory social aims” (Harley and Wedekind, 2004, p.211). I support

¹ Although the working group was circumspect about the dangers of a xenophobic nationalism and a narrow patriotism, it saw the need to celebrate national trappings such as the flag, anthem and coat of arms in order to build a common identity. It also made the controversial recommendation of a weekly pledge of allegiance at school assemblies (since discarded). Besides being uncomfortably reminiscent of Republic Day vows, the bland pledge might have reduced the intention and substance of the working group’s sentiments to mere ritual without meaning.

the view of Apple and Beane who write that the most powerful meaning of democratic citizenship is formed “not in glossy political rhetoric, but in the details of everyday lives”(Apple and Beane, 1999, p.120). For instance, while School Governing Bodies are portrayed as organs for participation in local, democratic citizenship, the reality is that the decentralizing function of these statutory organs has become a burden for poorer parents.

School Governing Bodies (SGBs) face an invidious situation. To protect the revenue-raising power of the school, it is in their interest to minimize the enrolment of non-paying pupils. For schools serving impoverished communities, the burden of establishing, retrieving and exempting parents from paying fees is particularly onerous. SGBs have become cost and budgeting centers. Many parents on these bodies view their role as co-opted and glorified fund-raisers rather than co-decision makers in educational matters. Many point out that the state is shedding its responsibility for the provision of education and transferring it to the SGBs. Recent amendments to education laws, and developments in the provision of educators confirm this view.

Allowing exemption from paying user-fees to some parents is generally fraught with many complications. Some of these include the fact that procedures involved in obtaining the exemption are often cumbersome; the School Governing Body is often unco-operative, resisting the loss of (scarce and valuable) income; and parents are reluctant to seek rebates as they fear that their children might be ostracised or victimized. Although the South African Schools Act and the Admissions Policy for Ordinary Public Schools make no provision for free basic education, they nevertheless prohibit the turning away of learners whose parents cannot pay, even while these parents can be sued for non-payment; preventing learners from sitting for exams; withholding the reports of learners; excluding them from social and cultural activities at the school; or discriminating against them in any other way. Mandla Seleoane exposes some of the problems associated with this approach.

First it requires a lot of courage to parade one’s poverty, and it borders on the insensitive to expect people to. Part of the argument for enforcing socio-economic rights is precisely that poverty erodes the victim’s dignity and sense of worth. To say that people will only access education for free if they can show that they are poor is out of synch with the rationale for having a justifiable system of socio-economic rights. The approach we have requires people to parade their poverty, the very thing that socio-economic rights are meant to protect them against (Vally, 2002, p.6).

Not only are there various illegal sanctions imposed on poor parents but many simply refuse to forego their dignity, since a condition for receiving an exemption from paying school fees depends on demonstrating their poverty. It is no accident that the National Department of Education's (NDE) Report to the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) attributed the high drop-out rate partially to poverty. According to the NDE, while about 1.3 million learners enrol every year for school in Grade 1, only about 570 000 – fewer than half – make it through to Grade 12).

While the infusion of human rights, social justice and conceptions of democratic citizenship in the new curriculum are positive,² the reality is that under conditions where teachers are not provided with adequate training and resources to sustain this initiative, it is akin to providing teachers merely with 'a lamp and three wishes'. It is clear that the conditions and context for effective implementation of both the new curriculum and values in education are not in place in most schools. The rationalization of teachers and the decentralization of the financial affairs of schools have aggravated the extreme resource shortages and the lack of teacher preparedness.

Human rights and education

The human rights approach to education requires recognizing education as a fundamental right that gives rise to governmental obligation to respect, ensure, protect, and promote that right. Rights-based education entails safeguards for

² The Wits Education Policy Unit (EPU), South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), Centre for Education Policy Development, Evaluation and Management (CEPD) submission to the committee that reviewed Curriculum 2005, is also pertinent in its contention that "there is a danger that teachers can practice *laissez-faire* curriculum development which pays little attention, compromises or even excludes content related to human rights and social justice" (2000, p.2 of submission).

Suggestions by the Wits EPU/SAHRC/CEPD submission around content prescription on human rights education and a compulsory anti-discrimination component in pre-service education and in-service courses were not engaged with. For the Wits EPU/SAHRC/CEPD (2000) the practices of human rights education should be:

enabled both through a cross-curricula approach and a dedicated learning area. Given our historic context, human rights education should not be diluted into soft curriculum options, but rather practiced within a strong enabling framework. The two approaches reinforce and are complimentary to each other and also reduce the possibility of marginalizing the field. We might reach a stage in our future where the need for a dedicated area will be obsolete, but for now it is imperative that we maximize the entry points for the practice of human rights education into the formal education and training sector.

the right to education, human rights in education, and the advancing of all human rights through education. National and local governments have the duty and obligation under international human rights standards to guarantee that education is available, adaptable, accessible and acceptable. Accessibility encompasses three dimensions. It includes economic and physical accessibility as well as the repeal of discriminatory measures and barriers to education, implying, *inter alia*, that education institutions should be within reasonable proximity and should be affordable. One of the mechanisms to create equal opportunity is to make education compulsory and free. Acceptability means that functioning education institutions and programmes have to be available in sufficient numbers. It also implies that institutions and programmes should have buildings to afford protection from the elements, adequate sanitation facilities, clean drinking water, trained teachers, teaching materials, libraries, and laboratories. Both these guarantees of accessibility and acceptability do not fully exist in South Africa. Much research over the past few years has shown how the user fees funding mechanisms at schools serve as exclusionary devices for huge numbers of young people (see for instance Vally, 2002).

The Department of Education's own School Register of Needs Survey (2001c) also shows that the guarantee of accessibility does not fully exist. The Needs Survey released at the end of November 2001 estimated that 27% of schools have no running water, 43% have no electricity, and 80% have no libraries. Only about 8 000 out of over 27 000 schools in South Africa have flush sewer toilets while close to 12 300 schools use pit latrines and 2 500 schools have no toilets at all. Even in schools that have toilets, 15.5% are not in working order. Schools requiring additional classrooms number over 10 700. The Survey also revealed that the number of state-paid educators has decreased dramatically by 23 642 while School Governing Body paid educators have increased by 19 000. Clearly a labour market involving the purchase of teachers has gained momentum as the state is determined to reduce personnel expenditure, and teacher shortages become more severe as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and previous rationalization policies. A consequence of this trend, while saving the state a salary bill of many millions, is the increasing disparities and inequalities between schools. It is largely schools that serve richer communities that can afford employing additional teachers to supplement the number of state-paid educators. The survey also showed that the number of schools that reported weak or very weak buildings increased from 4 377 in 1996 to 9 375 in the year 2000. Transport to and from schools remains a serious concern for learners in the rural areas. Provinces with a high number

of rural schools, such as the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo have thousands of learners who walk for long distances. It is not uncommon for learners to walk for 10-20 kilometres to get to school (Vally, 2002).

The human rights framework also recognizes the link between the right to education and other human rights. This is because education operates as a multiplier, enhancing the enjoyment of all individual rights and freedoms where the right to education is effectively guaranteed, while depriving people of the enjoyment of many rights and freedoms where the right is denied or violated. The quality of education, particularly in countries like South Africa is also a human rights issue. For instance, while the high enrolment rates in South Africa are positive, this is eroded by the conditions of schooling for many young people. To put it starkly, getting young people to school is important but does not make sense if the young women who get there are then raped. Also, the high enrolment rate does not reveal the ability of the system to retain learners.

Human rights and democratic citizenship

The interrelationship between education and democratic citizenship becomes even clearer when it is looked at from a human rights perspective. At the most basic level, economic and social rights have both direct and indirect effects on democratic citizenship. They have direct effects in that they ensure minimum equality of access to civil and political rights for all citizens. Any significant denial of the necessities of life (such as education or employment opportunities) involves a diminution of citizenship for those so denied, both in itself, and by impairing their capacity to engage in civil and public life on the same terms as others. Thus, social and economic rights should be seen as necessary conditions for citizens to exercise their civil and political rights.

In an insightful analysis of South Africa's macroeconomic strategy and its implications for human rights and democratic citizenship, Oupa Lehulere (1998) makes the point that:

we are presented with a one-way traffic: free markets produce democratic freedoms, but the democratic processes of society must not interfere with the markets. Instinctively and subconsciously, we shy away from a critique of the impact of GEAR-type macroeconomic strategies on first generation rights because we reproduce the assumptions of the dominant paradigm about free markets and freedom.

Lehulere emphasizes that the relationship between first generation or political and civil rights, and second generation or socio-economic rights, must be asserted in a fundamental manner. He believes that the obstacles for the achievement of socio-economic rights begin of necessity to undermine first generation rights. He argues, for instance, that the decision-making processes that led to the adoption of neoliberal policies had to be insulated from mass pressure and therefore needed to be secretive and undemocratic. The fact that GEAR and neoliberalism have corroded and continue to corrode South Africa's democratic institution can lead to many turning away from democratic institutions and cultures. Gear's failure to deliver on socio-economic rights is, as it turns out, its greatest blow to first generation rights.

South Africa's negotiated settlement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Bill of Rights clauses in the Constitution and the establishment of Chapter Nine institutions like the South African Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Gender Equality, the Public Protector and others have provided a fairy tale façade often serving to disguise the often vicious nature of the society we live in. This reality is obscured by the language of rights that mask privation by presenting values that are unattainable for the majority. These values are then meant to be the pillars upon which our society is constructed. Deprivation of the right to eat, work in a dignified way and the right to shelter, health and education surely nullifies the illusions of employment equity, equality and freedom. Acting as if certain rights exist for all inhibits peoples' ability to recognize when they are in fact, illusory, and why society does not act to protect these rights. A single mother in Soweto compared to a Sandton corporate executive cannot be said to have the same power of political persuasion or opportunity. These are real distinctions that give some people advantages and privileges over others. The fiction that promotes the view that real differences between human beings shall not affect their standing as citizens, allows relations of domination and conflict to remain intact.

Felice (1996, p.34) recognizes that "ruling ideology often in the form of rights, disguises reality, blurs perceptions and creates illusions". It therefore becomes vital to disclose the discrepancy between the existing normative framework of society and its reality. This realization comes with an understanding that protecting human rights should take into account that the most pervasive and chronic forms of distress are a consequence of economic, social and political structural circumstances that impact upon groups, as well as upon individuals.

This view of collective rights is opposed to the liberal conception of rights based on the notion that those who succeed in society do so because of their own individual attributes and those who fail to do so because of their deficits and weaknesses. This view is possible because the philosophical foundation of the dominant human rights discourse sees human beings as individuals instead of as social beings – products of a web of relations: social, economic and political from which social relations arise.

Falk, in his preface to Felice's book, concurs that neo-liberalism as an operational ideology, despite its pretensions of expediently promoting democracy, is radically inconsistent with the defence of human rights, if human rights are perceived in relation to suffering rather than as "abstract ground rules governing the relations of individuals to the state" (Felice, 1996, p.xii).

Conventional wisdom asserts that education can serve as the life raft to rescue people from the sea of protracted poverty. A colder and more simplistic extension of this theme contends that in post-apartheid South Africa, opportunities abound and the poor have only themselves to blame. This 'blaming the victim' or deficit argument accepts uncritically the prevailing rhetoric of political liberty and fails to comprehend the obstacles of what Amartya Sen calls, substantial "unfreedoms". While conceding that individual agency is central to addressing deprivations, Sen argues that there is deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. It is the argument of this article that while enthusiasm for education abounds amongst the poor, various social and economic relations, influences and factors prevent the overcoming of deprivation. This, despite progressive legislation and our Constitution that guarantees the right to basic education and democratic citizenship.

At the beginning of this paper, Galeano's quote referring to the children of the world ended with the lines "almost never are they listened to, never are they understood". In South Africa today, some are beginning to listen and understand. A recent children's participatory process facilitated by the Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security (ACCESS) established that the most common concerns of vulnerable children are hunger and the inability to pay school fees. The problem is particularly stark for those who live in compromised home environments, children with disabilities and chronic illnesses, those living on the streets, in informal settlements, children of farm workers, refugees and those affected by HIV/AIDS. The plaintive

voices of children, collected during the ACCESS research are extremely suggestive of the “unfreedoms” confronting the poor:

The teachers shout at you. They say that we cannot sit on the seats at school because we don't pay school fees. The teachers like to swear at us. They don't have a good way of approaching children. They keep on teasing us about the school fees. It is not nice because we also like to pay, we just don't have the money.

The big challenge in our school is the pen, crayon, etc. If we don't have these things we are not allowed to come to school. Teachers beat us for that. Our teachers don't understand that we don't have money. Our parents and aunts also shout at us when we ask them to buy things for school.

I will be happy if I can have money for transport because I am far away from school. I walk a long distance to school and I pass next to the dangerous place and I walk a long distance to school.

My problem is I don't even have a chance to read my books. After school I go to work. When I come back from work I already feel like sleeping and I just sleep because I am tired. I wake up late. I am always late here at school. I've never been early. Another problem is that I am always tired, I am always tired.

My problem is that I don't have parents. My parents are no longer living. So I don't get things the way I used to when they were still living. Even the money that I work for I give my sister to go to school with. She goes to school far away and needs money for transport. Then I end up getting these few cents.

We lived in a good house in Dobsonville. I lived with my mom and my two brothers and it was nice until my mother lost her job. She disappeared for a few weeks. I needed bus fares and fees for school. I stopped to go to school totally because my mom wasn't there and we lost the house, we lost everything. We moved to this one roomed house because it was the only thing we could afford. I was feeling so bad, I was thinking of committing suicide. I had the whole plan of how to kill myself. We lost that house and had to move to the shelter here in town. (Shirin Motala, ACCESS Board Member. Presentation to the Education Rights Project's Reference Group. ERP minutes, 2003).

Throughout the country, initiatives such as ACCESS, the Education Rights Project, and a number of new social movements have used the democratic space available today to increasingly create a groundswell of support for human rights in education. The praxis of these organizations is based on an understanding of democratic citizenship that speaks to peoples' lived experiences. In my interaction with people involved in the ECD sector, numerous accounts of hardship, dashed expectations and encounters with an

uncaring, aloof, and sometimes a callous bureaucracy are often mentioned. Increasingly though, silent apathy and hopeless resignation is giving way to creative initiative and courageous attempts by young people and their parents to continue the long South African traditions of democratic participation from below. More and more people are realising that ultimately, redressing the historical neglect of ECD and addressing the landscape of 'many poverties' will depend on the capacity of the poor and their supporters in different sectors to mobilize, co-ordinate their struggles and become a powerful social movement.

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Childhood poverty and social exclusion in England and South Africa

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Abstract

Social exclusion has become a significant policy theme in most ‘developed’ countries and in many ‘developing’ countries as well. England and South Africa are no exceptions. Following a brief review of some perspectives on social exclusion, this paper describes some key policies in England and South Africa designed to combat social exclusion. The notion of social exclusion is examined in the context of addressing childhood poverty. It considers the extent to which these policies conform to a broad or narrow notion of social inclusion. The paper highlights some contradictions, complexities and ambiguities in both policy contexts.

Introduction

This paper explores the notion of social exclusion in the context of combatting childhood poverty in both England¹ and South Africa. The inconsistencies and complexities surrounding the concept social exclusion/inclusion as well as the various versions of social inclusion that are evident in the theoretical and policy literature suggest that its application to children’s well being merits critical scrutiny. A recent collaborative project, funded by the British Council and designed to promote inclusive practices in schools in KwaZulu-Natal provided the author team with an opportunity to examine and compare policies to combat social exclusion in their very different economic and cultural contexts. This paper is an outcome of that collaboration.

¹

In recognition of the fact that describing United Kingdom/British policy as if it were synonymous with what happens in England is not defensible, the authors focus on England rather than all four parts of the United Kingdom. This is especially important now in the context of the new territorial diversity (Patterson, 2003) of devolved government.

The first part describes the origin of the concept social exclusion, and it considers what might be termed ‘narrow’ and ‘broad’ versions of social inclusion and how the term ‘social exclusion’ has replaced that of ‘poverty’ in policy arenas. The second part offers an account of policies in England and in South Africa designed to address social exclusion. In the interests of clarity, these accounts are presented separately. The third part analyses the extent to which policy in both countries conforms to the narrow or broad versions reviewed in the first part, and highlights some of the complex and sometimes contradictory assumptions underlying the political discourse. This section also comments on the extent to which policies are successful in achieving their objectives.

Versions and approaches

The concept of social exclusion originated in France in the 1970s in connection with the exclusion of disabled people from equal participation in society. In the 1980s, the term came to be used across Europe to refer to people living on the margins of society (Percy-Smith, 2000). Since the 1990s, the Council of Ministers in the European Union (EU) has committed the EU to investigating the problem of social exclusion and to finding solutions to resolving it. The publication of the 1994 White Paper *European Social Policy: A Way Forward for the Union* (Nolan, 2003) made social exclusion central in European social policy.

Social exclusion came to be seen in the context of “social rights to citizenship ... to a basic standard of living and to participation in the major social and occupational opportunities in society” (Room, 1993, p.14). Room added a new dimension to the debate by locating it in a rights-based language when he refers to social exclusion as denying people civil, political and social rights as citizens. The notion of social exclusion gradually replaced the notion of poverty, and the definition just cited marked a shift in EU thinking from narrow economic definitions to definitions incorporating social and political rights and civic participation. Income poverty came to be seen as too limiting and narrow a concept to describe adequately the multiple disadvantages suffered by some groups (Klasen, 2001). Many analysts including Hill (2000) came to see traditional anti-poverty policies as ineffective and not adequately addressing the social policy problems of poverty, favouring instead policies that focus on providing opportunities for inclusion rather than merely lifting people to the poverty line in terms of income.

In South Africa, most social policy documents and legislation that have emerged since the democratic government came into power have been developed within the framework of human rights, social inclusion, redress, equity, and social justice (South African Schools Act of 1996; Department of Education, March 1995; Department of Education, July 2001; Ministry of Welfare and Population Development, 1997; Office of the President, 1996). Social exclusion is viewed as socially constructed disadvantage linked to the notion of vulnerability (Muthukrishna and Sader, 2004), and impacting on members vulnerable to exclusionary pressures within society. This includes children who do not go to school; those who have access to schooling but who experience barriers to participation; those who live in conditions of poverty; children living with HIV/AIDS; those who live with the burdens of disability and disease, those who suffer from sexual exploitation, family breakdown, unemployment, exposure to criminal environments, forced involvement in civil and military conflict, exploitative labour, socio-cultural isolation, geographic isolation and racial and gender bias. The notion of social exclusion in South Africa, therefore, includes poverty.

However, despite dramatic economic, social and political transformation over the last decade, the majority of South African citizens experience either extreme poverty, or continued vulnerability to becoming poor. There is an emerging consensus on the definition of the concept of poverty in South Africa, and it is conceded that poverty is multi-faceted and experiential in nature, that is, individuals' experience of poverty is different. Poverty includes: food insecurity; crowded homes, lack of access to safe and efficient resources of energy; lack of employment, low wages, lack of job security; fragmentation of family; alienation from the community, for example, young single mothers without the support of family and fathers of their children (May, 2000; SA-PPA, 1998). Streak (2004) points out that the evolving understanding of poverty in South Africa includes in addition to the aspects above, social exclusion that goes with lack of access to income and services, and the psychological suffering associated with this.

In examining poverty and inequality in South Africa, May (2000) argues that poverty is not a static condition. Although some households may be permanently poor, others move in and out of poverty as a result of life cycle changes, shifts, and specific events, for example, illness or death of the main income earner as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Vulnerability is not a synonym for poverty, and is used in the context of these processes of change. Individuals or households become vulnerable not only by a lack of resources

or an inability to accumulate resources and assets, but because they are unable to devise appropriate coping or management strategies when faced with crises (May, 2000).

At the end of the twentieth century, England had the highest percentage of children in poverty of any European country. Children are considered poor depending on the total income of the household in which they live. The median household is the one for which half the rest of the population has an income higher than it does, and half has an income lower. Low-income households are defined as households with income below 60% of the median.

However, as in the case of South Africa, policies designed to combat social exclusion in the United Kingdom focus on a number of exclusionary factors and exclusion on a number of dimensions rather than a focus on just poverty. Traditionally, the Labour Party in England viewed poverty as a social injustice and the solution as a matter of substantive public policy and intervention. Wealth redistribution and common ownership of services (e.g. the health and education services) were historic aims. However, New Labour, under Prime Minister Tony Blair and under the influence of the Third Way project (Hutton, 1999) has substituted aims for creating “a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties that we owe” (Dean, 2004, p.71), for central to Third Way thinking is a notion of citizenship in which there can be no “no rights without responsibilities” (Dean, 2004, p.66). So what we get here is a sense of responsibilities preceding rights – a point we return to below. In the United Kingdom policies to combat social exclusion, the theme of responsibility is never far away.

In both countries, the stance on social exclusion focuses on society, on social relations, and on the processes, mechanisms, and institutions that underlie and entrench exclusion. To varying degrees, the debate moves beyond a focus on descriptions of deprivation to historical and political causes (May, 2001; May 2000; May, Woolard, and Klasen, 2000). This more expansive view of social exclusion implies the need to focus on whole communities in which children are suffering multiple deprivation and agencies are expected to work holistically to tackle problems (e.g. United Kingdom’s Social Exclusion Unit, 2000 in Bynner, 2001). Valuable though this new sense of the problem might be, critics (e.g. Levitas, 1998; Veit-Wilson, 1998) have noted how the use of language (i.e. not referring directly to poverty) hides or at least neutralizes poverty and inequality. However, the rights-based notion of social exclusion is

worth further reflection. We draw on the ideas of Amartya Sen (1999) and on the views of Stephen Klasen (2001) to explore the concept a little more.

Lack of what Sen (1999) calls ‘capabilities’ is the key to the exclusion process. Those excluded are denied access to the material, cultural and emotional resources that would enable them to acquire capabilities. To counter this, she says people have to be allowed equal access to basic capabilities such as the ability to be healthy, well fed, housed, integrated into the community and public life, and to enjoy the social bases of self-respect. One gets a sense here of rights preceding responsibilities, rights that are not conditional in nature. Some implications of a capabilities or rights based approach are important to note (see Klasen, 2001 for a full discussion). First, this approach stresses that the inability to participate in mainstream society is a violation of a basic right. In contrast to the discourse of poverty, which is located in ‘welfare’ issues, the rights language highlights the duty of society to ensure that it facilitates participation and integration of all its citizens, including of course children. Second, the rights based approach does not require uniformity of outcomes for all citizens but instead demands equal ‘freedom’ for all to enjoy all aspects of citizenship. What is key here is choice – there is a distinction between a choice of individuals to not participate in mainstream society and their inability to participate. Thirdly, the capabilities or rights based approach recognises the diversity of people’s ability to make use of opportunities such that an equal starting point (or equal opportunities) may not be enough to guarantee equal capabilities. This view of social exclusion is especially evident in South Africa.

The upshot of the capabilities approach to social exclusion is that it shifts responsibility from the individuals who are socially excluded to mainstream society. Klasen (2001, p.421) refers to this as the ‘intrinsic’ problems associated with social exclusion. He says if social exclusion is a violation of rights or capabilities, it immediately implies that a society which tolerates social exclusion is “intrinsically deficient, since it fails to grant basic rights or capabilities to its ... children”. He adds that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) illustrates this intrinsic importance. He also refers to ‘instrumental’ reasons why social exclusion among children should be challenged. Among them are the following: combating social exclusion among children helps enhance their inclusion as adults; socially excluded children may as a result of their exclusion suffer from deficiencies in other capabilities like the ability to be healthy, well educated, housed, etc.; socially excluded children may pose a threat to the

future well-being of society as they become a burden socially and economically or worse as they generate social disruption in a society in which they have no stake. Although not stated explicitly, one gets a sense that there are some inalienable rights like the right to dignity, fair treatment, that people should have as a matter of being human.

The next section will describe the key initiatives in the United Kingdom and South Africa to address social exclusion in both countries.

Policies to address social exclusion and childhood poverty in England

This section will summarise three initiatives in England which have been mounted to address child poverty and social exclusion: the Sure Start programme, the Children's Fund, and the Family Tax Credit. All three derive from government analysis of social issues that had clearly identified social exclusion and child poverty that had to be addressed if, as Prime Minister Tony Blair says, Britain is to achieve the objective of "a better, fairer society that supports the most vulnerable, focuses on the future and delivers quality of life for all" (Blair, 2000). The establishment in 1997 of the *Social Exclusion Unit* (SEU) in the Cabinet Office is indicative of the Government's commitment. Analyses conducted by the SEU indicated that to achieve the Prime Minister's vision of a fairer society, a number of mechanisms would be needed. These mechanisms included: a coherent preventative strategy, policies for reintegration, services delivered in a significantly different way through new partnership arrangements, and agencies which worked *with* people, including children, rather than simply *for* them. In this regard, Sure Start and the Children's Fund could be said to illustrate what Tomlinson (2001) labels 'a post welfare society' in the sense that government taxation and spending decisions are less about challenging wealth and income distribution and more about widening opportunities and equipping people and communities to solve problems. The theme of opportunity is another significant indicator of the discourse of addressing social exclusion in England. Citizens are expected to seek out opportunities for themselves, to help themselves, and to take responsibility for themselves.

Sure start

Sure Start was introduced in 1999 to seek to close the gap in outcomes between children living in poverty and the wider child population (Eisenstadt, 2002). The programme is targeted at pre-school children and their families in disadvantaged areas, with objectives to improve social and emotional development, education and health, and to strengthen families and communities. A programme runs in a geographically defined area of need, and, at the time of writing this paper some 500 programmes are in operation, covering 16% of all children under the age of four years – a third of children living in poverty. Once areas are selected Sure Start services are for all families in the area. Early in its administration, the Labour government identified the lack of co-ordination between agencies both at a national and local level as a major inhibitor to effective service planning and delivery. Both the Modernising Government (HMG, 1999) agenda and the New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001) seek to encourage and facilitate more joined-up working between agencies. The goal is high quality, modern, accessible and responsive services. Each programme is designed to build on what services already exist in the area, and to augment these with other services as appropriate to the local community. Sure Start operates on a number of principles that define its ethos. First, the involvement of local parents and carers in the design, management and delivery of services is vital. The assumption here is that the involvement of parents is key to ensuring that any new service will be accessible and appropriate to children's needs. A second key principle is the notion of co-ordination to add value (Eisenstadt, 2002). The intention here is that in the past much effort was wasted in the sense that service providers did not communicate with each other to agree on key aims for children's services, and so services for children were occasionally fragmented and/or duplicated existing effort. The kind of 'joined up' thinking and planning would guard against waste but, crucially and more importantly, would result in the provision of better more responsive services. A third principle is that of cultural sensitivity in service delivery. The director of the programme notes that as Sure Start is aimed at children living in poverty and that Black and minority ethnic families are more likely to be poor, sensitivity in and appropriateness of services are crucial to success. While the programme is aimed at pre-school children and their families and the expectation is that by the time those children participating in the programme are 4 years of age, there will be little need for extra support, where the need for further support exists it will be offered. In this, the Sure Start programme ties in with another initiative – the Children's Fund, which is

designed to provide support for disadvantaged children between the ages of 5 and 13 years.

The Children's Fund

Like Sure Start, the Children's Fund is focused on developing services that support multi-agency working, bringing together preventative services that recognise the value of partnership working between the voluntary, community and statutory sectors as well the beneficiaries of such services. The programme has four elements. It supports services to identify children who are showing early signs of difficulty. It provides children and/or their families with the support they need to realise their potential and thereby overcome poverty and disadvantage. It secures long-term improvement in children's lives by building capacity in the local community, and it actively involves children and their parents in planning and delivering services. In their own publicity material, the Children's Fund is described as "locally determined and flexible". This, it is argued, makes it "particularly good for meeting the needs of diverse and changing communities, adding value to other services and working across boundaries of home and school". There is an emphasis in the programme on supporting children within the home and the school, and in the wider community. There is also a strong focus on supporting parents both in their parenting, and with other issues including domestic violence, counselling, family support and health awareness.

At the time of writing this paper, the whole of England is covered by the Children's Fund programmes. Priority was given to areas with the highest levels of child poverty and those areas were included in the first of three waves of provision. Over a seven-year period (2000-2007), the intention is that £600 million will be made available to set up local partnerships and to fund preventative services at targeted groups of children at risk of social exclusion. Each area is expected to form a partnership consisting of voluntary organisations, local communities, faith groups, statutory agencies, and young people themselves. This partnership plans and develops the necessary preventative services appropriate to address local needs. The expectation is that children will participate in the planning, delivery and evaluation of their local services. Indeed, significant status has been given to children's participation by the commitment of the government to the establishment of core principles for the involvement of children and young people in decisions that affect their lives. The government's objective in this regard is clear: 'the

Government wants children and young people to have more opportunities to get involved in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them or which they use' (CYPUP, 2001). The three themes – prevention, partnership and participation – are fundamental to the achievement of the Children's Fund objectives.

Family tax credits and other policies to alter income levels directly

As we already noted above, Britain had the highest percentage of children in poverty of any European country at the end of the twentieth century. At the end of the nineteen nineties, nearly 1 in 3 children lived in a household where no one is in paid work – this is double the proportion in 1979 and four times more than the proportion in 1968 (Piachaud and Sutherland, 2000). In 1999, the Treasury set out to eradicate child poverty by 2020, to halve it by 2010 and to reduce it by a quarter by 2004 (Brewer, 2003). The target for 2004-05 will be monitored with reference to the number of children in low-income households and against the baseline figures of 1989/9.

The Treasury attributes the increase in the number of poor children to two main changes: the inequality of earnings and the fact that more working households rely on part-time work which has often not been sufficient to lift households out of poverty. The overall strategy of welfare reform in Britain has the aim of ensuring paid work for those who can work and security for those who cannot (Piachaud and Sutherland, 2000). Persistent worklessness would appear to be a greater problem than short-term unemployment. New Labour's welfare-to-work policies seek to tackle worklessness. A feature of the approach here is that welfare recipients are subjected to a series of work-related interviews as a condition of receiving benefits. This includes *all* those in receipt of benefit, including the disabled, lone parents, and even partners of unemployed people (Dean, 2004).

Tony Blair (Labour Party, 2001) promised to "re-fashion the welfare state on the basis of rights and responsibilities, with people helped to help themselves, not just given handouts". His approach to altering income levels is shot through with this refashioning. Interestingly, what used to be the Department of Social Security has been replaced by the Department of Work and Pensions.

A number of policies designed to alter directly income levels of the poorest families have been introduced since Labour replaced decades of Conservative governments in 1997. Space prevents an account of each of these but the strategy as a whole rests on two key components – making work pay and helping people to return to or find paid work. Specific strategies include the following (detailed in Piachaud and Sutherland, 2000). Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) designed to promote paid work – the credit is larger if a parent does paid work for 30 hours a week. Child Benefit has been increased by more than the rate of inflation. A Children's Tax Credit (replacing the Married Couple's Tax Allowance and the corresponding tax allowance for lone parents) is paid to a parent in all families with the exception of those on higher income tax rates. Rates of Income Support and other means-tested benefits have been increased for families with children. All of these are in addition to more general measures such as changes to income tax and the National Minimum Wage which affect all families with children.

Policies to address social exclusion and childhood poverty in South Africa

In South Africa, the national action planning for social inclusion and child poverty has been guided by the core objectives of the reconstruction and development initiatives since 1994. The meeting of basic needs, development of human resources, building the economy and nation building form the foundation of all policies. Within this context, the National Programme of Action for Children, launched in 1996, is a comprehensive move designed to establish priorities and specific targets to promote the realisation of children's rights and well being. The government's pledge to 'Put Children First' is expressed in seven priority areas – child and maternal health, water and sanitation, child protection, leisure and cultural activities, social welfare, nutrition, early childhood and basic education.

This section considers three initiatives in the areas of social welfare, nutrition and health. The programmes in these priority areas derive from the government's analysis of how to heal and socially engineer a new democratic South Africa. The initiatives described below should be seen in this light together with growing concerns of poverty and HIV/AIDS.

The Child Support Grant (CSG)

In the context of chronic poverty, poor health, meagre education, fractured families, inadequate infrastructure, skewed resource distribution as a legacy of apartheid, and massive unemployment in South Africa, social security has become a major commitment of the government and is vital to the survival of many South African families. Aliber (2001, ii) argues that in the South African context, poverty is more complex than a mere lack of income. Six out of every 10 children in South Africa live in poverty, when 'poor' is defined as the poorest 40% of households. Black South African rural children make up the majority of the poor (Office of the President, 1998). This can be attributed to the legacy of apartheid that made many black South Africans vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion, and the effects thereof. Poor families, as the inheritors of deprivation, are unable to provide for their children and unlikely to secure employment due to the lack of cultural capital.

The Child Support Grant is the largest poverty alleviation measure targeting children in South Africa. It aims at helping the caregivers of children to address basic needs, in particular nutrition. Any primary care giver who may be parents, relatives or non-relatives, can apply for a grant on behalf of an eligible child once they are able to prove that the care of the child is their sole responsibility. The Department of Social Development in partnership with the Department of Home Affairs, faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, business and labour is responsible for the implementation of this social security measure. Prior to 1994, social assistance for poor children and women was catered for within a racially biased State Maintenance Grant. In April 1998, the latter was replaced with a means-tested Child Support Grant (Case, Hosegood and Lund 2003). The initial implementation began in April 1988 by catering for children between 0 to 6 years. The state of severe poverty and vulnerability, however, led to an extension of the grant to children under 9 in April 2003 as an initial step to extend it to all poor children up to 14 years from 2005 (Department of Social Development, 2003). In the initial implementation of the grant, caregivers received an amount of R100. It has been periodically increased slightly above inflation. At present, it is R170 per month.

The Integrated Nutrition Programme (INP)

The national Integrated Nutrition Programme (Department of Education, 1998) was introduced in 1995 in order to address the nutritional problems in South Africa. Malnutrition is complicated by the many causes in the South African context which range from direct factors such as inadequate food intake, or underlying factors such as household food insecurity. The programme specifically targets children from birth to five and primary school children from poor households. It is a collaborative endeavour of the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. There is a co-ordinated intersectoral collaboration within the primary health care approach and the district health system. At operational level, the programme is organised around target groups, focus areas, interventions and different points of service delivery – clinics, schools and community structures (Department of Health, 2002). The programme has parallel aims: it seeks to build long term capacity in communities to take ownership of their own nutritional needs, and at the same time create healthy outcomes for the most vulnerable groups in society – women and young children.

The programme combines direct and indirect nutrition interventions. It is informed by ongoing information on the growth and development of children. The National Food Consumption Survey of 1999 indicated that 21, 6% of South African children between the ages 1 and 9 are stunted. This is most prevalent amongst young children between the ages 1 and 3 in rural areas (Department of Health, 2002). At primary health care level, the Integrated Nutrition Programme addresses the problem by running an intense growth monitoring service. Special attention is given to childhood illnesses, hygiene, and child neglect. Undernourished children are provided with food supplements. Women are encouraged to breastfeed their children. Nutrition education is provided at all levels of care.

One specific programme within the INP that targets poor children's nutritional needs is the Primary School Nutrition Intervention (PSNP), initiated in 1994. It was intended to be an intersectoral and interdisciplinary initiative jointly managed by Education and Health departments. Its goal is to alleviate hunger and thereby enhance active learning capacity, promote increased concentration, lower absenteeism rates, improve school punctuality, and enhance general health and well being. More specifically, it also aimed to improve health through micronutrient supplementation, parasite eradication, providing education on health and nutrition, and enhancing broader

development initiatives, especially combating poverty. In 2001/02, the programme reached 85% of all primary schools in South Africa. Brand (2004) points out that since its inception and until 2001/02, the programme served an average of 14 746 primary schools per year, and reached 47% of all primary school learners in the country. The school feeding helpers who do the preparation and cooking are mostly unemployed people. They either volunteer their services or become contracted to the food suppliers.

HIV/AIDS - Home and Community-based Care and Support Services (HCBCS)

The Home and Community-based Care and Support Services (HCBCS) form one of three core components of the National Integrated Plan for Children Infected and Affected by HIV/AIDS. The joint collaboration between the Departments of Health and Social Welfare articulates the government's move towards an integrated approach to health issues and community-based care and support. The multifaceted response was necessary because of the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The HCBCS services are intended to "ensure that persons who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS have access to integrated services that address their basic needs for food, shelter, education, health care, family or alternative care and protection from abuse and maltreatment" (Department of Social Welfare, 2001, p.3). The goal is to provide accessible and responsive services within specific cultural contexts.

The services have four aims. They provide a functional referral system that creates access and follow up for children and families infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. They seek to empower families and communities to take care of their health and welfare. The aim is to integrate and structure a care plan into informal, non-formal and formal health and social development systems (Mabetoa and De Beer, 2002). Recently there has been a strong emphasis on traditional community life as a resource for prevention, early intervention and support for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

The Departments of Health and Social Welfare work in partnership with non-governmental, community-based and faith-based organisations. The Government provides the finance and the professional expertise (health worker and social workers) in order to support partnership organisations to deliver HCBCS services directly to children and adults residing in affected households. The partnership organisations are instrumental in creating access,

mediating between services for children and caregivers and building capacities in communities (Giese, Mientjies, Croke and Chamberlain, 2003).

The HCBCS service delivery model is based on three key principles. The principles are aligned to the Government's *Batho Pele* (People First) commitment to public service. First, there is recognition that children are better catered for in their local context. The assumption is that if programmes involve the local community, there will be greater chances of people being empowered and taking care of vulnerable children in the context of their families and communities. The second key principle is the use of traditional community life as a resource. The intention here is to use the indigenous culture and traditional leadership to promote messages that are supportive of preventing HIV/AIDS, reducing stigmatisation of adults and children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, and promotion of collective caring. The third principle is the linking of services to provide an integrated response to the pandemic. This is intended to avoid duplication of services and to provide multi-disciplinary teams of support.

Discussion

The impact of some of the policies noted above on social exclusion can only be judged in the medium or long term although national and local evaluations of them are in progress currently. Others, like the policies aimed at increasing family income for households with the poorest children, have more immediate impact and can be monitored year on year.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that poverty rates have fallen significantly in Britain between 1997 and 2002 and current predictions are that child poverty in 2004/05 should be at its lowest level since 1989 (Brewer, 2003). So taking a very narrow definition of social exclusion, it would appear that the trend is at least in the right direction even though there are complex issues in tackling poverty using tax credits and other direct income strategies (Brewer, 2003; Piachaud and Sutherland, 2000).

Staying with the narrow view for a moment, a less optimistic picture emerges in South Africa. Despite the governments commitment to a rights based approach to social exclusion, research suggests that 10 years into the democracy, poverty is still the greatest exclusionary factor in the lives of children in South Africa. Bray (2002) drawing from survey data argues that

there has been no dramatic decrease since 1994 in the number of children living under the poverty line in South Africa. Porteus (2004) in her analysis of the socio-economic well being of children in South Africa over the past 10 years of democracy suggests that between 58% and 75% of South African children live below the poverty threshold. Poverty is particularly concentrated in rural households.

To what extent do the approaches to social exclusion adopted in both countries comply with a capabilities or rights-based philosophy i.e. a broad approach to social exclusion? Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are no simple answers to these questions. There is no single discourse or approach to social exclusion in either country.

The aims of Sure Start and the Children's Fund in England and the Integrated Nutrition Programme and HCBCS programmes in South Africa are clearly about 'joined up government' and the policy impetus in these initiatives is very much about tackling the causes of poverty – prevention rather than cure in England and prevention *and* cure in South Africa. They are designed to build capacities at the individual and community levels. The evidence base on effective intervention highlights the need to provide coherent interventions that address risk factors associated with individuals, with families and with communities (Farrington, 1996; Bynner, 2001).

It is too early to say in the case of the English initiatives whether they are truly developed within an overarching preventative, partnership and participation strategy (see above), and if they prove to be so, whether they also prove to be successful. What can be said, however, is that there is ample evidence to justify the premises of all these programmes – English and South African (see Craig, 2002; Farrington, 1996; Franklin and Madge, 2000; Hardiker, Exton and Barker, 1991; Sinclair, Pugh and Heane, 1997). In this sense, it is arguable that they have the potential to contribute to a rights based philosophy of social inclusion which emphasises capacities to participate in social, civic and economic life.

Traditional social security is assumed to be, at best about 'cure' (rather than prevention) and at worst investing in failure. As analysts have noted, "redistribution has become politically unmentionable" in Britain (Piachaud and Sutherland, 2000, 7.3) This discourse, which can be used to pathologize individuals so 'blaming the victim' is especially evident in some of Tony Blair's comments. One example illustrates the point: "The basis of this

modern civic society is an ethic of mutual responsibility or duty. It is something for something. A society where we play by the rules. You only take out if you put in. That's the bargain." (Blair, 1997). Yet most of the impact of the policy initiatives in the short and medium term to alleviate poverty depend on redistribution. The redistribution discourse, recommended by Levitas (1998) would appear to be present albeit a less than the 'radical' redistribution justifiably favoured by her. Most of the immediate reduction in child poverty in England results from increases in Child Benefit and Income Support for younger children and the Working Families Tax Credit. As Piachaud and Sutherland (2000) point out these changes are all essentially redistribution to families with children.

It may be that a more radically redistributive policy will be required in South Africa to impact on the appalling statistic of the majority (between 56% and 75%) of children who live below the poverty line. However, the complexities and the massive scale of social exclusion in South Africa merit closer analysis.

An analysis of policies in South Africa designed to address social exclusion has to be made in the context of the macro-economic situation of the country. In general, policy formulation, expenditure, and to a large extent implementation, broadly correspond to the rights based, pro poor approach to social exclusion. However, it has become evident that the structure of the economy in South Africa has worked against the government's commitment to human rights and equity for all its people. Since 1994, the government recognised that a sustained improvement in the country's macro-economic performance was necessary for successful socio-economic transition. Strengthening the economy based on the principle of growth through redistribution was one of the key foundations of the government until 1996. By the end of 1996, this transformational policy was gradually withdrawn. The discourse shifted from massive redress to fiscal restraint. In its place, the government released the Growth, Employment, Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) – a neo-liberal macro-economic programme of deregulation, privatisation and fiscal restraint. The government argued that GEAR was necessary for participation in the framework imposed by globalisation, and the impact of global conditions on national economies (Mokate, 2000). Fiske and Ladd (2004) explain that this conservative shift in economic policy was largely motivated by the desire to convince international investors that the new South Africa could manage its fiscal affairs in a responsible manner. In addition, the assumption was, strongly supported by international evidence, that the most successful strategy for alleviating poverty and promoting equity

is one that focuses on growth and job creation (Streak, 2004). Thus, this combination of fiscal austerity and the economic slow down constrained additional public spending of any type.

These neo liberal economic policies adopted by the South African government since 1996 have not so far been successful. The expected new foreign investment did not materialise at the rate expected – the result was a lower economic growth. In 1997, GEAR projected that more than 200 000 jobs would be created on an annual basis until the year 2000, and that the unemployment rate would decline to approximately 8% by the year 2020. Economic growth rate was set at 6%. However, GEAR missed most of its targets – real economic growth rate was around 3%. Statistics indicate that job losses and thus an increase in unemployment rate occurred from 33% in 1997 to 37% in 2000 (Baatjes, 2003).

In line with neo liberal economics, fiscal discipline became a more significant priority than social provision and equality enhancement. This has made it extremely difficult to address social backlogs in health, education, welfare, amongst others. The amounts allocated for social services were inadequate for the degree of social redress, inequality and imbalances that exist. Porteus (2004) argues that although a range of initiatives across the various sectors have started to operationalise the government's commitment to the rights of child citizens, the gains have not been strong enough to address the inequity and imbalances that exist.

The impact of the macro-economic policy can be seen in the shortfalls on the delivery of the three social policies described earlier in this paper. We have already noted the inadequacy of the Child Support Grant to tackle child poverty due in no small measure to inadequacies in resources made available and in implementation (Leatt, 2004). The Primary School Nutrition Programme was evaluated in 1997 by the Health Systems Trust. The findings indicated that although the overall objective of hunger alleviation had been met in many provinces, the implementation has generally been limited to being a vertical feeding programme despite its broad range of objectives. De-worming, nutrition education, and micronutrient supplementation considered low cost interventions have not been systematically implemented as part of PSNP. The evaluation highlighted many problems with implementation of the PSNP due to inadequate management, infrastructural and institutional constraints, resulting in poor and inconsistent coverage for significant periods of time. These problems continue to impact the programme.

Whilst the commitment by the Department of Health and Social Welfare to the Home and Community-based Care and Support Services (HCBCS) has been welcomed as a positive move towards creating social safety nets for children and adults infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, there have been numerous implementation problems – lack of proper infrastructure, state worker overload, access to state funding, lack of collaboration between state departments, overuse of volunteers without compensation (Giese, Mientjies *et al.* 2003).

Despite the capacity-building attitudes inherent in most policies in the two countries, there remains the view, more particularly in England, of citizens as individually-responsible for seeking and finding their own opportunities to survive and thrive in the new global economy. One has a sense of the entrepreneurial, ambitious individuals on the look out for opportunities to enhance their own situation. With reference specifically to the United Kingdom, Hartley Dean (2004, p.69) notes the “pragmatic instrumentalism and guarded altruism” evident in popular discourse about social attitudes to the welfare state. In our view, this is also directly evident in New Labour’s political discourse, reflected for example in the welfare-to-work policies described above. The emphasis on individualism in New Labour thinking is a serious obstacle to the implementation of a broad and rich view of social inclusion. It is likely that a more expansive notion of rights and inclusion requires a more collective, less individualistic outlook. Recognition of our status as interdependent human beings who need to work collectively (Dean, 2004) may be a prerequisite for the implementation of such a view.

Conclusion

What emerges from our analysis is that a rich and rights based model of social exclusion is evident in the policies in both countries. We conclude, however, that this rights-based model is a stronger feature of the rhetoric in South Africa than in England and this can be attributed to the historical and political context of its new democracy. The rhetoric in England is tempered by an emphasis on ‘something for something’ to draw on Tony Blair’s own phrase, noted earlier. Yet it would appear that the policies in place in England would seem to be having a positive effect on combating social exclusion for children at least with reference to the narrow definition. The complexities and interactions of so many adverse factors in South Africa (poverty, HIV/AIDS, economic instability and the global economy) mean that capacity building and

prevention (rather than merely cure) remain a significant challenge for the future well being of children. Unfortunately, Sen's ideal, capabilities-based notion of social exclusion seems a long way off from the reality.

We recognise the need for further analysis on the policies for combating poverty and social exclusion in both countries. In particular, we suggest the need for continued exploration of the discourses relating for example to citizenship, rights, social justice, welfare and poverty. This could take the form of analysis of the political and popular discourses. Such work is necessary, since discourses are rarely discrete and simply straightforward, they are frequently contradictory, ambiguous and contested, always complex.

No governments in a democracy have a unified ideology and it remains the task of academic analysis to disentangle the varying strands that influence policy making (Paterson, 2003). In this context, we would advocate the need for a good deal more exploration of the way policies on social inclusion are brought into being, how they are popularised, publicised and disseminated, and how they are implemented, interpreted and reinterpreted at local and national levels.

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Mapping HIV/Aids as a barrier to education: a reflection on the methodological and ethical challenges to child participation

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Abstract

The authors reflect on a qualitative research project on mapping the impact of HIV/AIDS as a potential barrier to education for young, vulnerable children. The methodological and ethical challenges in this project are explored in terms of the multiple layers of context, topic and skills that impinged on the nature and process of the research design. The means of obtaining informed consent, negotiating the bounds of confidentiality and addressing beneficence and nonmaleficence are discussed. A four-stage focus group design is related to the underlying principles of valuing the child and a process approach to research. Strategies, including participatory research techniques with vulnerable children are described. The researchers argue that especially in developing contexts, the ethical and methodological issues are interrelated and result in inherent tensions in the research process.

Introduction

This paper arose out of a broader South African study exploring the barriers to education that may have been precipitated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.¹ The paper reflects on the complex ethical and methodological challenges that arose when conducting focus groups with children from a marginalized and developing context on the highly sensitive topic of HIV/AIDS. Five central issues related to the site of study, the target population and the topic of research are discussed. Firstly, conducting research in a developing context characterised by unemployment and extreme poverty generates particular dynamics of power. Secondly, the research context has a history of political

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violence and the research participants were likely to have experienced high degrees of stress and trauma, as well as be suspicious of external investigators. Thirdly, the stigma associated with the HIV/AIDS pandemic creates a culture of silence affecting the degree to which the pandemic can be openly discussed particularly in terms of the children's understanding of the illness. Fourthly, language and race differences typical of the South African context create particular dynamics amongst members of the research team, and between the research assistants and the participants. Lastly, it was challenging to find ways of accessing credible data and facilitating the expression of the children's voices.

The project

In 2004, a team of researchers from the disciplines of education and psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal engaged in a project to map the barriers to learning precipitated by HIV/AIDS in a small KwaZulu-Natal town. The project targeted numerous stakeholders ranging from learners (Grade 3, 6 and 9) to local health services and local government. This paper focuses on the pilot phase of this project with particular reference to the Grade 3 learners.

Researchers have acknowledged that access to quality formal education may be a combatant strategy against HIV transmission (Kelly, 2000, cited in Baxen, 2004) and may enhance resilience (Foster and Williamson, 2000). However, children exposed to the HIV/AIDS pandemic are likely to experience disrupted education. This is a strong motivation for an exploration of the nature of barriers to learning. Studies have acknowledged a gap in research within the educational sector in relation to HIV suggesting that it neglects the "social and cultural embeddedness of the disease" (Baxen, 2004, p.1). This highlights the need for localised research and alternative methodologies.

The research context

A small rural town in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa was selected as the research site. The town is surrounded by agricultural productivity with a population of approximately 70 000 people living in semi-formal and informal settlements. The population tends to be dominated by

young people and grandparents. In addition to a predominantly migrant labour force, the unemployment rate is approximately 40%, and 75% of the households earn less than R1 500 (£15) per month (Sinani, 2003). This town was a site of intense prolonged political conflict, with an estimated 20 000 people being killed and many more becoming refugees over the last twenty years, leaving the communities impoverished, fragmented and struggling for basic daily survival (Higson-Smith and Killian, 2000). Although the town has been actively engaged in a process of peace and reconstruction over the last four years, the high population mobility, high unemployment rates, and the continued social fragmentation have contributed to the extremely high rate of HIV/AIDS infections (Whiteside and Sunter, 2000). In fact, the KwaZulu-Natal region has one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in the country. The pandemic has a major impact on all the biopsychosocial systems in which children develop with many children directly experiencing HIV/AIDS related deaths and illness in their families (Shisana and Simbayi, 2002). The problems most frequently associated with psychosocial risk variables are low self esteem, hopelessness, anxiety, aggression, depression, behavioural, cognitive and emotional difficulties, inadequate communication and life skills, and poorly developed problem solving, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills. In addition, the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS brings shame, fear and rejection that exacerbate the anguish of the children (Germann and Madörin, 2002; Hunter and Williamson, 2002).

The larger research project was responsible for identifying a range of community sites in which the research could be located. Sampling was partially random and purposive (Henry, 1998) addressing different rural and urban localities, political alignment, historical access to resources and racial integration. This aspect of the pilot phase of the research project considered two very different schools: a rural primary school with extremely limited resources where all the children and educators were *isiZulu* speakers; and a large urban primary and secondary combined school, in the centre of the town, with a racially mixed learner group, predominantly English speaking educators, and slightly better access to resources. Unlike the more rural schools, this school's position in the centre of town gives the learners access to many other attractions that compete with the basic activities of school.

Approaches to research

As discussed above, there has been a perceived gap in research that has sought a situated understanding of the effects of HIV. A qualitative and social constructivist (Fraser and Robinson, 2004) research approach recognises that language and action only derive meaning within a context – an inherited, cultural, historical and social background (Durrheim, 1997). This study sought in-depth knowledge of how children construct an understanding of barriers to learning. In discussing some of the ethical considerations and methodological processes that were adopted, it is important to recognise the following principles that guided our approach to this research: seeking depth and richness of description in the data; recognising the researcher and the research participants as co-constructors of the data; recognising the importance of active involvement of participants in the research; valuing the child; recognising the importance of developing particular processes and methods for working with children; acknowledging the issues of power, control and authority; and understanding the context as inextricable from the data.

Valuing the child as co-constructor of the research data

Research has moved away from seeing children as passive recipients of socialisation to recognising them as active participants in constructing meaning of their experiences (Christensen and James, 2000). Inherent in our approach was the assumption that the child's experience and perspective is critical and contributes significantly to our understanding of the phenomenon in this site of study, since children bear the brunt of the impact of HIV/Aids, emotionally, practically and economically.

Research with child participants presents unique challenges in conceptualising and implementing the research process (Jones, 2004; O'Kane, 2000). Working in a cultural and historical context in which children's voices have been marginalised, has highlighted the need to address the power imbalances that exist between adults and children, to develop techniques to maximise the participation of children, and to provide ways in which they could express their understanding and experiences without relying solely on verbal communication. The participatory techniques were developed in a collaborative process in the research team and arose from our accumulated experience of working with vulnerable children in developing contexts.

Participatory research techniques have their origins in development and agricultural interventions and are designed to proactively deal with the power dimensions within research interactions, and to reliably access the resource of local knowledge that develops in relation to the everyday activities of the participants (Chambers, 1992; Van Vlaenderen and Neves, 2004; Kelly and Van der Riet, 2001). The first principle is realised by giving participants a sense of control over the research process, the data and the dissemination of findings (Johnson and Mayoux, 1998). The second principle emphasises ways of accessing local and situated understandings of a phenomenon. The participative process results in the emergence of local categories and frameworks for understanding an experience. In conventional research the researcher's questions, in the form of an interview schedule or questionnaire, define the way in which data is extracted from the participants (Theis and Grady, 1991; Van Vlaenderen and Neves, 2004).

This study has used a participatory approach in an attempt to address the power differentials in the dynamic inherent in the relationship between researchers and the researched. Participatory techniques have also been used to access the participants' frameworks of understanding, and to facilitate the meaningful involvement of participants in the process (Kellett and Ding, 2004). Participatory techniques were considered fitting vehicles to facilitate participatory research with children without focussing on verbal fluency, but rather on applying methods to access particularly young children's perspectives.

The importance of process

Data collection processes in research studies are frequently once-off engagements with participants, for example, conducting a single interview or the administering of a questionnaire in a defined time period in a particular setting. Developments in qualitative research have highlighted the need to collect data on several different occasions over a time period (Seidman, 1991). This process-approach is assumed to be closer to activities in real life, where people's opinions change and develop over time and in relationship with the researcher. Employing this principle facilitated the accessing of participants' perspectives on their experience and was also used by the research assistants, as focus group facilitators, to develop relationships with the child subjects.

Ethical challenges

The intrinsic dynamics of exploring the barriers to education within the South African context posed ethical challenges. The young children are learners within hierarchical educational settings, who live in poverty-stricken communities in which racial discrimination, stigmatisation and HIV/AIDS predominate. All of these factors accentuated their position as disempowered and marginalized members of these communities, making it difficult to access their ideas about potential barriers to education. This situation posed potential threats to the overall validity and credibility of the research data.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989), the African Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of the African Child (OAU, 1994) and the UNGASS Agreement (2002) advocate strongly for children's right to participate in research and intervention endeavours, recognising them as fully-fledged individuals with the potential to share their perspectives and to fully contribute as actors of social interchange, with the right to express their views in matters affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity. The researchers attempted to design the study so that these principles would be evident for both the children and other role players.

Standard ethical research practice includes consideration of the three major ethical principles: i.e. autonomy, nonmaleficence and beneficence (Durrheim and Wassenaar, 1999; Emmanuel, Wendler, and Grady, 2000; Mason, 2004). These are considered necessary for research to be both scientifically and socially acceptable. They are especially important considerations when one works with disempowered and vulnerable population groups, such as young children, on sensitive topics such as HIV/AIDS. Situated ethics are an eclectic set of practices that can broadly be categorised as post-modern, feminist, post-colonial and democratic, particularly well suited to working with disenfranchised research participants. In this view, ethical principles are mediated within different research practices, questioning the notions of scientific objectivity and value neutrality by recognising the socio-political context of all research (Simons and Usher, 2000). This situated ethics approach led the researchers to take careful account of the local and specific factors that prevailed at multiple levels within the research site. In particular, special attention had to be given to the perceived power differentials between the university-based researchers, the research assistants who are masters students and facilitated the focus groups, and the child subjects – learners within mainly historically-disadvantaged and resource-limited schools.

The children, and the young children in particular, had had little previous exposure to the concept of research and were unlikely to be spontaneous in their participation (Nieuwenhuys, 2004). The challenge for the researchers was thus to find ways to afford the children the opportunity to decide if they wished to participate and to give their informed assent to engage in the focus groups and other data gathering exercises. This process had to acknowledge that even though young children might be limited in their ability to articulate experiences, their perceptions were critical to the research question. The researchers considered the basic guidelines for working ethically with children (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Mason, 2004) and then developed strategies to apply these within the research context.

Informed consent procedures

Special attention had to be given to ways in which informed consent could be obtained from the community, the children's legal guardians (parents or caregivers) and the young child participants. It was essential that all the role players be fully aware of the nature of the research content and process so that they could truly make an informed decision about participation. Obtaining informed consent involved a threefold process.

Since the schools were considered to be the nucleus of the research site, the first step involved meeting with the school principals and staff to explain the nature and purpose of the research, and to discuss ways of informing the community about the research process. Political and traditional leadership, religious leaders, parents, community members, health carers and NGO representatives were then invited to community meetings so that the process of gaining entry into the community could be fully negotiated.

The next step involved random sampling of learners from three grades within each school using the class registers. The principle of the random sampling of learners (where each learner in the grade had an equal opportunity of being selected) was not well understood by the educators who at times tried to suggest children who were doing well, or children whom they perceived as being affected by HIV/Aids.

The parents of the subject sample were then sent letters, written in their home language, and asked to attend a meeting. At the meeting the research project was explained and parents were given the opportunity to express concerns and

ask questions, before being asked to sign consent forms. The major concerns raised by the parents revolved around the emotional state of the children, and a questioning of the need for confidentiality. The researcher's emphasis on the need for confidentiality and that children's identities would not be revealed to allow for freedom of expression was in tension with parents' concern that we might be asking about issues that could harm their children. From the researcher's perspective, the need for confidentiality is prescribed by the principle of nonmaleficence, but it is also perceived to affect the validity of the participant's accounts. An environment in which a participant can be free to express him/herself without fear of reprisal or discrimination, is one that allows for accounts that more closely reflect the real life experience and perceptions of that individual. Parents also asked if they would be held responsible should anything negative emerge about what was happening to the child, fearing that they could be called to account. Whilst these concerns can be regarded as typical of parents, if the participants had known that we were obliged to 'report' issues back to their caregivers, it might have inhibited them from revealing issues that may reflect negatively on their caregivers and home circumstances. Many of the parents seemed to perceive expert knowledge as resting with the researchers, undervaluing their own understanding of the child. This perception is not uncommon in resource-constrained contexts, where any research process is perceived as a potential source of resources and opportunities. It is debatable whether caregivers in this position would ever truly challenge the research intervention or feel empowered enough to deny permission for their child to participate. In the three schools mentioned, no caregivers/parents refused permission for their children to be involved in the research process.

The third step involved obtaining informed consent from the young children. The research was explained to the children individually in initial individual interviews where they were given the opportunity to commit to, or withdraw from the research process. Although in practice, it was unlikely that children would refuse to participate in a programme that had been accepted on their behalf by community leaders, educators and caregivers, it was vital that the children understood the research aims and were given the opportunity to give informed assent.

As the pilot study continued it became apparent that people in a resource-deprived community acquiesce to requests whereas in better resourced situations, where people have greater self confidence, they are more likely to be a position in which to make autonomous decisions, to refuse requests and

to be aware of their roles as child advocates. In as much as many children obey without question, so do adults who perceive themselves to be in a less powerful position than the people who are making the requests.

Confidentiality issues

Since the data gathering was to occur through focus groups when the children would be exposed to the individual stories of other child participants, the researchers had to ensure that the concept of confidentiality was fully understood. This required firstly, ensuring a secure and emotionally containing context in which sensitive topics could be openly discussed; secondly, establishing group norms, and lastly, the use of confidentiality pledges.

Creating a therapeutic frame (McMahon, 1992) involved several considerations. Firstly, a suitable venue had to be found in which interruptions were minimised, privacy ensured and the children could feel safe enough to express emotionally sensitive material. This was a difficult task in resource-constrained environments with limited physical spaces. It was difficult to maintain privacy in the face of the curiosity of the other learners who tried to peep into the room during the focus groups. In one school, the focus groups were conducted in the staff room and some educators remained seated in the same room. In other venues, educators came in to 'check' on the group discussion. Nevertheless, the researchers tried to establish a confidential space for the focus group through asking the participants to sit on a blanket in a circle to give credence to the idea of equal rights of participation and containment; by clearly explaining the research process, and by maintaining defined time and venues.

In discussing the group norms, the child participants were encouraged to contribute and establish their own criteria for the safety of the group. This provided procedures to manage the group in terms of respect for each participant, discipline and logistical concerns as well as communicating to the children that their opinions were valued.

In addition, Confidentiality Pledges were supplied, written in the children's own language and in easily understood terms. These pledges were explained to the group and each child was asked to sign assent in front of the facilitator as a witness and then retain their pledges. This made explicit the importance of

maintaining and respecting confidentiality as an individual and group responsibility.

As an additional precaution in terms of endorsing the need for confidentiality, children were asked to select pseudonyms, or code names, that they would use throughout the research process. The pseudonym was written on a name-tag and as the children entered the room they were given their name-tags, and these were then collected at the conclusion of each group session. The children responded positively to this idea and demonstrated awareness that the name belonged within the group context by spontaneously removing their name-tags at the end of each session.

Beneficence and nonmaleficence

The ethical principle of beneficence requires that the research be of social benefit, even though the subjects themselves may not directly benefit from participating. The principle of non-maleficence demands that the researchers be particularly sensitive to potential harm that may befall subjects and take the necessary steps to avert detrimental consequences of participation. These principles were difficult concepts to implement. Exploration of sensitive, possibly stigmatizing topics inevitably raises tension between the need to collect data and the child's need to be offered a contained context in which to express their feelings and experiences. The focus group facilitators had limited research experience and struggled to manage the emotional dimension of the focus group processes, commenting that “you see the feelings in them (the participants) and the mood (of the group) changes”. One of the facilitator's comments that the focus group sessions “takes a bit out of us” highlighted the need for debriefing sessions after each focus group.

Methodological challenges

In addition to these ethical issues, the sensitive nature of the topic of research and the characteristics of these particular child participants necessitated the adoption of a particular data collection methodology. There were particular reasons for using qualitative research techniques in this part of the research process (Kellett and Ding, 2004). Qualitative research prioritises subjective accounts and meanings and enables researchers to pay attention to process issues.

Two qualitative data collection techniques were used. Firstly, each learner was interviewed using a structured questionnaire that focussed on biographical and contextual information. This interview was the initial step in building rapport with the participants and it provided the forum for accessing relatively sensitive information such as financial status and difficulties. The second data collection technique was a four-stage focus group process. The focus group methodology prioritises the perspectives and experiences of the research participants, enables participants to jointly reflect on topics, and provides a critical context for exploration guided by the facilitator (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1998). Kitzinger (1994, cited in O’Kane, 2000) describes focus groups as encouraging communication especially around difficult issues, allowing for the exploration of differences as well as similarities in experiences and thought. The group format of focus groups also potentially decreases the power dynamics between the researcher and the participants, enabling the children to converse with other participants rather than having to always respond individually to an interviewer. Focus groups facilitate the expression of multiple views through individual stories and enable sharing of information thereby potentially decreasing the isolation that individual learners might experience about their own painful realities.

A critical aspect of the methodology was that the focus groups were conducted in a series of four clearly defined, but inter-related, sessions. Each focus group session was designed to address specific potential indicators of barriers to learning. For example, a barrier to learning would potentially be revealed in patterns of school attendance, or the child’s state of mental and physical health. The list of indicators in relation to each focus group is presented in Table 1 on the next page. This four-stage approach facilitated the development of rapport and trust within the group and between the facilitator and the participants. In addition, the theme for each focus group built on the previous theme, with the more sensitive issues being dealt within the later focus groups. The focus groups began with a focus on external contexts and factors (the school), and progressed to more personal and individual factors (issues related to self, illness, and finally to HIV/AIDS (see Table 1). This four-stage focus group procedure exemplifies the process approach adopted as basic methodological and ethical principles for the research.

Table 1

| | FOCUS GROUP 1 | FOCUS GROUP 2 | FOCUS GROUP 3 | FOCUS GROUP 4 |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| <i>Theme:</i> | <i>School</i> | <i>Self</i> | <i>Sickness</i> | <i>Experience of HIV/Aids</i> |
| Introductory tasks/icebreakers | Code names Name game Name & action game Establish group norms Confidentiality pledge | Greeting game Remember group norms Put on code-name tags | Finding animal pairs (cards) through noises Put on code-name tags | Circles cut into pieces find people in group Put on code-name tags |
| Activities in Focus group (FG) | Topic 1: Motivation for going to school Method: FG discussion | Topic 1: Telling life story Method: Timeline/Road of life drawing | Topic 1: What is sickness? Method: Drawing someone who is sick & FG discussion | Topic 1: Knowledge of HIV Method: FG discussion of statements |
| | Topic 2: What you like/dislike about school Method: FG discussion. | Topic 2: Self concept: what you like & dislike re self Method: FG discussion | Topic 2: Assessing knowledge and stigma re HIV/AIDS Method: FG discussion & 3 rd person projection onto photo | Topic 2: Accessing support Method: 3 rd person projection onto picture/photo |
| | Topic 3: Level of participation in class Method: Line ordering exercise & FG discussion. | Topic 3: Worries and strengths Method: Bean exercise & FG discussion | Topic 3: HIV/AIDS in your area Method: FG discussion | Topic 3: Feelings & experiences of HIV Method: Body Map Drawing |
| | Topic 4: Popularity and marginalisation Method: 3 rd person projection onto pictures/photos | Topic 4: Resilience factors Method: Written sentence completion | | Topic 4: Perceptions around relationship. (For grade 9's only) Method: FG discussion |
| | Topic 5: What is helpful & difficult at school? Method: FG discussion Ranking exercise and bean exercise | | | Topic 5: Reflection on group process Method: Group drawing and reflection/FG discussion |
| | Topic 4: Homework and support system Method: FG discussion | | | |
| | Topic 7: Absenteeism Method: 3 rd person projection onto photos | | | |
| Closing tasks | Reflect on something nice about today | Reflect on hope for future | Where will you be in 2010? | Affirmations & power circle |
| Indicators | Motivation; Attitudes Participation Homework; Support system; Absenteeism Popularity/stigma | Support systems Health: emotional state Mortality Resilience factors | Support systems Knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS Stigma | Support systems Knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS Health: emotional state |

Methods used in the focus groups

Different techniques and strategies were used in the data collection process. These included process-related activities such as icebreakers, diagrammatic mapping and drawing activities, projective techniques, ranking exercises, and activities to draw the sessions to a close with a positively affirming activity.

Icebreakers, used at the commencement of each focus group, created an environment conducive to the formation of group cohesion, promoting participation and helping participants to relax (Rooth, 1995). For example, a game relating actions to each child's code name helped familiarise facilitators and participants with each other's names, provided an opportunity to laugh and develop group identity. McMahon (1992) argues that play is often used when working with children as it is believed to be children's natural means of expression. Table 1 contains an outline of the activities used in each focus group.

The sensitive and emotional nature of the research topic created the need to provide a containing environment in which to share personal information. In addition to the processes discussed above, at the beginning of each session children were asked to recall the previously established group norms. The extract below from Focus Group 2, Grade 3 illustrates that the young children had to some extent internalised and understood the group norms:

- Researcher: Hauw, I have forgotten, can you remind me of the group rules. . . Ja Nonhlanhla?
- Participant: Do not say it outside.
- Researcher: Yes. . .
- Participant: Something we discuss in the group.
- Researcher: Yes.
- Participant: When someone talks not to laugh at him or her.
- Researcher: Yes. . . Nokwanda?. . . Siboniso?. . .
- Participant: When someone is talking not to interrupt.
- Researcher: Yes Thokozani?
- Participant: Do not tell people of your code name.
- Researcher I: Yes. . . Mbali.
- Participant: This is confidential.
- Researcher: Okay. . . right.

Lastly, in line with maintaining a ‘holding’ space, it was important to have processes of closure for each group session and at the end of the four sessions. At the end of each session, there was a small reflective activity with children to express something affirming about themselves. The risk and resilience literature argues that part of being able to build resilience is the ability to articulate positive things that one is, one has, or one can do (Grotberg, 1995). These closing activities served as a reminder to keep information confidential and to distinguish the focus group activity from other school-based activities. At the end of the last focus group, learners discussed what they had done in the four focus groups through a collective drawing. The young children participated enthusiastically in this activity and surprised the facilitators by accurately recording all of the activities in the focus group process.

Techniques used in the focus groups

In terms of facilitating expression within the focus groups, diagrammatic, mapping and drawing activities, projective techniques and ranking exercises, were used. Many of these techniques draw on the participatory research literature (Theis and Grady, 1991; Johnson and Mayoux, 1989; Chambers, 1992) and do not rely heavily on reading or writing skills, emphasising “the power of visual impressions and the active representation of ideas” (O’Kane, 2000, p.138). Children, particularly younger children, respond better with techniques that encourage more than verbal discussion. The mediums of drawings, stories and activities enabled expression and facilitated children’s active participation.

Projective techniques

A projective technique used in Focus Groups 1, 3 and 4 asked the children to reflect on a picture of a child in relation to particular issues. For example, how they would react and feel if someone in this child’s family was HIV positive, and how it might affect his/her learning. In Focus Group 1, the purpose of the activity was to gain an understanding of factors that might prevent some children from attending school. Pictures of a boy and girl were included to ascertain if there were gendered differences in reasons given for absenteeism/lack of progress. It was also important to use pictures of children of the same race group, with neutral facial expressions, and with clothing indicating similar socioeconomic status as the child participants. Examples of the questions used by the facilitators to progress through different levels of subjectivity are as follows:

1. This is Siphon. He didn't go to school. Tell me a story about why he didn't come to school. (*Probe for more reasons*). Could there be other reasons why he didn't come to school? (*Elicit a list of possible reasons*).
2. What happened to him when he didn't come to school? What did he do during the time that he was not at school? What did his family do?
3. What did the teachers or school do?
4. Are there learners in (*name of school*) who do not come to school?
5. Why do they not come? (*Elicit a list of possible reasons*).
6. Have you ever not been to school? Why did you not go to school?

Using concrete situations helps to facilitate younger children's participation and ability to enter the discussion (O'Kane, 2000). The strategy of moving from the general and less threatening issues to the more personal and potentially sensitive areas enables the establishment of trust and for children to hear others' experiences. Enabling children to project onto a picture (an 'other') circumvents them having to talk directly about potentially anxiety and stigma provoking personal issues. The respondent's real feelings are then inferred from what she/he says about others. This also reduces researcher bias by asking the participants to assign ideas about a phenomenon, in this case reasons for absence from school (Levin-Rozalis, 2004). The same technique was used in Focus Group 4 to implicitly encourage the development of resilience through exploring the types of support children could access and their knowledge of support systems.

Drawing exercises

Children's drawings have been used as psychological assessment tools to explore developmental maturity, group values, perceptions of self in relation to others, and personality (Klepsch and Logie, 1982). Oaklander (1988, p.53) argues that, "pictures can be used in endless ways, for a variety of purposes and at different levels. The very act of drawing, with no therapist intervention whatsoever, is a powerful expression of self. . . and provides a way of expressing feelings." Drawings were used several times in the focus group process, with the main aim of facilitating and enabling expression.

In Focus Group 2 children drew 'A road of life' to share their life stories through the metaphor of their life as a journey or road, and to expose significant life events, including whether the children had experienced loss and/or illness of others during their lives. In Focus Group 3, children reflected on their drawings of a 'sick' person, and in Focus Group 4, they drew body

maps, a technique used by NGOs along with memory boxes as a process to facilitate talking about loss and grief (Thoms, 2003).

Ranking exercises

Drawing on participatory techniques, we used two types of ranking exercises (Theis and Grady, 1991). In one of these, children were asked to discuss and rank what made school difficult or what they did not like about school. The children then ranked these issues in order of difficulty using a diamond shape (Kellett and Ding, 2004; O’Kane, 2000), which allowed for several issues to be ranked as equivalent.

In another exercise participants discussed the things that worried them. These ‘worries’ were written on pieces of paper and spread out on the floor. Each learner was given two beans and told, “Perhaps someone also mentioned something that also worries you. Put your beans on two of the things that have worried you, that you agree with.” Although not a direct numerical evaluation, this technique provided insight into which issues concerned these children the most. A similar exercise was repeated to establish what may help children feel supported and strong.

Reflection on methodology

Using focus groups and participatory techniques provided a forum for the expression of young children’s concerns whilst at the same time providing the researchers with a window onto their perspectives on barriers to learning, illness and HIV/Aids. The characteristics of these two forms of data collection facilitated the meaningful involvement of the participants in the focus group process. However, several critical tensions permeated this research process.

There is an inherent, and possibly unresolvable tension between the use of playful mechanisms such as ice-breakers and energisers to build rapport and trust between participants within the group, and the seriousness of the topic under discussion, illness, death and HIV/Aids. In addition to this, embedded in this research process is a tension between the useful, child-friendly and inclusive participatory techniques and the difficulties that arise in managing the form of data, which emerges from these techniques. For example, diagrams, time-lines, line-exercises and body-maps are fascinating, but pose additional challenges in recording, analysing and interpretation.

The two different records of the data collection process (an audio and video version) pose further challenges as to how one accurately and incisively transfers and relates the audio and video recording of the event and activities of the focus group sessions into analysable form. The tension here is that a text version alone would not do justice to the activity of the focus group that involves conversation and non-verbal interaction. How then do we transcribe the recordings in such a way as to provide the fullest account of the event? If one of the main aims of the research is to identify a local and contextualised perspective on barriers to learning, the challenge for the transcriber is to adequately contextualise respondents' perspectives and their behaviour, when their own perspective is necessarily selective.

In this site there was the added dimension of the original focus group discussions being in *isiZulu*, whereas the medium of interaction within the research team was English. There is a double burden placed on the facilitators/student researchers to conduct the focus groups in one language, and translate the discussion in these groups into English, for use in their own projects, but also for use by the broader research team. Translation is not an easy task and the skill does not automatically exist because an individual can speak two languages. There was extensive debate amongst the group facilitators when developing the focus group questions and finding the appropriate *isiZulu* equivalent.

The site of the research generated a particular tension. Working across different contexts and different school 'cultures,' in the sense of norms and conditions meant that the facilitators had to adapt their expectations and their facilitation skills. For example, one school context was permeated by a norm of a disciplined, respectful learner body who listened to educators and other adults. In another school context, there seemed to be very little respect of learners for educators and vice versa. A few educators were seen with *sjamboks* and threatened to use them on the learners. The learners took this dynamic into the focus group sessions where they resisted attempts by the facilitator to establish and adhere to group norms without the presence of this disciplinary measure. It is possible that the racial diversity in the school played a role in the tensions between educators and learners. It is also possible that because the facilitators were of a different racial group from most of the educators and adults in the school, that the learners had less respect for them.

The development of research and facilitation skills

The data collection process was facilitated by *isiZulu*-speaking masters students as research assistants who were simultaneously collecting data for their own theses as well as for the research project as a whole. Whilst having the support of the project team, they had the responsibility of conducting the data collection process according to the decisions made by this team. As masters' students, they were developing an understanding of how research and reflective practice works and the research project therefore had to incorporate the development of research and facilitation skills. This included basic research skills such as operationalising the research question into research instruments; the negotiation of access to the sites, obtaining consent from parents/caregivers and learners; and training workshops to facilitate the development of the skills needed to conduct interviews and focus groups with young child participants.

The nature of the research topic further complicated the research process. The sensitivity of the issue of HIV/AIDS and the likelihood of there being a strong emotional component to the discussion meant that ethically, the facilitators also had to perform a therapeutic function. The research team utilised reflection and debriefing sessions in an action-reflection process to develop these skills.

The facilitative function in conducting a focus group is critical to the adequate and directed collection of quality data. O'Kane (2000) argues that while the participatory techniques are useful, the dialogue around activities is what provides the richest sources of interpretation and meaning. In this particular study, the facilitation included the skills of engaging with children in ways that encouraged further participation and enabled the children to feel heard and supported. Facilitators also need skills of mediating and being able to probe responses to elicit deeper meanings. This is particularly difficult with young children who do not reflect easily on the responses of others within a group, demanding that their own views be taken into account. There is also a tension in this practice between adhering to a structured set of questions for the focus group, and recognising the appropriate times to adapt this structure to incorporate and explore the responses of the participants. This is not an easy skill to 'teach' as the skill develops with increased awareness of the way in which the research process works. It is probable that the facilitators' lack of confidence in adapting and changing the focus group questions or deviating from the defined steps reflected the dynamics within the research team.

Inexperienced students are unlikely to challenge more experienced staff. They are also more likely to want there to be a single, correct way of implementing a data collection process. However, the facilitators in this research process have been through an incredible process of self-reflection, development and growth, and cognisance must also be taken of the intensity, and at times overwhelmingly, emotional nature of the research process. Working with vulnerable groups, and young children, requires researchers to be sensitive to the inherent tension between data collection and playing a facilitative and, at times, a therapeutic role. In this sense, the competence of the facilitators becomes an ethical issue. The adequate and appropriate management of the emotional dimension of the focus group process was essential, however, this demand goes beyond the role and skill expected of a research assistant.

Conclusion

Research with young, vulnerable children about the sensitive issues of HIV/AIDS raised particular ethical and methodological challenges. We have argued that a process approach that values the child as an active participant in the research addresses some of these challenges. A four-stage focus group method that utilised participatory techniques increased the child participants' active involvement in the process. We have illustrated that the ethical dimensions of working with young child participants about HIV/AIDS can be addressed through innovative approaches to informed consent, confidentiality, beneficence and nonmaleficence. Research in this developing context, however, led to numerous tensions that permeate the research process.

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That child needs a good listening to! Reviewing effective interview strategies

Carol Aubrey and Sarah Dahl

Abstract

This paper provides a review of effective methods for interviewing young and vulnerable groups of children and the influence of their voices on decision-making from the English-speaking literature. Very few studies are designed to address questions of effectiveness. Of those that do, there is evidence to suggest that interviews with young children are enhanced by the use of activity- and computer-based techniques. Quite young children can participate successfully in interviews though their responses are affected by question format. Age, gender and family circumstances will also be an influence. Descriptive-analytical studies in the family, educare and social welfare context suggest that a range of multi-method techniques is being employed to access children's views and that these may be beginning to influence decision-making. Not all young children are as yet asked for their views though involvement increases with age. The impact these have on policy, however, may be less certain. Children want their views to be listened to and treated with genuine consideration, nevertheless, and may not necessarily be upset or offended by questions probing sensitive areas. The current emphasis on widening children's opportunities to talk, however, may risk creating a culture in which children are expected to talk. Extending the range of documented themes to include child survival, renegotiation of parenthood or children and violence that better encompass global issues are discussed.

Introduction

This study was commissioned by an English local authority serving a large multi-racial and ethnically diverse city area. The aim was to review the range and effectiveness of methods of listening to and consulting with young children under twelve years and, more specifically, the early childhood phase (birth to eight years). The focus was young children's views and key experiences of families, pre-school and school provision and, in the case of vulnerable groups, of services related to care and protection, they received.

The principle objectives were to examine:

- *Methodology*: different approaches used in research with and consultation for listening to young children and evidence for their effectiveness;
- *Impact*: evidence gained on children's experiences and priorities in relation to the impact of listening on practitioners, parents and young children themselves, where this existed, in order to challenge the relevance of services (education, care and welfare services) to their needs, aspirations and wants.

Given the current impact on children of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa through family illness and death, poverty and malnutrition with consequent denial of access to healthcare and education and/or the need to provide full-time parental care, the topic of listening to young children by practitioners, policy makers and academics has a growing relevance and importance in the South African context (United States Agency for International Development, 2000).

Background

Recent times have seen an increasing interest in accessing and understanding children's perspectives on their own lives that have legal, political, economic and academic origins. Suffice it to say that whilst at the statutory level, legal instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (1996), and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000) have been far-reaching and possess a wide scope for action, local government structures may provide a more appropriate context and level for the development of granted and exercised rights for child participation. In this context, children as well as parents become clients of the services they receive and, as such, have independent views about improvement of these.

As well as practical and ethical dimensions to the development of child- or young person-centred approaches, there has been a significant conceptual or theoretical contribution to the debate from the sociology of childhood to our growing understanding of childhood and youth. From this perspective, children and young people are being seen as 'social actors', actively

constructing (and reconstructing) themselves in different social contexts (James and Prout, 1997). The implications of this are that children are active in constructing their own social worlds, thinking about and understanding the meaning and significance of their own personal lives. A methodology is required that places the child at the centre of focus, recognizing their social relationships and cultures as worthy of study in their own right. Mayall (1996) has argued that this approach needs three components: first conceptualising and accepting young children as competent reporters of their own experiences; second, giving children voice means taking them seriously and placing their views at the centre of the analysis; and third, aiming to work *for* children not *on* them in order to influence social change.

The review of evidence for effective methods of interviewing such children and the impact of children's voices on local policy making was thus informed by three key questions that focused the present work.

Questions

The first two questions were oriented towards methodology:

- what are effective practices of engaging with young children?
- what range of approaches are being used?

The third was oriented towards children's participation in decision-making in their lives:

- how and in what contexts can the voices of children be used to influence the development of policy?

Methodology

The research questions provided a framework for the subsequent stages. They determined the kinds of studies to be reviewed and, thus, helped to make explicit key characteristics that the review was able to answer. Once the questions had been made explicit, the characteristics were then set out in a number of statements that were called *inclusion* and *exclusion criteria*. The following criteria were used.

Included were:

- ▶ Papers reporting studies conducted in or after 1987;
- ▶ Papers written in English (reported studies conducted predominantly across England and Wales, though some studies from other English-speaking countries were included);
- ▶ Papers reporting an empirical study;
- ▶ Papers focusing on children from birth to five years, though papers referring to children up to twelve years were also consulted.

Excluded were:

- ▶ Papers about forensic interviewing, related to child abuse (that is, concerned with the use of leading questions, ‘false memory’ and sexually explicit material);
- ▶ Papers referring to young people over twelve years;
- ▶ Papers about interviewing children where reference to methods was omitted or insubstantial;
- ▶ Short reviews and summaries of existing research;
- ▶ Literature not subjected to peer-review;
- ▶ Papers providing only commentary or opinion of existing research.

Definitions

Search terms were as follows:

‘interviewing children’; ‘interviewing vulnerable children’;
‘children’s opinions’; ‘children’s views’; ‘children’s voices’ ;
‘using children’s opinions’; ‘using children’s views’;
‘engaging with children’;
‘listening to children’;
‘consulting children’;
‘children’s perceptions’;
‘children’s perspectives’.

Electronic data bases searched were as follows:

| Database | Number of References: |
|---|-----------------------|
| Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts | 269 |
| Social Services Abstracts | 139 |
| Sociological Abstracts | 334 |
| Medline | 681 |
| Joseph Rowntree Foundation | 201 |
| Child Poverty Action Group | 44 |
| Web of Science | 102 |

A number of other people, organizations and websites were also consulted.

Once the studies to be included had been determined, the next step was to obtain copies of the relevant papers through a process of library visits, including other University collections, private sources such as the National Children’s Bureau and interlibrary loan. A data extraction proforma was used as the basis for constructing the review for the thirty-two included studies that were then grouped into two main categories according to design: small controlled studies (six papers or 18%); and descriptive-analytical studies (twenty-six papers or 82%). The controlled studies addressed review question 1, oriented towards effective interviewing strategies and the descriptive-analytical studies addressed questions 2 and 3, providing vivid and innovative examples of interview techniques, as well as being oriented towards children’s participation. The next section reports the findings from this review process, using these categories. Examples are drawn from the review of a literature that is mainly from England and Wales, with some contributions from New Zealand and North America, thus, representing ‘first world childhood’ The implications of this will be re-examined in the closing section.

Effective methods of questioning

The first group of studies considered the influence of different questioning conditions and different question formats, as well as the age, gender and differential family experience of the respondents, on children's responses.

Conditions for questioning

Wesson and Salmon (2001) examined the effectiveness of drawing and re-enactment as a means of facilitating verbal reports about emotionally-laden events of sixty children aged five and eight years in one of three interview conditions: drawing and telling; re-enacting and telling; or simply telling. For children of each age group, drawing and re-enactment enhanced the amount of information reported relative to a verbal interview. Furthermore, drawing and re-enactment elicited a greater number of items of descriptive information than did the verbal interview.

Priestley and Pipe (1997) complemented this study by examining the conditions under which toys and model items facilitated children's accounts of personally-experienced events. One hundred and nine, five- to six-year-old children were interviewed about an event in which they had participated (visiting a pirate). Experiment 1 varied the similarity of the props (small-scale models or toys) to the items from the event while Experiment 2 and 3 varied the number of model items and the method of their presentation. Results showed that increasing the physical similarity of the props to items from the event, adding spatial layout cues (setting out props in the same spatial arrangement as the items they represented from the original event), or increasing the number of props provided, enhanced the facilitative effects on children's accounts.

Powell, Clare and Hasty (2002), by contrast, compared the effectiveness of conventional verbal techniques with a computerized assessment tool designed to provide interviewers with knowledge of children's understanding of spatial, temporal, numerical and coloured items that might be relevant to any clinical setting. The effect of the computer programme (compared to a standard verbal assessment or no assessment at all) was examined on four- to five-year-old children's recall of an independent event and their enjoyment of the interview process. Overall, the children rated the assessment conducted on the computer more favourably though the verbal assessment elicited responses that were

more consistent with their responses about the event than the computerized assessment. However, there was no difference in the accuracy and detail of children's responses about the independent event, irrespective of whether the children received the computerized or verbal assessment, or no assessment.

These studies suggest that young children's responses can be enhanced by the use of drawing, enactment and props, and that assisted methods add to their enjoyment.

Question format

Waterman, Blades and Spencer (2001) randomly selected one hundred and twenty-eight five- to nine-year-olds and twenty-three adults, who were told two short stories and then asked questions about the stories. Half of the questions posed were answerable based on the information provided; the other half were not answerable. Within these categories, half of the questions were closed questions (requiring only a yes/no answer) and half were 'wh' questions (why, what, where, who or when) that requested particular details to be provided. All participants performed at ceiling with answerable questions. With the unanswerable questions, there was an effect of format. The majority of children and adults correctly indicated that they did not know the answer when asked unanswerable wh-questions. The majority of children, however, and just over one-fifth of adults, provided a response to the closed (that is, yes/no) unanswerable questions. It was concluded that when children and even adults, are interviewed, interviewers should be cautious in their use of closed questions. Where possible open questions or wh-questions should be used. If closed questions are necessary, then follow-up questions may be necessary to check the interviewee is not attempting to answer a question to which they do not know the answer.

Peterson and Biggs (1997) also looked at wh-questions (which request specific information) and yes/no questions that merely require confirmation or denial. From the emergency room of a children's hospital, they recruited ninety-two thirteen-year-olds for interviews on the subject of traumatic injuries necessitating hospital treatment. The interview consisted of free recall ("Tell me what happened when you hurt yourself?") and probed recall (consisting of open-ended and specific wh-questions). Yes/no questions were problematic for preschoolers. All children were usually accurate when they said "yes", although two-year-olds were significantly less so. Children's "no" answers

were problematic and preschoolers' "no" answers no more accurate than by chance. A possible explanation advanced was that young children say "yes" when they are certain of their answer but if at all uncertain, they are biased towards saying "no". This bias declined sharply as children reached school age and continued to decrease as children got older. Overall, it is clear that open-ended questions should be used with young children, where possible, and that closed questions may need to be explored with follow-up probes.

Respondent characteristics

Hay, Zahn-Waxler, Cummings and Iannotti (1992) also used props to interview forty, five-year-olds about conflict with peers, based on a simulated dispute between two glove puppets. In this case, children's recommendations about tactics to be used in resolving conflicts were affected by gender and experience of being cared for by a depressed mother. Girls in general recommended more socialized tactics than boys did. It was concluded that five-year-olds hold a systematic set of beliefs about conflict with their peers that transcend gender and differential family experience but, at the same time, the general approach they take to solving this sort of social problem, and the coherence between their recommendations and their actual behaviour, are sensitive to the family experiences associated with maternal depression.

It is clear from this small group of studies that both factors in the context and process of interviewing, as well as characteristics of the young children themselves will influence the type, accuracy and detail of responses made and that methods used will require very careful planning to ensure the most effective outcome. The next section considers the range of methods of listening to young children generated by the descriptive-analytical studies.

Interview approaches

Multiple methods

The 'mosaic approach' of Clark and Moss (2001) for listening to three- and four-year-olds in pre-school settings, used multi-method and participatory techniques to combine visual with verbal approaches, including mapping and modelling, drawing and collage, taking photographs, child-to-child interviews, drama and puppetry. Children and adults co-constructed meaning through

observation, active listening, gathering documentation, interpreting and responding. Wing (1995) also used participant observation and in-depth interviews to explore kindergarten, first and second grade children's perceptions of classroom activities that they believed would be included in a book that the researcher was writing.

The Daycare Trust (1998) employed multi-method approaches, too, in three nurseries by inviting suggestions for making a teddy enjoy nursery, offering paper and pens to make drawings and a Polaroid camera to take pictures. Ensuing conversations were then tape-recorded.

Evans and Fuller (1996; 1998) also sought children's perspectives on nursery class experience through role-play, using push-button telephones to take part in an open, tape-recorded conversation with a researcher, focusing on why they attended nursery school.

Bond (1995) elicited what three young users of family centres thought of services provided in the context of telling a new child what to expect at the centre and how it could be improved, using drawings and captioned photographs.

Listen and talk conversations

Others, such as Farrell, Tayler, Tennent and Gahan (2002) have employed a conversational style to comment on their experiences and possible advice that might be given to a new friend (pictured) entering the service in order to have a good time. Cousins (1999) also adopted a 'listen and talk' conversational approach and role-play interviews to find out how new school entrants might help adults plan their educare.

Participatory techniques

Thomas and O'Kane (1998a and 1998b; 1999a and 1999b; 2000a and 2000b) drew directly on 'participatory' methods where concrete and tactile techniques have been found to appeal in exploring the participation in decision-making of children eight years and over. One method created a 'chart of decisions' by generating the names of significant adults along the top of a grid, identifying key decisions in the lives to place down the side, and selecting a red, yellow or

green sticker to indicate whether they had ‘no say’, ‘some say’ or ‘a lot of say’ in making the decision concerned. Other methods generated a ‘story of a day’ with choices made in its course and drawing of a favourite place or something feared, such as depicting a review meeting or social worker. The ‘pot of beans’ for rating the amount children participated (one for ‘not much’, two for ‘a little’ and three for ‘a lot’) and ‘decision chart’ proved powerful. In group sessions, games, wall-posters, drawings, jigsaws, panel discussions and role-play were also used to explore social work practice with children.

Combining interviews with other techniques

Farnfield and Kaszap (1998) supplemented semi-structured interviews for children seven years and over with prompts such as flow charts, eco-maps identifying key family members and the nature of their relationship with the target child, as well as sentence completion book and attitude scale. Smith, Gollop and Taylor (1998) asked children to describe verbally or draw the people with whom they lived in order to stimulate talking about living situations.

Shemmings (1996) also reported working with vulnerable children using a mixture of semi-structured, audio-taped interviews and questionnaires to ascertain reactions to case conferences. Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas and Murch (2002) explored views concerning divorce, using interviews and a range of other data collected using an activity book. Morrow (1989), too, used structured activities for twelve-year-olds to draw and write on ‘who is important to me in the family’, sentence completion, questionnaires and group discussions. Wade and Smart (2002), meanwhile, listened to the views of children of six to seven years and nine to ten years on parental separation through small focus groups where issues were explored from a hypothetical perspective. This was followed up by interviews exploring their own personal experiences.

Finally, Fisher and Johnson (1990) asked seven- and nine-year-olds to tell four stories concerned with interpersonal family conflict: child angry with mother; child angry with father; mother angry at child; father angry at child. They were, then, questioned individually by an interviewer who had recorded their stories.

Semi-structured interviews

Smith (1995) also used semi-structured interviews to explore views of children from five to twelve years on playcare. Strickland-Clarke, Campbell and Dallos (2000) used semi-structured interviews to investigate children's views on family therapy involvement. In this case, sessions were replayed on videotape to assist children's memory and they were invited to describe how they were feeling. Reich and Kaplan (1994) used interviews for children six to twelve years about the effects of psychiatric and psychosocial interviews. Boswell (2002) explored the parenting role of imprisoned fathers with children from three to nineteen years through interviews.

In general, multiple-method activity approaches have been successfully adapted for talking with and listening to very young children, though focus groups, conventional interview and questionnaire methods are increasingly common as the middle years of childhood are reached.

Key themes

The topics for research and consultation with children are wide-ranging though three key themes emerged from the review of children's views: the family; pre-school and school provision; and services they received.

The family

Morrow (1989) found that children had an accepting, inclusive view of what counts as a family and it emerged that love, care, mutual respect and support were key characteristics. The centrality to children of parents, especially mothers, as providers of physical and emotional care, was clear from their accounts. Girls in particular described their mothers as important as someone to talk to.

Wade and Smart (2002) explored parental separation and drew the conclusion that there was no single type of family that experiences divorce and change since the processes of divorce and separation take different forms in different cultures. Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas and Murch (2002) suggested that children experience parental divorce as a crisis in their lives but that they are able to mobilise internal/external resources to gain a new point of view.

Boswell (2002) examined the particular separation involved with imprisoned fathers. Responses did not fit into neat categories, some children were old enough to have formed judgements about their father, others were still pre-occupied with emotions. None was untouched and all would have preferred not to have been in this situation. Most appreciated any opportunities for contact and would have liked more. All looked forward to their father's return. The need for more normalising child and family visiting was considered.

Fisher and Johnson (1990) investigated changing views of family conflict. In general, family conflict themes of childhood concerned the failure of children to fulfil social obligations, the inadequacy of parental helping behaviours and, to a lesser degree, children's disappointment at the frequency of parent-child association. Helping behaviour and social obligations, however, dominated family conflict stories.

The importance of adult involvement and emotional support threads through children's accounts.

Pre-school and school provision

Young pre-school children in the Clark and Moss (2001) study were asked about their everyday experiences in the setting: the routines, the role of children and adults, the activities and the premises. Children talked about practitioners as well as other children being their friends. They felt that it was important for adults to keep order and help them feel safe, as well.

Children in the Daycare Trust study (Day Trust, 1998) also thought their friends provided a support system and talked about looking after their friends. As shown in the previous family context, feeling safe and loved was important. Some children liked adults to help them to do things and to play with them and were proud of things they had made and done for themselves, for instance, they liked being able to get a drink when they wanted. The garden was among their favourite activities.

Children in the Evans and Fuller study (Evans and Fuller, 1996; Evans and Fuller, 1998) were asked for the reasons they advanced for attending nursery. Their reasons included play, conforming (having to), being unaware (not knowing why), practical, domestic and educational as well as self-gratifying (pleasing them).

Children in the Wing study (Wing, 1995) thought about classroom pursuits in terms of work and play. Distinctive elements, like the previous study, included the obligatory nature of activities, also included was the cognitive and physical effort required, the involvement and evaluation of the teacher, and the fun children experienced whilst engaged in activities. They also saw some activities as 'in-between' work and play.

As other studies showed, overwhelmingly relationships were of fundamental importance to children in the Cousins study (Cousins, 1999). They enjoyed being in school and liked teachers. They liked calm people and calm settings. They did not like being laughed at, shouting and being bullied. They liked playing with their friends, having fun and freedom to explore, playing outside, cooking food and eating together. They also liked finding out about all sorts of different things and different people. They had curiosity about science, were motivated to learn to read and had a need to 'natter'. They were beginning to write, role play with real money in a shop, build with bricks and make patterns and shapes, paint, collage, construct lots of models and choose art materials.

Children in the Farrell, Tayler, Tennent and Gahan (2002) study believed that they attended their child and family centre to learn to do things and to prepare for the future. Positive aspects mentioned by younger children included play equipment and by older children, specific subjects, activities and people. Negative aspects focused on adverse behaviour of other children. Younger children would advise a newcomer about fun activities and older children about knowledge of and compliance with instructional rules and protocols. Bond's children felt family centres provided opportunities for social contacts, sharing problems and gaining in confidence (Bond, 1995). They also provided for children's social development and offered a safe play-space. The majority of Smith's (Smith, 1995) 'playcare' children liked the opportunity to attend after-school and holiday clubs. Such centres allowed them to meet and play with friends, using centre equipment, take part in activities and have fun. Views were divided as to whether such centres should operate on a 'free play', 'semi-structured' or 'unstructured' basis. Clearly children liked some control over what they did and when they did it, valuing choice and independence.

As in the previous section, the studies highlighted the importance attached to relationships with adults and other children as well as the social and educational opportunities provided by educare settings outside the home.

Social and care services received

In the Thomas and O’Kane studies (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998a and b; Thomas and O’Kane, 1999a and b; Thomas and O’Kane, 2000a and b), more ‘looked after’ children in the eight to eleven years age groups were felt to be attending social care reviews and planning meetings that concerned them but the likelihood of their attendance varies with age and other factors. The overwhelming reaction to the involvement of children and young people in case conferences was positive. The young people, whilst not wishing to be upset in the meeting, did not necessarily regret going to the conference. They did, however, express clear views on how they could have been better ‘emotionally prepared’ before the meeting to reduce or minimise their discomfort as well as helped afterwards to make sure that they had understood what had been decided. Children did not like adults arguing in the case conference, especially if the disagreements were between professionals and their parent or carer. Quite a few young people thought that their views had not always been sought. Although they did not always want to speak, they said that they wanted to be given the opportunity to do so. A number of children felt that although they had been present, they had not really participated. Some children would have preferred to have had someone ‘independent’ in the meeting to give them support and encouragement.

Smith, Gollop and Taylor (1998) attempted to ascertain the most effective way of involving children in decisions concerning their lives by examining intervention in children’s lives following expressed care and protection concerns. More than half said that they did not know or understand why they were in care, although sometimes this conflicted with the caregiver’s or social worker’s view. The majority showed some confusion about roles of the professionals, agencies and processes that affected their lives. Most appeared to have been consulted on decisions about their lives in relation to where they lived or their contact with birth families but not all children were asked for their views by those making the decisions.

Farnfield and Kaszap (1998) investigated children’s views of professional help. Four major themes concerning the ‘helpful adult’ appeared: general qualities; counselling skills, ethical stance; and the ability to make things happen (helpful outcomes). The unhelpful adult was categorized in terms of: physical behaviour; verbal behaviour; social behaviour; and attitudes. An important finding was that the profession of the adult mattered far less than whether or not they possessed the qualities of the helpful adult.

Strickland-Clark, Campbell, and Dallos (2000) investigated vulnerable children's views on their involvement in family therapy. Common themes emerged: being heard/not feeling heard; coping with challenges; bringing back memories; concern about relations with other family members; needing support in sessions; expecting to be judged; viewing sessions with apprehension; feeling misunderstood; having difficulty in saying what they were feeling. Indeed, the analysis clarified that 'being heard' was a key category for the children. Reich and Kaplan (1994) also interviewed children about the effects of psychiatric and psychosocial interviews. Positive responses were received to all aspects, and no negative effects were reported. Most interviews were enjoyed. None indicated they would withdraw because of the questions they were asked. Interestingly, children were not upset or offended by psycho-social questions.

Beyond vulnerable groups, there was evidence of the participation of children in services that affect their lives. Chapman, Emerson, Gough, Mepani and Road (2000), for example, consulted groups of children and young people in London on their views concerning decision-making related to health matters. A wide range of messages for decision-makers on health matters was generated. They wanted better information in more accessible language, reduced pollution, better housing, action against drugs, smoking and drinking, and improved safety.

Overall, despite the sensitive areas involved, children wanted to be consulted about key decisions affecting their lives though a need to be properly prepared and supported was also indicated. Here, as in previous sections, the importance of sensitive and helpful adults is highlighted.

Impact

With respect to the impact of listening to individual children, some children, as noted in the Morrow study (Morrow, 1989), felt listened to in their families. However, others did not. In terms of specific crises, the Wade and Smart study (Wade and Smart, 2002), for instance, indicated that the focus on the identifiable transition in divorce obscures understanding of profoundly different experiences of family life and transitions. Children, it was felt, needed real rather than token choices in this process.

With respect to the impact of listening on practitioners, the value of one-off contacts to 'ascertain' their views, it was thought, was highly questionable and met legal process rather than the needs of children. Working with children, it was concluded, is a skilled activity and many young children prefer play-based methods rather than talk. Children themselves pointed out that having fun and being cheered up are essential ingredients in managing change. Overall, divorce is one of many separation problems that some children face. When parents are unable to help, children's most accessible source of support is from other family members and friends. Children are highly discriminating about accepting outside help. They want their views to be listened to and treated with genuine consideration, and they also appreciate having things being done for them.

With respect to the impact of listening on institutions outside the home, although many children prefer to keep their family lives private when in school, schools can play a significant role in promoting children's agency and providing a contact point for the dissemination of information. Boswell (2002) also identified the need for schools to develop supporting strategies.

Farrell, Tayler, Tennent and Gahan (2002) concluded that children's lived experience contributed to new knowledge and to the development of democratic communities in which children and families were free to participate. The extent to which this knowledge is actually having an impact at the strategic and policy level is less certain. However, it should be remembered, as noted by Wade and Smart (2002), that widening opportunities for children to 'talk' may benefit some children at the risk of creating a culture in which they are expected to talk.

Conclusions

With respect to review question 1, a small number of controlled studies highlighted the importance of question format, the use of enactment, play props, drawing and computer-based approaches, as well as the potential influence of age, gender and family circumstances on young children's responses in interviews. With respect to review question 2, the larger number of identified studies provided evidence of young children's increasing involvement in the major decisions being taken in their lives. Paradoxically, it was the controlled studies using children as subjects in manipulated conditions with their responses being measured that provided the evidence of effective

interview strategies. This contrasted with the rich descriptive-analytical studies that positioned children's perspectives in the foreground. The extent to which children's solicited views actually influence policy-making is less clear. From the perspective of children's rights to participation, however, these studies do begin to uncover for critical examination factors that influence views concerning children's exercised participation in areas of life where traditionally adults have made decisions on their behalf. Increasing children's opportunities to talk, however, may carry the real danger of creating a culture in which children are expected to talk. Hopefully, such investigations will make some small contribution to establishing the importance and promotion of exercised rights by children. That said, it should be noted that this is review of literature that carries assumptions about the nature of a child and childhood that are protected and 'schooled'. This view of the child is contested by globalization that generates a different set of themes, such as child survival, renegotiation of parenthood or children and violence, even the disappearance of childhood and where 'love' and 'safety' cannot be presupposed.

The review goes some way in identifying effective methods for gathering children's key views and experiences. The challenge is now to consider how and in what context the voices of 'unequal' children, street children or working children, for instance, can be used to influence the development of policy for those living in more challenging social, cultural and political circumstances.

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Ten years of early childhood development: a case study of Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education

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Abstract

The last decade has seen considerable changes in the field of Early Childhood Development (ECD). This paper focuses on change within and around a single ECD training organisation, Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education (LETCEE). Established in 1991 in Greytown, LETCEE started as a pre-school, took on training for ECD educators, and later worked in ECD as an aspect of community development. LETCEE has been shaped by the increasing formalization and regulation of the field, on the one hand, and its evolving understanding of ECD as a part of community development, on the other. This historical case study explores LETCEE as a unique organisation with its own contextually specific history, and as a microcosm of the evolving ECD field. It draws attention to the critically important but neglected area of Early Childhood Development within South African educational research.

Introduction

During the apartheid era, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) played a prominent role in the provision of early childhood development (ECD) services to black children, who were largely neglected by the apartheid government. The role of ECD NGOs in the post-apartheid era has shifted to one of uneasy partnership as a new ECD dispensation has unfolded over the last decade with an increasing formalization, regulation and institutionalization of the field. The history of Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education (LETCEE), a small, Greytown-based ECD NGO in the Midlands region of KwaZulu-Natal, roughly coincides with the democratic era. This study examines developments within the ECD field as reflected and refracted within the situated experience of LETCEE as a local role player. It

presents a historical case study of the organisation in the context of ECD policy development and implementation. It argues that the tension between the formalizing requirements of the state and an engagement with community needs has shaped LETCEE's evolution. Data collection methods included a review of the secondary literature, interviews with key members of the organisation, analysis of documentary sources and site visits. The study seeks to contribute to a neglected aspect of the history of civil society, as well as to provide a perspective on developments within the broader ECD field.

While there have been some studies and overviews of the ECD field in South Africa (Van den Berg and Vergani, 1986; 1987; Padayachee, Atmore, Biersteker and Evans, 1994; Department of Education, 2001; Porteus, 2004), very little intensive research has been conducted on local ECD organisational settings. One exception is Haggie's (1994) historical study of the African Self Help Association, which was central to the development of the pre-school movement in Soweto. Van den Berg and Vergani (1986) provide a useful survey of ECD organisations at a moment in the 1980s, and their 1987 collection of readings (Van den Berg and Vergani, 1987) presents some brief case studies of ECD organisations (see Richards on Grassroots and Malepa on Entokozweni); and the National Audit commissioned by the Department of Education (2001) presents an overview of provisioning in the field in the early democratic era. A dedicated issue of *Perspectives in Education* (June 2004) focuses mainly on theoretical models and ECD programmes and methodologies. The present study offers a textured account of the relation between local needs and dynamics, as embodied in a small non-governmental organisation, and the national environment of policy and implementation.

This article also seeks to understand the peculiar development of LETCEE as a non-governmental organisation in its own terms. It will draw on the literature on the life cycles of non-governmental organisations (Korten, 1990) in order to characterise this development. It will locate LETCEE within Korten's generational framework of organisational development. The first section will focus on LETCEE's direct provision of education to children, the second on its educator training, the third on interaction with the wider ECD field, and the fourth on LETCEE's role in community development. The sequence of sections is thematic rather than strictly chronological and this involves some movement backwards and forwards in time. A brief discussion of Korten's theory will establish the theoretical framework for the study.

Korten (1990, p.113-132) identifies four stages or “generations” of non-governmental organisations, each of which has its own orientation towards action and development. The first generation has a relief and welfare orientation. NGOs of this generation provide direct delivery of services to meet immediate needs or shortages. Second generation organisations, recognising that relief and welfare can at best provide temporary alleviation of the symptoms of underdevelopment, seek to develop self-reliance among communities at a local level through small-scale community development. Third generation organisations, frustrated by the problems of sustainability arising in small-scale projects which are dependent on foreign funding and on the agency of the NGO, and by the absence of large-scale impacts, look beyond the individual community. They seek changes in policies and institutions at local, national and global levels. A fourth generation recognises that this orientation is also flawed by endless duplication of effort across government departments in an often hostile environment. They prioritise the facilitation of ‘a global people’s movement’ and act as service organisations to people’s movements in this quest.

Korten recognises that all “generations” of organisations have a contribution to make but sees the movement from one generation to the next as an evolutionary progression, “each moving further away from alleviating symptoms toward attacking ever more fundamental causes” (Korten, 1990, p.115), with the fourth generation the most advanced stage. Korten’s schema provides a useful tool for analysing the roles and orientations of NGOs engaged in development. However, it needs to be located within the messy specificities of context and history in relation to actual organisations. In South Africa, for example, many progressive NGOs in a variety of fields such as health and education participated actively in the anti-apartheid movement, thus playing a fourth generation role in Korten’s terms. However, in the democratic era these organisations did not levitate to some kind of fifth generation nirvana. Many closed down because funding dried up (Aitchison, 2003; Baatjes, 2003; Morrow, 2004). Others struggled to redefine their roles, sometimes taking on second or third generation profiles. Others still morphed into commercial entities, and specialised in acquiring and servicing contracts in the public and private sectors (see Morrow, 2004). The experiences of South African NGOs suggests that NGO development does not necessarily follow a linear sequence of progression through “generations”, based solely on an expanding vision of development and deepening analysis of society, and that the specificities and constraints of context and history are crucial in shaping them.

Rising to the challenge: Little Elephant Pre-school

In terms of Korten's (1990) schema, LETCEE had its origins as a first generation organisation in that it was responding to immediate needs for educare in the Greytown area. Little Elephant was established in 1991 as a pre-school housed at the local St James Anglican church and initiated by the rector. It occupied premises on the church property. The school was set up in response to the Anglican Synod of 1989 that challenged local congregations to establish pre-schools. The context of ECD provision at the time was one of massive inequality. The apartheid government had provided virtually no pre-school services for black children. A study undertaken in 1992 found that only 6 per cent of black children in South Africa, as opposed to one third of white children, had access to an ECD site and that the differential between expenditure per capita on white children and black children exceeded 40 (Padayachee, Atmore, Biersteker and Evans, 1994).

Besides poor and unequal ECD facilities, the Greytown area was characterised by high levels of poverty and unemployment. As a LETCEE annual report states:

We have to spend a great deal of our time trying to help the students to deal with the consequences of the extreme poverty in which they work viz.: lack of food for children, little or no fees being paid, which means no income for the teachers and greatly limited facilities both in terms of buildings and equipment (Annual Report, 1998, p.2).

Additional contextual problems included unreliable public transport, sporadic taxi violence, and political violence around the times of elections.

Little Elephant was an innovative initiative in that it admitted children from all races at a time when schooling was largely segregated in South Africa. The approach was 'multi-racial' rather than non-racial at first, with a 'tricameral' admission policy of one third white, one third African, and one third coloured and Indian children. This policy changed when a parent challenged it as racist. The first principal, who later became director of LETCEE, remembers that the reaction of the white community in Greytown to the school was hostile. "It was a 'communist plot' with Archbishop Tutu making waves and the church taking in black children" (James, 2004). The local branch of Child Welfare, which ran a day care centre, felt threatened by the new school, and the host congregation, besides the rector and a small, committed group of supporters, was indifferent or antagonistic. Some congregants, for example, did not want

the black children using the toilets. At a local level, Little Elephant thus played a significant but difficult role in the movement towards a non-racial society within the ECD field, the local church and the Greytown community.

The focus of the pre-school was on building relationships with the children, encouraging constructive play and preparing them for life. The curriculum was informal, based on relationships and exploration (James, 2004). This child-centred approach contrasted with the dominant teacher-centred approach in the state schooling system at the time, an approach which persists within ECD to the present (see, for example, Prinsloo and Stein, 2004).

The pre-school expanded rapidly in its first year, indicating the vast need for such a service. Whereas 6 children had registered for the school, 12 arrived on the first day. By the end of the first week, there were 17 and by the fourth term 47. Towards the end of 1991, Little Elephant was confronted with the prospect of children graduating from the pre-school with nowhere to go because schools were not yet racially integrated. “It was an incredibly naive thing to do – we hadn’t thought of what would happen to the kids” (James, 2004). In 1992 Little Elephant started a Grade 1 class in addition to its pre-school to accommodate the children moving up, adding Grade 2 in 1993 and Grade 3 in 1994. Within four years, what had started as a pre-school initiative had expanded to include a fully-fledged junior primary school, named St Davids. In 1997 plans to separate the schools began, and in 1998 St Davids moved off the site and became an independent primary school. LETCEE thus shed its primary school component and continued to work in the ECD field.

At a national level, there was activity around ECD policy principles and proposals in the early 1990s. The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) produced a sectoral report on ECD in 1993 (National Education Policy Investigation, 1993), identifying inequalities of provisioning, fragmented access to ECD services, and inequitable and inadequate training as shortcomings within the field. It argued against privatisation of ECD services, placed the central responsibility for the subsidisation of ECD services on the state, and called for increased expenditure on ECD. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the African National Congress’s (ANC) main policy platform for the 1994 elections, affirmed the need for increased public and private funding of ECD, and assigned ultimate responsibility for ECD policy and implementation to the government.

These broad policy initiatives had minimal effect on Little Elephant as they were far removed from actual implementation on the ground. However, in 1996 the ANC shifted away from the ambitious social agenda of the RDP to the market oriented Growth, Equality and Redistribution (GEAR) Plan. GEAR placed primary emphasis within economic policy on productivity and competitiveness in the global market economy, and this had the effect of cutting back social investment and reorienting education policy towards macroeconomic goals. Porteus (2004) argues that the macroeconomic determinants within GEAR had a far greater impact on ECD than educational considerations. This applied equally to other peripheral sectors of education such as Adult Basic Education and Training (Baatjes, 2003; Baatjes and Mathe, 2004). In 1996 the government launched a National Audit of the ECD field as well as a pilot project for a Reception Year for five-year-olds. LETCEE became involved in both these initiatives, which marked the beginning of a phase of growing influence of national government ECD initiatives on LETCEE. Little Elephant school was one of the pilot sites for the Grade R project.

Two trends within Little Elephant School became apparent from the late 1990s. The first was a decline in numbers. From a high of 63 children in the pre-school in 1995, numbers fell steadily to 52 in 1997, 47 in 1999 and 25 by 2003 when questions about the viability of the school began to come to the fore (LETCEE Annual Reports, 1997, 1999, 2003). The reason for this was the number of pre-schools springing up in Greytown. Little Elephant was thus ironically a victim of the expansion of provision within the ECD field which it pioneered in the Greytown area. Another trend was an end to the multi-ethnic character of the school. The 'non-racial' moment of the early 1990s passed as white parents placed their children in other schools and the school body became predominantly black African. Staff experienced this as a loss. As one staff member put it, the pre-school was "impoverished by losing its multi-ethnicity – the exposure to people's languages and cultures" (James, 2004).

LETCEE Educator Training

In 1992 the centre was formally constituted as LETCEE . That year LETCEE began, in addition to running a pre-school, the training of pre-school educators. On the one hand, this was in response to a need within local communities for educator training. Again, this was an innovative initiative as very little training was available for black pre-school educators during the

apartheid era. What was available was closed down by the government. For example, in 1953 the Anglican Mission Training College for nursery school teachers, Dikonyaneng, was forced to close in Soweto (Haggie, 1994). Training for black ECD practitioners was largely curtailed after 1958 (Porteus, 2004). In the larger Greytown area, there were many women either actually running or wishing to start creches from their homes or from community centres who had not been trained. They approached Little Elephant with requests for training and assistance. Most of the LETCEE trainees came from rural areas around Greytown, particularly the impoverished Tugela valley: Tugela Ferry (west of Greytown) and Ntunjambili (east).

On the other hand, the initiation of training was a response to a funder's prompting. When Little Elephant approached Nedbank for funding, the bank proposed that Little Elephant establish a "teacher outreach programme". Little Elephant conducted a needs survey and the first six trainees were recruited in 1993.

The National Audit (Department of Education, 2001) found that 72 per cent of ECD sites were either community-based (49 per cent) or home-based (34 per cent), while only 17 per cent were school-based. The vast majority of educators in the Greytown area came from community-based or home-based sites where working mothers left their children for the day. Besides a lack of training, the educators who approached LETCEE struggled with a lack of equipment, poor facilities and very little income because parents or other caregivers could not afford fees.

Initially, the training was not formalized and the curriculum was shaped by the needs of the trainees as they arose. Staff visited trainees at their sites fortnightly, winding down into the vast Tugela River valley and negotiating the rough rural roads in the parish bakkie. They monitored very closely what was changing in the students' practice and worked specifically in relation to their circumstances. For example, they helped students to set up administrative systems for recording attendance, fees and children's progress at their sites, and to make their own equipment out of waste materials. "I think we saw real changes quite quickly", remembers the director (James, 2004). However, at the outset of the training, staff were not yet aware of the need to develop the sustainability of ECD sites. "We didn't think to work with the community" (James, 2004). The thorough integration of ECD with community development was to come later in LETCEE's approach as staff learnt about the relation.

In 1993, the Durban-based ECD organisation, Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE), agreed to allow LETCEE to use its training curriculum. In 1994 LETCEE held its first Foundation Course with 13 trainees and began to hold training in communities such as Tugela Ferry. This enabled local practitioners, who could not afford transport fees to Greytown, to attend. By 1995 courses offered included Foundation (an introduction to Early Childhood Development), School Readiness (focusing on preparing children for school), and Themes (focusing on what and how to teach pre-school children). In that year, LETCEE staff addressed a number of parent meetings at rural schools and the director addressed a forum of traditional leaders. Through this interaction with local communities, LETCEE began to appreciate the centrality of community involvement to the success of ECD initiatives:

LETCEE has become very aware of the need to develop the community of each creche in order that the parents realize the importance of educate and begin to accept responsibility for the creche. Without their 'ownership' of it, the creche seldom operates effectively and the teacher is not accountable to anyone (Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education, 1995, p.2).

Following from this, LETCEE planned a series of Parent Awareness Workshops and Committee Skills Training to develop awareness around ECD and capacity for centre governance in local communities, thus deepening its identity as a second generation NGO concerned with issues of development.

By 1996 LETCEE was training 150 trainees per year and began to use the Little Elephant pre-school as an observation site for trainees. This enabled the trainees "to see exactly the concepts that which have been dealt with in the theory lessons" (Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education, 1996, p.2). The course also involved trainees being visited at their ECD sites in the community by field workers. Besides supporting the trainees, the fieldworkers played an important role in fulfilling the vision of ECD awareness-raising and capacity building envisaged in the 1995 report. This extended LETCEE community education role, but also its own learning:

the fieldworkers have spent many hours talking to creche committees, community leaders and parents. This has meant regular feedback to us with regard to community needs, problems and interests and in turn explains the benefits of pre-school education and teaches basic hygiene and Aids information to the rural communities (Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education, 1996, p.2).

Thus the practical concern of LETCEE to support trainees in their communities began to shape a broader vision of ECD within the context of community development. At the same time, however, a different imperative arising from the government began to assert itself from the late 1990s, that of regulation and formalization of the ECD field. This did not necessarily complement LETCEE's shift to community development and a tension between the two imperatives became increasingly evident.

By 1998 LETCEE's training curriculum had taken on a more formal appearance and reflected the language of Outcomes-based Education. Various courses were pegged at levels defined within the National Qualifications Framework, from level 1 (equivalent to nine years of formal schooling) to level 4 (equivalent to first year of tertiary study). It consisted of an introductory Foundation Course (level 1), an Inkulisa (pre-school) course (level 2), and the TREE Higher Educare Course (level 3). The 1999 annual report identifies these courses at levels 1, 2 and 4 respectively of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which is mentioned for the first time, and in 1999 LETCEE also offered workshops on OBE. There was also a growing emphasis on forms of assessment. By 2000 LETCEE offered three courses: an Introduction to ECD; a National Certificate in ECD (level 1); and a National Certificate in ECD (level 4). In 2003 LETCEE won a tender from the Education Training and Development Practitioner Sectoral Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA) to offer an ECD level 4 learnership in the Greytown area. It also gained accreditation from this SETA as an ECD training provider in 2003.

One clear trend in LETCEE's training has been its expansion, from six trainees in 1993 to 150 in 1996, and 223 in 2003. LETCEE has trained over 2000 pre-school educators since its inception, attesting to the positive perception of LETCEE training by local educators and their 'word-of-mouth' advertising. This growth is also partly accounted for by the recognition and sponsorship of ECD research, pilot projects and learnerships by the government. Another trend has been increasing formalization, from an informal curriculum in 1993 shaped by the needs of the trainees as they arose, to credit-bearing National Certificates in 2000 based on Core Unit Standards recognised by the South African Qualifications Authority and placed within the National Qualifications Framework. Thus the evolution of training within LETCEE has been powerfully shaped by government policy. One benefit of formalization is that training is more uniform across organisations and of a higher quality: "we've adopted each other's methods and shared ideas and

experiences” (James, 2004). On the other hand, the bureaucratic load has increased with the administrative and assessment requirements of learnerships, and the increase in numbers has made the training encounter more impersonal and less responsive to particular circumstances. The interaction with government bureaucrats and the reliance on government funding for training, which is often delayed, has added to stress levels within the organisation.

Engaging with the wider field

In 1992 Little Elephant entered an ECD field that was fragmented with little co-operation between ECD organisations in KwaZulu-Natal. Staff members ventured outside the province for assistance, visiting the Border Early Learning Centre in East London and using this training organisation as a model for establishing an educator training programme. Relations among ECD organisations in KwaZulu-Natal improved from the mid-1990s. LETCEE forged strong ties with Training Resources in Early Education (TREE), a major ECD training organisation based in Durban, and began to use the TREE training materials from 1994. This relationship evolved into a KwaZulu-Natal ECD consortium which included other organisations. In 1996 the government launched a National Audit of the ECD field as well as a pilot project for a Reception Year for five-year-olds. LETCEE, as part of a consortium with TREE, New Beginnings and Zululand Educare, successfully tendered for the training in KwaZulu-Natal for the National Reception Year Pilot Project. This process involved a modification of existing curricula to conform with the requirements of Outcomes-Based Education and Curriculum 2005. LETCEE staff were also involved in the selection of sites in the Pietermaritzburg and Ladysmith areas for the pilot project and in assessing the prior learning of educators.

As part of a slightly different consortium, LETCEE also participated in the National Audit of pre-school facilities. The consortium visited 6 450 sites in the province. LETCEE managed the Pietermaritzburg region of the audit, where over 1 200 sites were visited. LETCEE’s involvement in the audit exposed the organisation to conditions within the field across the province, which included a number of common problems such as a lack of ownership of ECD sites by parents, non-payment of school fees, lack of equipment and low levels of educator training. LETCEE staff members also attended national meetings around the audit which provided the organisation with a wider picture of ECD, and allowed it to network and become known nationally. One

of the benefits of government ECD policy initiatives, therefore, has been the consolidation of the field through processes of joint government-NGO action and the concurrent sharing of ideas and development of relationships.

During the mid-1990s, LETCEE participated actively in the development of national ECD unit standards. At a provincial level, it developed curricula as part of the KZN ECD consortium. As part of wider provincial and national networks, LETCEE thus played a 'third generation' role in contributing to ECD policies and procedures, while simultaneously engaging in first and second generation activities. However, engagement in isolated activities does not necessarily characterise the overall orientation of an organisation. In this regard, LETCEE appeared to move gradually and at times unevenly through the 1990s and into the new millennium from a first generation orientation to providing education for children and training for practitioners, to a second generation orientation towards ECD development within the context of community development. This is epitomized in the *Izingane Zethu* project discussed below.

LETCEE and community development

In 1996 LETCEE's shift to community development was reflected in its statement of aims: "Our aim is to empower the marginalised rural women of the area and to improve the quality of pre-school education which is offered" (Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education, 1996, p.1). It initiated a community development project which involved holding community and parent meetings to raise awareness about the importance of ECD and to encourage community support of, and involvement in local ECD centres. Staff members also addressed parents' misconceptions that an ECD centre was "school" and that children should be learning "a, e, i, o, u" to make it worthwhile (Mzila, 2004).

By 2001 the community development thrust had become more explicit in LETCEE's aims, which included that of equipping students with knowledge and skills "to contribute to the social upliftment of their families and community, by creating sustainable employment for themselves" (Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education, 2001, p.1). This was even more evident in the 2002 and 2003 reports which stated LETCEE's overall goal as "to increase the capacity of individuals and communities to provide

appropriate early childhood interventions”. This encompassed more specific aims of, among others:

- Developing skills and building the capacity of individuals
- Advocating the improvement of conditions of young children
- Working in partnerships with organisations working with children in their communities (Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education, 2002, p.1; 2003, p.1).

These statements are replete with the “second generation” discourse of community development: “building capacity”; “working in partnerships”; “working in communities”; “sustainable employment”. This shift was crucially informed and developed by LETCEE’s involvement in the *Izingane Zethu* project.

In 2002 LETCEE, as part of the KZN ECD consortium, became part of an ongoing *Izingane Zethu* (Our Children) project funded by the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund. The primary aim of the project is to improve the quality of life of young children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. LETCEE’s major role within the consortium is to facilitate early education within the family setting for children who are not able to attend pre-school because of illness or poverty. This project involves building awareness and capacity within poor rural communities in the Kranskop area, including Ntunjambili, around early education. Twenty family facilitators, trained and supported by LETCEE, visit young children identified as vulnerable in the community, particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS. The family facilitators work with caregivers and the wider community to create conditions conducive for healthy child development (Kohne, 2004).

LETCEE’s experience of working intensively in a poverty-stricken rural area has had a powerful personal impact on staff members and further developed their understanding of the developmental context of ECD. Work has extended beyond visits to assisting local people to interact with government departments and facilitating access to government services:

LETCEE has worked closely with CINDI [Children in Need and Distress] and various government departments to facilitate the registration of births of the children so that childcare grants may be accessed (Little Elephant Training Centre for Early Education, 2002, p.4).

The *Izingane Zethu* project also includes components such as developing food sources through gardening, protecting water sources, improving sanitation and building the capacity of community structures. These components are run by other consortium members in close collaboration with LETCEE. The project falls clearly into Korten's "second generation" orientation towards development with its focus on small-scale, local development aiming at self-reliance. It also has "third generation" components in engaging with government departments, insisting on implementation of existing welfare policies to the poor and facilitating access to these services. Here LETCEE and consortium members play an intermediary role in development, interacting closely with the Departments of Health, Home Affairs and Social Development. However, the project is potentially subject to "second generation" limitations such as a dependence of foreign funding and on the NGO as initiator within the local community, with no guarantee that initiatives will continue when the NGOs leave.

While LETCEE's trajectory as an organisation has become increasingly bound up with implementation of government policy through, for example, participation in the Grade R pilot project, the formalization of the training curriculum and the provision of ECD learnerships on behalf of government departments and agencies, there is another countervailing trajectory. This concerns LETCEE's learning as an organisation, through support visits, parents' meetings, community education and the *Izingane Zethu* project, about the relation between ECD and community development. LETCEE's experience points to the vital importance of community-based support and provision, especially for vulnerable children who are not able to access government services.

This article concludes with a discussion of the challenges faced by LETCEE and other ECD organisations in relation to ECD policy and implementation.

LETCEE and the shifting ECD policy terrain

In 2001 the government finally brought out an *Education White Paper (5) on Early Childhood Development* (Department of Education, 2001). This puts forward the establishment of a national system of Reception Year for 5-year-

olds based in primary schools with a small community-based component. The legislation says very little about 0–4-year-olds, for whom responsibility is shifted to Department of Social Development. Subsidy to schools takes place via a direct grant-in-aid from provincial departments of education to school governing bodies (SGBs) at the rate of 70 per cent of what it costs for a Grade 1 child.

Porteus (2004, p.363) suggests that “the current strategy for ECD development may not be oriented to confront the inequities inherited from our past, and may serve to further entrench them”. In particular the institutionalization of ECD within schools through Grade R for 5-year-olds places community-based provision, which constituted 72 per cent of ECD provision in 2001 according to the National Audit, in jeopardy. LETCEE’s experience in the Greytown and Tugela Valley areas of Tugela Ferry and Ntunjambili, confirmed by the experience of Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE) elsewhere in the province, is that parents opt to send their 5-year-olds to Grade R at schools because it is cheaper and includes a free meal a day, rather than to community-based sites, which are not subsidised. There are also reports of underage children attending these schools and forgery of birth certificates to get children in. Grade R classes are in some cases overcrowded and include a range of ages. They are also often further away from children’s homes than community-based sites, and this subjects small children to the risks and expenses of transport. Schools benefit in terms of funding and staff allocations from increased Grade R numbers, but the conditions around Grade R classes are not necessarily in the best interests of the children or of the ECD field more broadly. There is an exodus of 5-year-old and other children from community-based ECD sites, many of which become unviable and have to close down, leaving 0–4-year-olds outside any system of provision. In addition, Grade R teachers are generally not drawn from the cadre of NGO-trained ECD educators, but from redeployed school teachers who have no ECD training and treat Grade R as a “watered down Grade 1” (James, 2004; Picken, 2004).

LETCEE’s engagement with provision of educator training and Grade R on behalf of the state, on the one hand, and ECD community development initiatives such as *Izingane Zethu*, on the other, entails an involvement with contrasting models and philosophies of ECD provision (Porteus, 2004). This raises questions about the theory of development that underpins LETCEE’s activities. The shift evident in LETCEE’s vision and aims suggests the adoption of a community development model of ECD underpinned by a

rights-based discourse, although this does not necessarily encompass all of its activities. This model, however, has implications for LETCEE's sustainability, both in terms of financial security and in terms of legitimacy among beneficiary communities.

Tandon (2001) identifies sustainability as one of the key dilemmas facing NGOs in the new millennium. He argues that NGOs' dependence on funding from traditional development-aid sources

is making NGOs become service providers in a restricted and narrow sense, so depriving them of their ability to maintain autonomous, independent perspectives and positions on a wide range of socio-political and economic issues. As NGOs become more involved in large-scale service delivery and/or become more reliant on official funding, one might expect some fall-out in their flexibility, speed of response, and ability to innovate. . . How does one maintain a sustainable economic base, a material base, which allows NGOs flexible funds and yet keeps them accountable to the society and the community in which they live, work and practise? (Tandon, 2001, p.57).

LETCEE, like other ECD NGOs, balances on a tight rope strung between the poles of government and community. On the one hand, the governmental policy of formalization, regulation and incorporation of ECD into the education system means that NGOs become government service providers with an uncertain future. For example, the government's moves to provide ECD training at Further Education and Training colleges threatens to close the space presently occupied by NGOs, and the Department of Education's failure to recognise NGO-trained level 4 ECD practitioners for Grade R provision in schools undermines the credibility of NGO training. NGO dependence on official funding through tenders and grants makes it more difficult for them to exercise an independent critical voice. On the other hand, NGOs are acutely aware of the needs within communities for ECD provision and support, particularly in the 0–4 year age group which is not catered for by Grade R and among vulnerable children, such as those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. However, the status of funding for ECD activities outside of state provision is precarious as funders refocus on other needs and foreign donors prioritize other parts of the globe.

In the light of this, there appears to be an important role for NGOs with direct experience of what is happening on the ground to challenge government policy and to advocate for a strengthening of community-based provision within an integrated system which utilises the capabilities of both civil society

and state formations. This would correspond with a shift to third generation and even fourth generation orientations, according to Korten's schema. Whether NGOs can play this critical role, given their increasing dependence on government tenders for survival and their incorporation into bureaucratic systems of state regulation, is open to question.

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Children without play

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Abstract

This article concerns a small-scale research study conducted during the first year of a playwork intervention with abandoned children living in a Romanian paediatric hospital. The children, ranging in age from one- to ten-years-old, had suffered chronic neglect and abuse. They had previously spent most of their lives tied in the same cot in the same hospital ward. They were poorly fed and their nappies were rarely changed. Although able to see and hear other children, they experienced little in the way of social interaction. The article highlights the benefits of the playwork project for the children's development. It also draws parallels between the behaviour patterns of these children and those exhibited by infant monkeys reared in isolation in research conducted by Harlow. The article quotes extensively from reflective diaries kept during the study in order to identify some of the most significant therapeutic elements of playwork.

Introduction

We recently completed a small scale research study examining the impact of a playwork project on a group of abandoned children living in a Romanian paediatric hospital (Webb and Brown, 2003). The children, ranging in age from one to ten years old, had suffered chronic neglect and abuse. They had previously spent most of their lives tied in the same cot in the same hospital ward. They were poorly fed and their nappies were rarely changed. Although able to see and hear other children, they experienced little in the way of social interaction. The focus of our study was the children's play development, which we assessed using an instrument developed for a previous study (Brown, 2003a). During a period when nothing changed in their lives, other than their introduction to the playwork project, the children themselves changed dramatically. Their social interaction became more complex; physical activity showed a distinct move from gross to fine motor skills; the children's understanding of the world around them was improved; and they began to play

in highly creative ways. They no longer sat rocking, staring vacantly into space. Instead they had become fully engaged active human beings.

It is our contention that playwork practice includes elements of both play and care, so we did not attempt to isolate the play elements from the care elements of the project. That would have been an impossible task, given the restrictions on our time and resources, quite apart from a number of ethical issues, and basic human sensitivity. We have subsequently been asked: was it playwork method itself, or the relationships that developed through the method, that benefited the children? That is not a useful distinction, since the development of relationships (both child–adult and child–child) is one of the basic aims of playwork. Our conclusion was straightforward, i.e. the children’s developmental progress was clearly identifiable, and apparently made possible through their experience of the playwork project.

The following article attempts to identify some of the most significant therapeutic elements of playwork by making detailed analysis of the play behaviours of this unique group of children. We quote extensively from reflective diaries kept during the study

Background

The playwork project started in the summer of 1999 and continues today. It started as a result of the concern of the newly appointed Director of the Sighisoara Paediatric Hospital, Dr Cornel Puscas. When confronted with a ward full of disturbed children sitting rocking in their own solitary worlds, he was reminded of one of the most powerful conclusions from Harlow's studies: “play is of utmost importance for the subsequent social well-being of the individual and those around him” (Suomi and Harlow, 1971, p.493). Hoping to help the children recover some sort of ‘normality’, he approached the White Rose Initiative (WRI) for funding to employ someone to play with the children. They employed Edit Bus, the first Romanian playworker, and brought her to Leeds Metropolitan University for a specially designed training course. Upon her return to Romania, Edit worked with the children for four months, before being joined by Sophie Webb for an extended period, and later by Fraser Brown for briefer periods. During the first year of the WRI project, the two Leeds Metropolitan researchers spent more than 500 hours working with Edit, and studying this small group of children. At this point it is worth re-emphasising the distinction between the ongoing WRI Therapeutic

Playwork Project, and the research study conducted during the first year of that project.

Methods

Our original intention was to help alleviate the suffering of the children, but it quickly became apparent that remarkable changes were occurring, and so we resolved to conduct a research study of the outcomes of the playwork project. Thus, the research project evolved out of the WRI project. The aim of the research was to assess developmental change during the first year of the project. It was possible to observe the children each day, noting the details of their play behaviours and social interaction. Observations had to be unobtrusive, for two reasons: firstly to avoid disrupting what the children were achieving in their play, and secondly to enable the recording of detailed notes at close quarters. In the early stages of the study, we used a form of participant observation where the participant's role is partially concealed (Steckler, 1999). Although our dual role was understood by the Romanian playworker and the director of the hospital, everyone else would have seen us as visiting playworkers from the United Kingdom. The ethical implications of this, especially in relation to “informed consent” and privacy (Alderson, 1995, pp.3-5), are not significant since the nurses had very little input into the children's lives, and the Director of the hospital had given permission for the study to take place. Although we had permission to use the children's medical records, their names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality. In the later stages of the study, we employed a slightly different observation technique, i.e. rotated peer observation, which saw us alternating tasks and roles – one hour working with the children, one hour non-participant observation, and vice versa.

The issues of language and culture, and the pros and cons of these methods in terms of their specific application to this study, have been explored in some depth elsewhere (Webb and Brown, 2003). However, it is worth restating our view that the role of the playworker is particularly appropriate with regard to participant observation. It is one of the guiding principles of playwork that the child's agenda should be regarded as the starting point for child-adult interactions (Hughes, 1996a). This means that playworkers naturally adopt Corsaro's “reactive strategy” (1985, p.28), which encourages researchers to avoid dominating the adult-child relationship. Corsaro suggested the adult's tendency to take control of the child's world often has a detrimental affect on

research outcomes. Instead, Corsaro recommended adult researchers should be responsive to the child, and set aside their adult prejudices. This is reflected in a second guiding principle of playwork, namely “negative capability” (Fisher, 2002), which will be discussed later. An effective playworker expects to pick up on signals rather than instigate them, which means the playworker is adopting an approach similar to that of the classic Tavistock Model (Greig and Taylor, 1999). This encourages researchers to interact with the subjects, and record the behaviours and feelings of all the participants, including themselves. In the Romanian context, we made extensive use of reflective diaries, not simply as a memory aid, but also to provide raw data.

All this enabled us to complete independent assessments of the play development of the children. Assessments were made using a variation on a system developed during an earlier study of children's play behaviours (Brown, 2003a). One hundred and fifty-four assessment questions, largely derived from play and playwork theory, were grouped under eleven general headings covering the full range of children's play behaviours and/or characteristics of play:

- Freedom
- Flexibility
- Socialisation
- Physical activity
- Intellectual stimulation
- Creativity and problem solving
- Emotional equilibrium
- Self discovery
- Ethical stance
- Adult–child relationships
- General appeal

The children were assessed in February, April and August 2000, using the questions in the assessment tool. Three separate forms were completed for each child. There was evidence of change in all the children, albeit to differing degrees, presumably according to a combination of their individual genetic make-up and their life experience. A detailed breakdown of each child's progress has been provided previously (Webb and Brown, 2003). This was extremely encouraging in terms of its implications for the recovery potential of abused and neglected children. It was also slightly chilling, since the medical records described most of the children as ‘retarded’. We were told

informally, although this was not confirmed in the medical records, that most of them were waiting for places in a children's mental hospital. Thankfully their remarkable progress meant that fourteen of the original sixteen children were eventually either adopted or fostered. Sadly, the other two were eventually transferred to a children's mental hospital. It has not been possible to conduct any longitudinal follow-up on the children. For the purposes of this article, it is sufficient to restate our conclusion – namely that the children's developmental progress was clearly identifiable, and apparently made possible through their experience of the playwork project.

Ethological parallels

The antecedents of the playwork project are interesting to explore, as they highlight some striking parallels with a well known series of ethological studies conducted by Harry Harlow during the 1950s and 1960s. Perhaps we should make it clear at the outset that we are not in any way condoning Harlow's experiments. However, he was conducting research on a primate species (monkeys) and it would be naive to ignore the lessons for our own primate species (human beings). Harlow's experiments were summarised in the article 'Monkeys Without Play' (Suomi and Harlow, 1971) – the conclusion being that “monkey play is of overwhelming importance”, and that the same must be true of human play. For this reason, Harlow's experiments have generally been considered to have great significance for playworkers.

In Harlow's laboratory, infant monkeys were raised in a variety of ways. Some were left with the mother and allowed to play with peers. This group showed no developmental differences from monkeys raised in the wild. Others were raised by the mother, but given no peer interaction. These infants developed disturbing patterns of behaviour as they matured. Yet another group of infants was isolated from their mothers, but allowed to play with their peers. So long as they also experienced some form of 'contact comfort', this group developed normally. The tactile input might be something as simple as a piece of soft cloth, and the play input might be as little as half-an-hour a day. This led Leonard Rosenblum, one of Harlow's collaborators, to suggest “there are three variables to love – touch, motion, and play – and if you can supply all of those, you are meeting a primate's needs” (Slater, 2004).

However, Harlow's experiments did not stop there. A further group of infant monkeys was raised in cages where they were able to see and hear other

monkeys, but not able to play with them, or interact in any meaningful way. Not surprisingly in such circumstances, the monkeys developed clear signs of disturbed behaviour. Thus,

Having no mother or peers to cling to these monkeys embrace their own bodies in intensive self-clasping. Having no maternal nipple to suckle, they suck and chew their own digits. . . Having no playmates to provide motor stimulation, wire-cage reared infants develop compulsive and stereotypic rocking behaviours, strikingly reminiscent of the human autistic child (Suomi and Harlow, 1971, p.492).

It is this group that we are particularly interested in. The parallels between the two sets of primates (monkey and human) are obvious. Our Romanian children had also lived most of their lives trapped behind bars (in this case their cots), in a hospital ward where they could see and hear other infants, but could not play with them. At the beginning of the playwork project, the children exhibited many similar behaviour patterns to those identified by Harlow. The following diary extract, which was written after Sophie's first visit to the hospital, illustrates the point:

The silence. Every room was full of children in cots, but it was so quiet. Even when we entered the room there was no sound from the children. They just looked at us. The smell of urine in every room was almost unbearable. *The emptiness.* Each room had just the cots with plastic mattresses. The children were dirty and wearing clothes that were too big for them. Some were wearing jumpers as trousers, and none of them were wearing shoes. There were rags around their waists, which I later found out were ripped up sheets tied to keep the nappies in place. These rags were also used to tie the children to the cots. Most children were sitting rocking and others were standing up banging the sides of their cots against the walls. Giving the children a cuddle was strange as they either held on too tightly, or they remained stiff and unfeeling.

(Reflective Diary, 6 February 2000)

Harlow found that when his infant monkeys were introduced to peers, they did not seem able to play. Rather, “they avoid social interchange and continue in their self-directed, self-satisfying behaviours” (Suomi and Harlow, 1971, p.492). When untied, fed and bathed, and then taken to a playroom, the Romanian children exhibited very similar behaviour patterns. Hence:

When I observed the children in the playroom, they were unaware of each other, fixed on their own activities – barely communicating. Some just sat and seemed bewildered and vacant.

(Reflective Diary, 6 February 2000)

Harlow concluded “no play makes for a very socially disturbed monkey” (Suomi and Harlow, 1971, p.492). We might just as easily conclude that no play makes for a very socially disturbed child.

When Harlow's infants reached physiological maturity they were “incompetent in virtually every aspect of monkey social activity” (Suomi and Harlow, 1971, p.492). For example, they showed little understanding of social rules or social hierarchy, often preferred to sit in a corner by themselves, and sometimes engaged in self-harm. In the early months of the playwork project, the Romanian children were showing signs of these disturbing behaviour patterns, as the following extracts illustrate:

Alexandru still can't keep focussed for very long. He started to build bricks on his own today, but after a few moments he was throwing them around again, which is dangerous for the other children. He doesn't seem to be aware of that.

(Reflective Diary, 15 February 2000)

Elena. . . is aware for a few seconds and then looks away. She also smiles a lot but never at the other children. She seldom cries or makes any loud noises. She stares at things endlessly.

(Reflective Diary, 16 February 2000)

While dressing Carol, I noticed the bruises on his back from him banging the cot. It was awful and covered his whole back. What must these poor kids be thinking when they are tied to the cots each night? Quite a lot of them harm themselves physically.

(Reflective Diary, 28 February 2000)

In contrast to all the evidence of social and physical damage, Harlow found that total isolation had “little apparent effect on the monkey's intellectual capabilities” (Suomi and Harlow, 1971, p.493). This was also borne out in our experience of the Romanian children. For example, Virgil exhibited many disturbing behaviour patterns, such as clutching his feet and rocking at the slightest sign of tension, or refusing to eat unless he was standing up. Nevertheless, the following extract suggests his intellectual capacities remained unimpaired:

Virgil appears to have made improvements – or maybe he could do these things anyway, but just hasn't been encouraged. He sat with Edit for a few hours and learnt some colours and numbers. He can concentrate for a long time, so he really absorbs what he hears. . . It's

also excellent how fluent his vocabulary is, considering that last Dec/Jan he couldn't say a word.

(Reflective Diary, 15 February 2000)

As a general rule, however, Harlow showed that isolation had a severely damaging impact on an infant monkey's chances of maturing into a stable functioning adult. Harlow and his collaborators suggested that play, or the absence of play, were an absolutely critical factor in this process. A little play in the developing years and the ill-effects of isolation appeared to be negated. The final sentence of their 1971 article is particularly relevant to our work:

Then pity the monkeys who are not permitted to play, and pray that all children will always be allowed to play (Suomi and Harlow, 1971, p.495).

Thus far we have presented a fairly shocking picture of abuse and neglect and its appalling consequences. The Romanian children with whom we worked, had not been able to play. The results were clearly catastrophic, and apparently irreversible. However, our study showed that recovery was still possible even for these severely deprived children.

Playwork

Some readers may be new to the concept of playwork, so we are including a few words of explanation. Playwork is rooted in an understanding that children learn and develop through their play. There are many instances in modern society where that process is interrupted or impaired. Playwork involves identifying and removing barriers to the play process, and enriching the child's play environment. Playwork is a generic term for a profession that encompasses those occupations where the medium of play is used as the major mechanism for redressing aspects of developmental imbalance (Brown and Webb, 2002). This may be something as straightforward as providing an after-school club for children who would otherwise have nowhere to play.

On the other hand it might be something as complex as creating an environment to assist the recovery of children who have suffered severe play deprivation. Hughes (2003) suggests play deprivation is the result of either "a chronic lack of sensory interaction with the world" or "a neurotic, erratic interaction". In other words the child's play experience is either "so impoverished by lack of stimulation that she is forced to search within her

own limited experience for the reality she needs”, or it is “so subject to changes outside of her control that her view of the world is one of instability or neurosis” (Hughes, 2003, pp.68-69). Prior to the start of the playwork project, the Romanian groups appear to have experienced an unpredictable combination of both these forms of play deprivation. They were deprived as a result of being tied in their cots for most of the day, with virtually no social interaction, but they were also treated in an erratic way by nurses who might feed them properly one day, but forget to feed them the next.

The therapeutic form of playwork that is needed to address such problems is quite distinct from play therapy. It follows certain guiding principles, which form the subheadings for the remainder of this article. The accompanying diary extracts illustrate the way in which these principles were put into practice for the benefit of the Romanian children.

Children learn and develop through their play

It is one of the most basic assumptions of the playwork profession that given the right conditions, children will learn and develop through their play. It is the role of a playworker to create those conditions, so that the play process can be effective. Depending on local circumstances, that could mean anything from feeding hungry children and changing their nappies, to providing toys and craft materials in order for them to explore their own creativity. The project workers in Romania did all those things. Ultimately the aim of playwork is to provide an environment that enables the child to grow towards self-fulfilment, referred to by Maslow (1973) as self-actualisation. For example,

Virgil is becoming more and more sociable and really enjoys drawing. He's started to develop his own ways. Two crayons at once for example. . . Something else I've noticed today. . . the children are playing together more than they have done. I'm wondering if it's got something to do with them now eating together. We put the soft toys on the floor again and they just lay on them chilling out. It was lovely to watch.

(Reflective Diary, 23 February 2000)

Many modern environments contain elements that act against the play process

The playworker's initial role is to analyse the child's environment in order to identify and remove any barriers to the play process. In most playwork projects, there are elements of the work that have little to do with play, but which nevertheless have to be addressed, otherwise the quality of the child's play experience is likely to be restricted, e.g. checking the safety of play equipment on an adventure playground is not in itself a playful activity, but most playworkers regard it as part of their role. Given the extreme levels of neglect and deprivation in the Romanian setting, the issue of 'barriers to play' was far more significant than might be encountered in most United Kingdom settings.

The Romanian project involved a range of elements, from basic human care to highly complex therapeutic play. We regard most of the tasks performed by the workers as crucial to the playwork role. This is not simply a matter of human sensitivity, but also a practical necessity. It is not possible for the play process to work effectively while children are malnourished, neglected and generally lacking social care. If the children were to benefit fully from their play, then the playworkers had to address many of their non-play problems as well. In our view, that is good playwork practice.

An enriched play environment holds greater potential for child development

The playworker is also concerned with enriching the child's play environment in order to stimulate the play process. This might contain elements of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976), or Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (1976). However, both those concepts imply a level of intervention that would not be accepted in the playwork approach. Hughes suggests that playworkers should aim for "a low adult to child approach ratio" (Hughes, 1996a, p.51). Thus, enriching the play environment is not so much about aiding specific elements of learning, but adopting an holistic approach to learning. There are a number of factors that playworkers have to take into account when considering how best to create such an environment. For the purposes of our research study, we grouped them under the eleven subheadings mentioned previously, i.e. freedom; flexibility; socialisation and social interaction; physical activity; intellectual stimulation; creativity and problem solving; emotional equilibrium; self discovery; ethical

stance; adult/child relationships; and general appeal (e.g. humour, colour, etc.). The following extracts illustrate the way in which the playworker's gentle interaction helped to stimulate the children and enable them to take control of their own environment:

I found some feathers in the cupboard today and went around tickling them. . . Virgil was really afraid at first and threw his arms up shouting, but when I tickled my own arm and showed him it was okay – he was more curious. The look on his face when he felt comfortable to feel the feather was absolutely beautiful. . . so fresh and innocent.

(Reflective Diary, 17 February 2000)

Today I sat Elena on the car and she stayed there, so I showed Carol how to push her and then they were able to do it on their own! I think it was a real step for Elena, as she never 'plays' with the others she just touches them every so often. Until today this WAS her play ... a beginning that needed nurturing?

(Reflective Diary, 24 March 2000)

Compound flexibility, the theory of loose parts and the Portchmouth principle

There are a several ways in which the play environment may be enriched. For many playworkers the most important element in their work is *compound flexibility*, i.e. “the interrelationship between a flexible/adaptable environment and the gradual development of flexibility/adaptability in the child” (Brown, 2003a, p.53). According to Sutton-Smith, the function of play is “adaptive variability” (1997, p.231). Taking these two concepts together, we can infer that the role of the playworker is to create flexible environments which are substantially adaptable or controllable by the children. One way of doing this is to ensure there are lots of ‘loose parts’ in the play environment. When explaining his ‘theory of loose parts’, Nicholson suggests “in any environment both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it” (1971, p.30). Thus, a room full of cardboard boxes is more likely to stimulate creative play, than a fixed climbing frame. This concept links to Vygotsky's (1976) zone of proximal development, via the Portchmouth principle. Portchmouth (1969, p.7) says “It helps if someone, no matter how lightly, puts in our way the means of making use of what we find.” He gives the example of providing buckets and spades for children to play on the beach. There is no need to tell them what to do. The play environment contains its own play cues

in such circumstances. The following extract illustrates the way in which children made use of the inherent flexibility of a box (actually a rubbish bin) to create two games of their own.

Whilst Ion was sitting in a big yellow box Virgil started to play a game with him, involving an imaginary object. He pretended to receive something from Edit and then took it back to Ion in the box, who took it from him and put it in his lap. The spontaneous interaction between them both was fascinating to watch. Afterwards Virgil continued playing with the yellow plastic box, by putting it on his head and walking around the room. . . He created a sort of obstacle course out of the cots and tables.

(Reflective Diary, 25th February 2000)

Negative capability, the suspension of judgement and prejudice

Most adults who come into contact with children bring their own agenda to that relationship. For example, teachers have an obligation to teach the national curriculum (a set of adult priorities). Doctors, social workers, even parents, invariably have their own adult priorities. The playworker is unusual in as much as she/he attempts to suspend personal prejudice, and go along with the flow of the children's needs and tastes. This brings us back to the concept of 'negative capability' mentioned previously. The poet John Keats (1817) suggested this was a characteristic of all creative minds. He recommended the complete suspension of all prejudices and preconceptions as a prelude to opening up the creative flow of the mind. In the modern era this is reflected in the words of Miles Davis the jazz musician who was asked about his unique ability. His explanation was this: "You need to know your horn, know the chords, know all the tunes – then forget about all that, and just play" (Sanjek, 1990, cited in Graue and Walsh, 1998, p.411). The similarity between this approach to creativity, and one of the most fundamental aspects of the child-adult relationship in playwork, was identified by Fisher (2002). She suggested that playworkers have to guard against entering the play environment with their own preconceptions and prejudices. Only then will they truly be there for the child. This approach requires a great sensitivity to the learning potential of the playwork setting, and means the playworker has to be prepared to stand back when others might be inclined to rush in:

The children do fight a lot and I only intervene if it gets too violent or if I can see they won't work it out themselves. I think they learn more from their own reactions than from adults at times and it's good for them to work out their own disagreements.

(Reflective Diary, 22 March 2000)

Else and Sturrock (1998) take this one stage further highlighting the dangers of playworkers bringing their own childhood-based neuroses into the setting. It is often the case that those with whom we work are socially and economically disadvantaged or emotionally vulnerable in some way. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that the adult brings no 'baggage' to the relationship. If a child begins to share a problem with the playworker, and the worker finds herself saying "that happened to me too", then her value to that child is doubtful. In all probability, she will do more harm than good. The playworker must be there entirely for the good of the child.

The child's agenda has to be taken as the starting point

For the playworker in a therapeutic setting, it is especially important to take the child's agenda as the starting point for interactions. Hughes suggests that both the "content and the intent" of play should be determined by the child, and that playwork should be "child-empowering" (1996a, pp.22-23). In the child's daily life, play is his/her only experience of being in control of events. If playworkers are not to "adulterate" that experience, they have to ensure that wherever possible they are following the child's agenda (Else and Sturrock, 1998). It follows that in most circumstances the playworker would expect to adopt an approach of "preparation followed by withdrawal" (Hughes, 1996, p.23). However, the Romanian children required a stronger presence over a more extended period. Nevertheless, it remained the case that most of our interventions were a response to the specific play behaviours of each child. The following example refers to a ten-year-old child who was too frightened to walk independently. He was obsessed with shoes, and the playworker was able to work with that with dramatic results:

I have played 'shoes' with Nicolae for the past two weeks and that appears to have led him to trust me. Today, after playing 'shoes' yet again, I stood him in the middle of the room, about four steps away from me. Usually he just sits down, but this time he walked towards me with his arms stretched out for a hug. I think these may have been his first independent steps (after 10 years!).

(Reflective Diary, 24th February 2000)

Sympathy, empathy, affective attunement, mimesis and making appropriate responses to children's play cues

Until recently most theorists assumed social interaction was a skill developed by toddlers. Now Trevarthen (1996) has shown that babies are in fact 'coherent' as soon as they are born. They immediately show interest in their environment, especially other human beings. Very young babies are actually more interested in human beings than objects (a distinction not made by Piaget). Thus, babies are social actors, not passive beings, as had generally been assumed. Trevarthen has also shown it is possible to interpret the meaning of a baby's actions simply by observing vocalisations and gestures. He agrees with Adam Smith's (1759) idea that human beings are innately sympathetic to each other, and suggests it is the human capacity for 'mimesis' that makes this interpretation possible. Through fantasy, invention and symbolic play humans are able to use parts of the body to describe anything. For example, we all know what it means if a child is running round the playground yelling 'broooooom. . . broooooom. . .', and we can easily interpret the accompanying actions. To quote Donald (1991, p.168-69):

Mimesis rests on the ability to produce conscious, self-initiated, representational acts. . . Thus, mimesis is fundamentally different from imitation and mimicry in that it involves the *invention* of intentional representations. When there is an audience to interpret the action, mimesis also serves the purpose of social communication.

Human beings are probably the only animals able to substitute behaviour for action in this way. Trevarthen (1996) suggests that mimesis is a talent which gradually develops, and that play is the catalyst. In other words, we learn how to interpret other people's play cues while we are playing. This is a skill that is fundamental to effective playwork practice (Else and Sturrock, 1998).

Today I was sitting on the floor tossing a ball gently into the air. Carol was watching me intently. First he came close. Then he backed away, all the time keeping eye contact. This was a clear play cue ('throw it to me'). I flicked the ball to him. The thrill of having someone respond to his play cue was immense. He became so excited he crammed the ball into his mouth, before returning it to me for another go.

(Reflective Diary, 4th August 2000)

Similarly, Daniel Stern's concept of affective attunement (Stern, 1985) may be something that we learn through our play. Stern did not suggest that. He

focused on the mother-baby relationship, and was interested in the way mothers attune with their babies rhythms. That makes it possible to demonstrate to the baby ways in which its actions might be further developed. For example, if an object is just out of reach, a baby may have to make a double movement in order to grasp it. The mother is likely to clap her hands twice, or make a sound 'ah-ah', in exactly the same rhythm as the baby's grasping action. This apparently simple interaction contains some very complex subtexts. The obvious message is, 'I am in tune with you', but there is a more subtle and far more powerful message, 'I can help you translate your actions into a different form'. Stern linked most of his ideas to the mother-baby interaction. However, we have evidence from our work in Romania that affective attunement can easily be achieved by an empathetic adult working with a severely disturbed child. Indeed, it is our view that sympathy, empathy, mimesis, affective attunement and the sensitive interpretation of play cues are skills and abilities that are easily absorbed and developed during play. It is doubtful whether they could be learnt in the classroom.

Creating relationships and building the child's self-esteem

One of the most significant elements of the playwork role is the way in which relationships are made with the children. If the child-adult relationship is effective, there is a good chance of not only helping children with their problems, but also of raising their self esteem generally. Roberts (1995) has attempted to apply some of Piaget's thinking about schemata to this subject. Although she focuses on the world of pre-school practice, her ideas have merit for playwork in general. She suggests that small children will develop a set of cognitive structures that favour one schema. They may be enclosers, transporters, connectors, etc. This has implications for the way we approach specific children. For example, a child who spends most of the time throwing stones around, may simply be a 'trajectory' child who has been offered no other way of connecting with his/her basic schema. A playworker who provides a set of skittles, or a game of cricket, may be able to address the situation effectively, without recourse to disciplinary controls. Roberts (1995) makes it clear that children do not favour one schema to the exclusion of all others. Nevertheless her approach highlights the need for provision to match the requirements of the client. In the playground setting an 'enclosing' child might be stimulated by opportunities to build dens; a 'rotater' might like the roundabout etc. Roberts (1995) goes on to suggest that by responding to these favoured schemata we are giving the child a powerful message, i.e. "I respect

the things that matter to you". By so doing the playworker can help to build the child's self esteem. For example:

Virgil was happy about playing with the crayons, he was laughing about taking them out of the box and putting them in again. He likes doing this more than using them to colour in!
He does it with other toys he plays with, always has to tidy!

(Reflective Diary, 22 February 2000)

Cultural awareness - macro and micro

Among other things, Else (2001) suggests that, "with knowledge based on child development" therapeutic playworkers need to have "cultural competence" – of their own and others' cultures. He is not simply referring to the need to understand and respect the culture of a different race or religion. He is also talking about cultures within cultures. Thus, in the Romanian example, it was not only important to develop an understanding of national characteristics, but also the culture of the local town, and the paediatric hospital. Even the nurses on the abandoned children's ward had their own culture, which had to be respected otherwise life could be made very difficult. Here is an extreme example of the lengths that we had to go to, in order to be allowed to stay and work with these children.

I think the hardest part of the day for me is having to put them back in their cots again, but it will create even more aggravation if I don't, and that could ruin everything. People would probably think I'm awful for doing it, but I've had to accept that this is part of their system whether I like it or not. I know the nurses will tie them back in after we leave.

(Reflective Diary, 25th February 2000)

Clearly, this raises an issue about the ethics of conducting a research study where children continue to be abused. Unfortunately, there was nothing we could have done to stop the nurses tying the children to their cots. Nor was there anything in our approach that added to the abuse. We were not present while the children were tied to their cots. We just had to deal with the consequences. On a positive note, the longer term impact of the WRI project has been considerable. The nurses stopped tying the children to their cots during the second year of the project. The children are now well fed, and their nappies are changed regularly. The hospital has recently adopted a policy of finding abandoned children foster placements within six months.

Conclusions

The following extract was written towards the end of Sophie's first period of working at the hospital. Considering these were the same children who had been tied to their cots, rocking and staring into space only a few months previously, it illustrates the vast change that had taken place in a very short period of time.

The thing I'm going to miss most of all is coming into the room in the morning. Sometimes Carol or Ion are still sleeping, and it's lovely to be there when they open their eyes. When we open the door there are lots of shouts of happiness and excitement, jumping up and down in their cots. The noise only starts when we open the door, or when they see us through the window – they are so quiet before that. The first thing I do is go around saying good morning to each one and untie them from their cots and get them on the floor. There are lots of morning cuddles.

(Reflective Diary, 29th March 2000)

In less than a year, these chronically abused and neglected children made the sort of progress that many experts assumed would be impossible. During the period of the research study, the only change in the children's life experience was the playwork project. Therefore, it is sensible to ask what it is about playwork that has contributed to these changes.

Clearly the children's learning and development resulted substantially from the playworkers' ability to create an enriched play environment that was substantially supportive of the play process. The playworkers' use of negative capability, their suspension of judgement and prejudice, coupled with a determination to take each child's agenda as his/her own starting point, helped to create a good quality playwork environment – in other words, an environment that offered adaptability to the children, and so encouraged the compound flexibility process. Through their empathy, and their ability to interpret the children's play cues effectively, the playworkers were able to create strong trusting relationships, which in turn helped to enhance the children's self-esteem. If such approaches were applied in a typical playwork setting in the United Kingdom, we would expect children to learn and develop naturally. The remarkable thing about our experience in Romania was that this straightforward playwork approach appeared to work just as effectively with some of the most play-deprived children in the world.

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Social play by young at-risk children: a microgenetic approach to the study of emergent collaboration and numeracy

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Abstract

A sociocultural perspective was taken to examine the development of social play and emergent mathematics during social play with students at-risk. A longitudinal experimental design was carried out including a microgenetic study of the play sessions. Nineteen dyads from five primary schools and eight dyads from six special primary schools participated in the study. The dyads will be followed through from Grade 2 to 3. The subjects were selected with respect to age, language development, intelligence score and temperament. Then dyads were matched within classrooms according to sex and age. The dyads in the experimental condition took part in six 20-minute play sessions over a period of three weeks followed by a seventh session two months after the sixth one. The dyads in the control condition were studied in the first and seventh session only. Each experimental session included an invitation to build a zoo using toy-animals and wooden blocks. The study is still in progress. The results with respect to comparison of mathematical knowledge at the end of Grade 2 are presented. Moreover, collaboration and emergent mathematics during play sessions from two dyads are described and discussed.

Introduction

Sociocultural theory will be discussed to frame the general research question that will be explored, namely, whether social play develops differently with students at-risk attending a regular primary school as opposed to students at-risk attending a special primary school. As the data collection is currently in progress, the paper examines one of the hypotheses stated which is that emerging collaboration during play is related to emerging mathematical knowledge.

Sociocultural theory and the meaning of play

Within sociocultural theory, culture is understood as the created environment of people. It contains views, meanings, and ways of collaborating, rules and values as well as visible 'products', for example, signs and symbols in the material world. According to Vygotsky (1978), the child needs to interact with this created environment in order to learn. Results of learning thus comprise knowledge that is socially constructed. There is a dynamic exchange between individual meaning making and the task at hand. The result of this exchange is displayed in increasing stability of performance related to individual variability (Rogoff, 1998).

Within this framework, play is a form of imitation. As a culturally meaningful practice, the child creates zones of proximal development during play (Vygotsky, 1978). Children do not experience feelings of anxiety as they act out or imitate only what they can handle. Play is meaningful for development. Children experiment with their environment, materials, and language. They experience social processes and try to influence them. They can take initiatives and try to resolve problems to get acquainted with the cultural customs and the role that they are allowed to take (Van Oers and Wardekker, 1997).

When undertaken in a classroom, it seems logical that play also reveals how children experience the classroom in that they play in order to understand the social practices they are experiencing. The quality of play as seen in the skills children use to solve social and cognitive problems during play have been found to be related to future success in school as well as to the ability to work collaboratively together with colleagues later in life (Hannikainen, 1998; Lloyd and Nowe, 2003; Van Oers, 1997; Verba, 1998; Wyver and Spence, 1999).

Based on the work of Piaget, Vygotsky and Parten, Göncü (1993) suggests that social play requires intersubjectivity. This emerges in the third year of life when solitary play gives way to social play, and children achieve intersubjectivity in social play by negotiating their ideas with one another. Social play thus is a major developmental task, as children become part of a classroom and a school community.

In social play, peers are often approximately equal in status and competence. There are different kinds of cooperative formats related to joint role-play that reveal that cooperation develops from asymmetrical interactions into

symmetrical co-elaboration. Various social, motivational and cognitive factors become intertwined and balanced during cooperation as opinions and intentions related to goal orientation, meanings and management are shared (Verba, 1993, 1994, 1998). The children's play and learning are not cognitive activities in themselves, but they come about related to situational factors, such as activity, time and actors.

Göncü (1993) studied how social play evolves with 3-year-olds compared to 4-year-olds by investigating how play interactions are expanded. His study included pairs of children of the same sex from one regular primary school who were friends, according to their teachers. He showed that there was a significant effect of age with respect to length of sequences of social play. His study was an interesting start to studying social play with youngsters. However, the topic of situatedness of social play was not addressed in his investigation. Kontos and Keyes (1999) and Nolen (2001) who included environmental characteristics reveal that the quality of the classroom adds to chances that children will profit from interventions that take place in the classroom.

As children become more aware of cultural tools used by the adults surrounding them, it can be expected that emerging interest in reading, writing and mathematics is revealed during social play. The interactions displayed can show emerging number sense when concepts related to role play are discussed as well acted out during counting and discussing numbers of toys (Burchinal, Roberts, Riggins, Zeisel, Neebe and Bryant, 2000; Malofeeva, Ciancio and Jeanne, 2001). Since the behaviours may come forward during social play and during individual play whilst using private speech, we expect that social play in itself reinforces the appearance of utterances that are related to emergent mathematics.

Young children at-risk for learning difficulties in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, children enter primary education at the age of four. One per cent of all young children attends special primary education by the time formal academic learning of reading and writing starts at the age of six in Grade 3. Although these children at-risk for learning difficulties appear to have special educational needs, it is not clear whether placement in a special primary school is the solution to their problems. Moreover, enormous

differences exist between provinces on the number of children referred to special education that cannot be explained by rural versus urban or socio-economic status (Van der Aalsvoort, Van Tol and Thomeer-Bouwens, 2002). We refer to these children as “at-risk” because they:

... manifest some or all of the following behavioral characteristics: difficulty in using language fluently and effectively in a range of situations, inability to attend to and persevere with tasks and activities, lack of purposefulness, imagination and variety in play, lack of initiative; lack of ‘normal’ social and emotional maturity (Elliott and Hall, 1997, p.198).

Accurate placement in special education of these children is difficult for several reasons. Firstly, reliable prediction of success or failure to become readers and writers is difficult. Children develop at their individual pace and seemingly slow or quick progress can be caused both by endogenous and environmental factors (Hauser-Cram, Bronson and Upshur, 1993; Kontos and Keyes, 1999; Pianta and Stuhlman, 2004). In other words, some of the so-called students at-risk will indeed become poor readers and writers, however, others will not. Secondly, the rationale underlying placement recommendations at a special primary school at a young age is that there are clear-cut advantages to the child being among comparable performing peers. Yet, results of teaching homogeneous groups of ‘slow developers’, as opposed to heterogeneous groups of students are mixed. Some studies have revealed that attending school with comparable performing peers will make it easier for the child to feel at ease (Chandler, Lubeck and Fowler, 1992; Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman and Kinnish, 1996). Other findings suggest that education in the early years is the result of a challenging environment with a heterogeneous group of students. A child may feel challenged by this environment irrespective of adult involvement (Kontos, Burchinal, Howes, Wisseh and Galinsky, 2002; Stagnitti and Unsworth, 2000). On the other hand, however, the school as an environment can play a negative role in that children at-risk may be perceived as unresponsive to teaching efforts (Keogh, 1982 cited in Coplan, Barber & Lagacé-Séguin, 1999).

The arguments listed above are at the centre of discussions in the Netherlands about decision-making related to the referral of young children to special education. The question is what type of information is helpful in deciding whether a special primary school suits the needs of a child at-risk for learning difficulties.

Our study aims at clarifying the role of school-type with young children at-risk since the Dutch school system provides two types of academic environment for young children at-risk: regular and special primary education. Grades 1 and 2 in both types of education offer a comparable programme during a school day. Each day involves whole-group sessions. These sessions include storybook reading, singing songs, and children talking about everyday experiences. Birthday celebrations and festivities can also be part of these sessions. The rest of the day includes tasks that elicit experiences of emergent literacy and mathematics alternated by snack time, playtime in the classroom, and playtime outside. Why would we expect differences between these school types? We found that differential influence occurs because of the time available to interact with peers and teachers (Van der Aalsvoort, Van Tol and Thomeer-Bouwens, 2002). The mean group size of classes in regular primary schools is about 25 compared to a maximum of 15 in those of special primary schools. Teachers in special primary schools tend to interact with each child individually more often in their aim to respond to the child's special needs. At the same time, the child loses opportunities to interact with peers. Moreover, children placed in special education often take part in individual therapy sessions such as speech therapy and locomotor therapy, which also decrease chances to be involved with peers. We do not know whether these differences have an impact upon the child's developmental progress.

Design of the study

The general research question to be answered is whether social play develops differently by students at-risk attending regular primary schools as opposed to their peers in special primary schools. In addition, the study explored one sub-question, namely, whether an intervention that includes opportunities to play improves mathematical knowledge as assessed by standardized achievement tests.

The study included an intervention to evoke social play. We planned a longitudinal experimental design including a microgenetic study. The design involved dyads of young at-risk children from regular and special education in two conditions. The dyads of the experimental condition took part in seven play sessions and those of the control condition participated in two sessions only.

To allow for statistical group comparison, subject selection was based on intelligence scores, passive language development, and temperament. Every student from a classroom was tested with respect to passive vocabulary and intelligence to identify children at-risk. In addition, the teachers rated the children's temperament to exclude children who were either too introverted and at-risk for communication disorders, or too extroverted and at-risk for behavioural disorders. The children selected were then matched according to age and sex for dyads within classrooms. Dyads were chosen randomly to be part of the experimental or control condition. At least one of the dyads was part of the control condition if there were more than three dyads within a classroom. The design of the study controlled for quality of home and school environment as co-variables. Home environment was rated by collecting data on education and occupation of both parents, and the pedagogical quality within the school was also rated.

A play-session typically took place in a room separate from the classroom and the room included a video camera. Before the first session, each dyad was made familiar with the camera. Next, a task was offered to trigger the children's interest in materials that aimed at eliciting social play. The researcher said: "The two of you can play now. Do you see the blocks and toy-animals? Can you build a zoo for me? It's up to you to think about how to build the zoo and which animals are going to live in it". The researcher was present during the sessions but she did not participate or interfere in the unfolding activities. A dyad was allowed to stop playing after 20 minutes or when one of the children asked permission to leave the room. The researcher then said: "You built a lot of things! I will make a photo of your zoo so that you can play with it again next time". Then she escorted the dyad back to the classroom. In the next session, the configuration left behind by the dyad at the end of a session was built again by the researcher. She asked the dyad whether she had done this correctly, and invited the dyad to start playing again. Table 1 on the next page shows the design of the study.

Table 1: Design of the longitudinal study

| | | 3 weeks of play sessions | | | | | | | | 1 session 8 weeks after session 6 | June 2004 | March 2005 |
|-----|---|----------------------------|---|------|----|----|----|----|------|--|--------------|------------|
| | | 1 month of selection | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | C | S | P1 O | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 O | P7 O | AP1 | AP2 + P8 |
| RPS | E | + | + | + + | + | + | + | + | + + | + + | + | + + |
| | C | + | + | + + | | | | | | + + | + | + + |
| SPS | E | + | + | + + | + | + | + | + | + + | + + | + | + + |
| | C | + | + | + + | | | | | | + + | + | + + |

- RPS Regular primary school
- SPS Special primary school
- E-C E = experimental group; C = control group
- C Co-variables: Early Childhood Environment Rating Schedule (ECERS), Socio-economic status (SES)

- S Selection of subjects: Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices; subtest of Language of Children in Kindergarten; School Behaviour Evaluation List.
- P1-P6 Play session 1 to 6
- P7 Play session 7
- O Observation of the dyad in the classroom after a play session

- AP1 Academic performance: Ordering, Number sense, Passive language development, Phonological awareness

- AP2+P8 Play session 8 and tests to assess academic performance: Passive language development; Technical reading and spelling; Mathematics

The microgenetic study within the experimental design aimed at investigating the emergence of social play as a developmental process. According to Siegler and Crowley (1991) and Siegler and Svetina (2002), many observations in a short period of time need to be made, followed by in-depth analyses both qualitative and quantitative to grasp the process that may underlie a change, such as improved skills. Therefore, the play sessions were planned in a period of three weeks followed by a ‘retention’ session after two months in the research conditions to control for maturation. As each session was videotaped, the tapes allowed us to transcribe verbal utterances and nonverbal behaviours displayed. Next, the transcripts were analysed with respect to social play and emergent mathematics (see Instrument section). This procedure permitted us to study social play and emergent mathematics developing over time.

Instruments

As the study is still in progress, we will describe the instruments pertinent to the study until the end of Grade 2.

Passive vocabulary: Subtest of Language of Children in Kindergarten (Van Kuijk, 1996)

The norm-referenced test is administered individually. The child is offered two practice items before test items are presented. The test includes four subtests: two for expressive language development and two for passive language development. The passive vocabulary test was used to select participants. In the test, the child is offered four pictures, and the tester provides one word. The child should point at the picture that represents the word. Scores ranged from one (high) to five (low). All children from one classroom were tested to identify who would participate in the study. The cut-off score was a score lower than three.

Raven Coloured Progressive Matrices (Raven, 1965)

This is a nonverbal intelligence test that can be administered to children aged four to ten. The test contains 36 items. In each item the child is asked to point at a picture that would complete a series of three pictures. The choice made requires analogical reasoning. The raw score of each child was compared to Van Bon's standard norms for the Dutch population (Van Bon, 1986). Scores ranged from 9.9 (high) to 0.9 (low). All children from one classroom were tested to identify who would participate in the study. The cut-off range was a score higher than two and lower than six.

The School Behaviour Evaluation List (Bleichrodt, Resing and Zaal, 1993)

The instrument contains 52 rating scales that refer to four factors: extroversion, task behavior, emotional stability and agreeableness. Teachers rated each child separately and then the factors were traced and related to norm tables. Factor scores could range from one to nineteen. Children rated between four and sixteen for each factor selected.

Pedagogical quality

The schools were rated using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS) (Harms, Clifford and Cryer, 1998). This rating scale includes seven categories that can be rated from one (poor quality-level) to seven (high quality level). The categories are: space and furnishings, personal care and routines, language-reasoning, activities, interaction, programme structure, and

parents and staff. The ECERS was rated in each classroom of the school that took part in the study. The categories parents and staff, however, were rated at school level only. The Pearson Correlation Quoefficient was used to check inter rater reliability by rating four classrooms from different schools twice. The ratings were highly comparable: SPS-1: $r = .95$; SPS-2: $r = .99$; RPS-1: $r = .93$; RPS-2: $r = .98$; RPS-3: $r = .98$.

Socio-economic status (SES)

The socio economic status of each parent was rated using the Standard International Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status (Ganzeboom, De Graaf and Treiman, 1992). The index contains four levels of education and six levels of occupation. The levels of education ranged from one (low level) to four (high level) whereas level of occupation ranged from one (low level) to six (high level). Both indexes were computed for the fathers and the mothers separately.

Mathematical knowledge

Ordering (CITO, Van Kuyk, 1997). The test is administered individually. The child is offered two practice items before test items are presented. Then page one of the test booklet of the Grade 2 test is presented. When a child failed on more than two items of the four on the first page, the child was presented the test booklet of Grade 1. The booklet contains 42 items. Each item requires that the child points at the picture that fits with the question. Although the booklet can be used as a classroom assessment tool, the children were tested individually. The norm tables for Grade 2 students were used to derive the norm score. A score was given to reveal skill and performance related to comparable age groups. Scores ranged from one (high) to five (low).

Number sense (Borghouts-Van Erp, Bakermans, Coumans and Minkenberg, 1982). The task includes the principles of number sense as suggested by Piaget. They are: counting to ten and back (six items); sense of measure (eight items); conservation (six items); correspondence (six items); classification (four items); seriation (seven items). The results on the items solved correctly on number sense were used for the study as well as the score on counting.

Analyses of the transcripts made from the videotapes

Collaboration during play was determined using an adjustment of the procedure of Verba (1994). All play-sessions were transcribed, followed by a three-step procedure.

- Step 1: Assessing episodes in the transcripts
- Step 2: Assessing cognitive level in behaviour displayed in the transcripts as realism or play
- Step 3: Level of collaboration

Collaboration during play was examined at two levels:

- Simple: Seeking contact: saying something and being heard; reciprocal eye-contact; verbal communication may be part of the exchange but adds little information to the interaction.
- Deep: Seeking contact: saying something and being heard; reciprocal eye-contact followed by verbal communication followed by planning (proposing ideas, and/or giving directions, and/or carrying them out; and/or evaluating role play).

Emerging mathematical knowledge was assessed by identifying utterances referring to mathematical meaning making, such as numerical relationships, and utterances relating to number sense during episodes. Moreover, utterances as expressions of private speech were also identified with respect to numerical relationships and number sense. The numbers of utterances found were added to the data collection.

Participants

The study was carried out with 56 children who attended one of five regular or one of six special primary schools from different regions in Holland. The scores for the research conditions are listed in Table 2 on the next page.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations by school and by research condition

| | RPS: e-condition | | RPS: c-condition | | SPS: e-condition | | SPS: c-condition | |
|---------------------|------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|
| N | 24 | | 14 | | 12 | | 6 | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Age | 67,0 | 2,83 | 69,0 | 4,81 | 71,0 | 7,45 | 74,0 | 2,34 |
| Raven score | 4,1 | 0,88 | 4,3 | 0,85 | 4,4 | 1,10 | 3,8 | 1,38 |
| Language score | 3,1 | 1,53 | 3,2 | 1,37 | 3,8 | 1,55 | 4,0 | 0,82 |
| Temperament: | | | | | | | | |
| Extraversion | 10,6 | 2,36 | 10,8 | 2,23 | 10,9 | 3,20 | 11,3 | 1,50 |
| Task behaviour | 9,0 | 2,33 | 11,1 | 1,92 | 9,9 | 1,93 | 7,3 | 1,06 |
| Agreeableness | 8,8 | 2,77 | 9,9 | 2,84 | 9,5 | 3,06 | 7,8 | 2,22 |
| Emotional stability | 10,0 | 2,40 | 9,7 | 2,43 | 8,1 | 1,78 | 12,0 | 1,83 |

The school conditions were comparable with respect to all variables except for age ($F(3, 52) 4,905, p .004$), task behaviour ($F(3, 50) 21, 325, p .006$), and emotional stability ($F(3, 50) 18,423, p .019$). These results indicate that the selection procedure did not always lead to comparable groups.

When the experimental conditions were compared within school condition, task behaviour was higher in the control condition of the regular primary schools ($t(36) -2,853, p .005$) compared to the experimental condition. When the experimental conditions were compared within school condition, age ($t(14) 2,359, p .033$) was higher in the experimental condition of the special primary schools compared to the control condition. Emotional stability ($t(14) -3,787, p .002$) was lower in the experimental condition of the special primary schools compared to the control condition. These results were taken into account by using analyses of covariance with respect to the variables compared.

As the participants had been selected from eleven schools, we compared the pedagogical quality of the research conditions. In addition, we compared socio-economic status (SES). The results are listed in Table 3

Table 3: The means and standard deviations of the ECERS ratings by category and the SES by school and by research condition

| | RPS: e-condition | | RPS: c-condition | | SPS: e-condition | | SPS: c-condition | |
|------------------------|------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|
| N | 24 | | 14 | | 12 | | 6 | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| ECERS: | | | | | | | | |
| Space & furnishings | 6,2 | 0,48 | 6,0 | 0,44 | 5,7 | 0,58 | 5,8 | 0,52 |
| Personal care routines | 6,0 | 0,77 | 5,9 | 0,09 | 5,4 | 1,45 | 5,2 | 1,33 |
| Language-reasoning | 6,1 | 0,94 | 5,5 | 1,21 | 5,5 | 0,89 | 6,3 | 0,22 |
| Activities | 5,0 | 0,69 | 4,7 | 0,45 | 4,2 | 0,56 | 4,7 | 0,34 |
| Interaction | 6,1 | 1,22 | 6,4 | 0,51 | 5,6 | 1,09 | 6,3 | 0,85 |
| Programme structure | 6,7 | 0,40 | 5,6 | 1,14 | 6,3 | 0,57 | 6,7 | 0,30 |
| Parents and staff | 5,5 | 0,61 | 5,6 | 0,61 | 5,6 | 1,01 | 5,3 | 0,78 |
| SES index: | | | | | | | | |
| Father | 6,0 | 2,39 | 5,7 | 1,98 | 6,3 | 2,63 | 4,3 | 0,58 |
| Mother | 5,6 | 2,12 | 5,6 | 2,19 | 5,0 | 0,00 | 4,7 | 0,58 |

When the experimental conditions were compared with respect to activities ($F(3, 52) 5,301, p .003$), the groups differed remarkably in favour of the regular primary schools whereas programme structure ($F(3, 52) 3,863, p .000$) was higher in the special primary schools. When the experimental conditions were compared within school condition, programme structure was rated higher in the experimental condition of the regular primary schools ($t(14,831) 3,500, p .003$) compared to the control condition. When the experimental conditions were compared within school condition, language-reasoning ($t(13,470) -2,714, p .017$) was higher in the control condition of the special primary schools than in the experimental condition. Activities ($t(16) -2,344, p .032$) were rated lower in the experimental condition of the special primary schools compared to the control condition. Regarding SES, no significant differences were found between schools and between conditions. These results were taken into account by using analyses of covariance with respect to the variables compared.

Research procedure

The principals of several schools for regular primary and special primary education were asked to participate in the study. When the principals agreed, the teachers from Grade 1 were addressed. As soon as they gave their consent, the research procedure was explained to each teacher. Then a letter that was composed by the research team informed the parents about the study, and they were invited to give their consent. After having received their written consent, the assessment of child characteristics began. Due to the strict selection procedure only five regular primary schools and six special primary schools could participate in the study. Then the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (CERS) was administered including an inter rater reliability check. Next the play sessions were planned and carried out taking into account school holidays, school schedules etc. If a child was absent for a session, the session was postponed. All the dyads stayed in the study throughout. After the last session, the children were thanked for their cooperation. The teacher of the children received books as presents for her class. In June 2004, the subjects were tested with respect to emergent mathematics.

Results

Comparision of groups with respect to mathematical knowledge

We expected that an intervention including opportunities to play would improve mathematical knowledge. The findings related to this hypothesis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Means and standard deviations on number sense, counting and ordering by school and by research condition

| | RPS: e-condition | | RPS: c-condition | | SPS: e-condition | | SPS: c-condition | |
|--------------|------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|------------------|------|
| N | 24 | | 14 | | 12 | | 6 | |
| | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD | M | SD |
| Number sense | 23,0 | 2,70 | 25,4 | 2,10 | 21,4 | 5,18 | 14,8 | 3,49 |
| Counting | 4,5 | 1,12 | 5,2 | 0,58 | 3,8 | 1,94 | 2,3 | 1,86 |
| Ordering | 2,6 | 1,12 | 2,5 | 1,09 | 3,4 | 1,00 | 4,8 | 0,41 |

An ANOVA with task behaviour and emotional stability as covariables revealed that performance on the number sense tasks was higher in the experimental condition than in the control condition ($F(3) 11,492, p .000$). The same results were found with respect to ordering ($F(3) 7,310, p. 000$).

An ANOVA with task behaviour as a covariate revealed that number sense ($F(1) 4,533, p .041$) was better in the control condition of the regular primary schools than in the experimental control condition.

An ANOVA with task behaviour and emotional stability as covariates showed that performance on ordering ($F(1) 12.210, p .007$) was better in the experimental condition of the special primary schools than in the control condition.

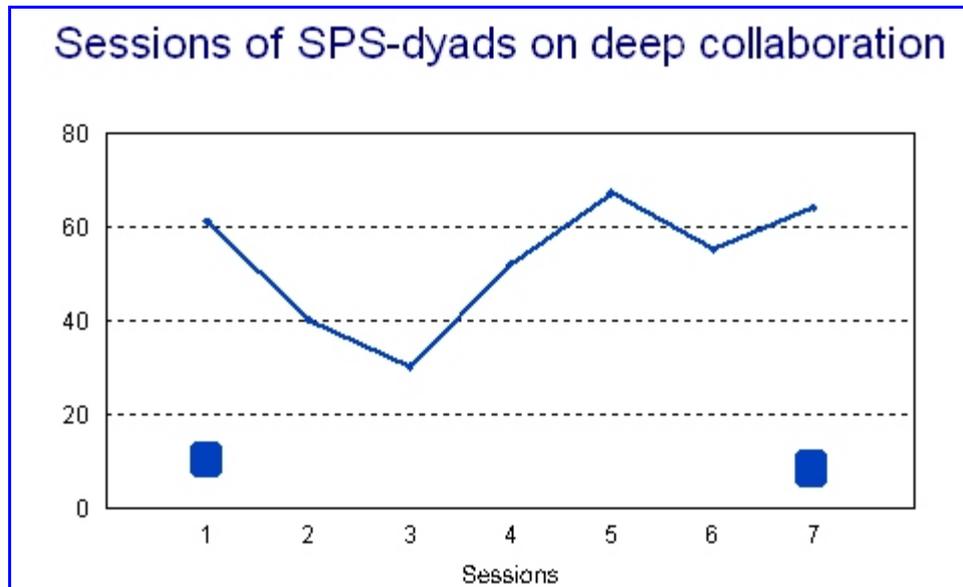
The findings suggest that mathematical knowledge as assessed by a norm-referenced test was higher in the experimental condition than in the control condition. With respect to the schools, this finding was due to the results in the special primary schools.

Two examples of microgenetic analyses with respect to social play and emergent numeracy

The findings presented below relate to the in-depth analyses of dyads with respect to social play and emergent numeracy displayed during social play. We chose this example to describe the processes that may underlie the results on mathematical knowledge.

Figure 1 allows for a visual inspection of the microgenetic analysis undertaken with dyads from a special primary school, that is, two dyads from special primary education from the experimental and the control condition. The dyads, both pairs of boys are derived from different schools.

Figure 1: Microgenetic data with respect to deep collaboration from the experimental dyad (diamonds) and the control dyad (blocks) during episodes



The histogram reveals the number of times that deep collaboration occurred with the two dyads from special primary education in the experimental and the control condition. The findings reveal that there is a rise in collaboration as to be expected with the dyad in the experimental condition. Collaboration in the control condition was barely existent.

Figures 2a and 2b allow for a visual inspection of the occurrence of the emergent mathematics for each session.

Figure 2a: Microgenetic data with respect to emergent mathematics from Reginald (experimental group: diamonds), Richard (control group: wedges) and during episodes (crosses)

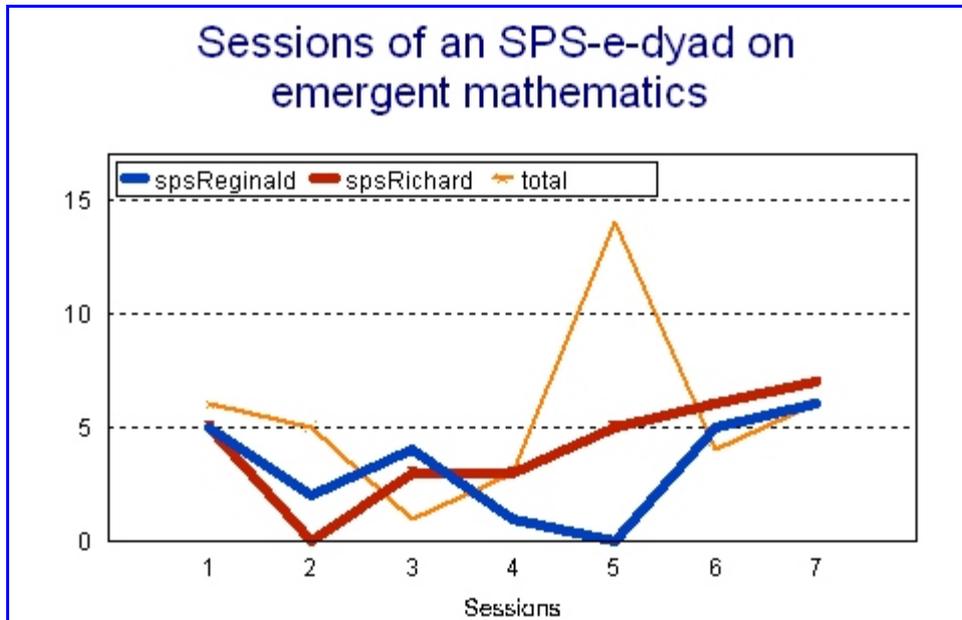


Figure 2a shows that both the boys utter more or less comparable mathematical remarks separately as well as during collaboration. Session 5 reveals a high number of utterances during episodes. The conversation of the dyad is typical in that many conversations relate to size, numbers etc. such as discussing the size of the animals that would fit in the cages.

Figure 2b: Microgenetic data with respect to emergent mathematics from Andy (experimental group: diamonds), William (control group: squares) and during episodes (triangles)

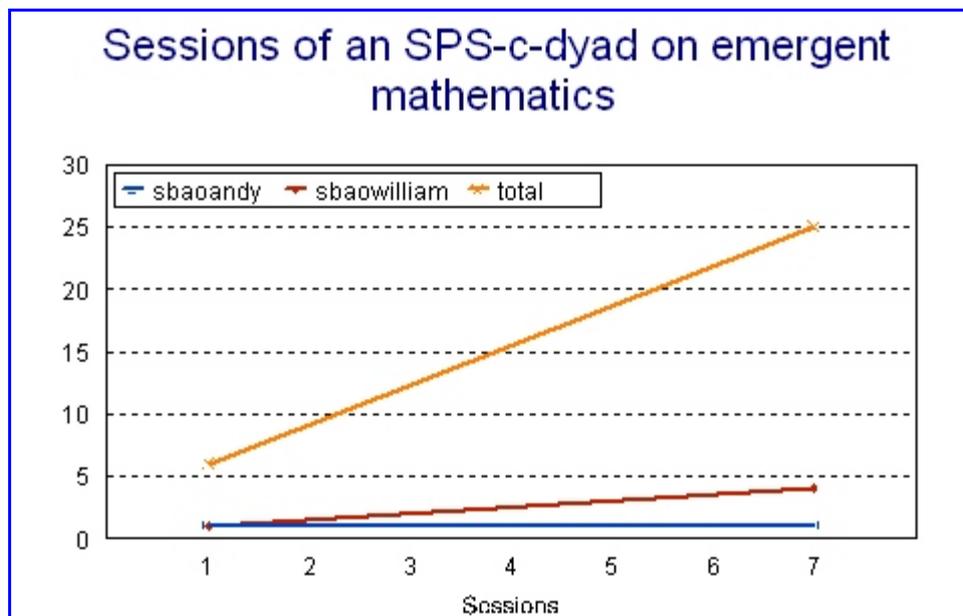


Figure 2b shows that both the boys utter a comparable number of solitary mathematical utterances in session 1. Session 7, however, reveals an increase in utterances during episodes as well as an increased number of utterances by William.

Summary and conclusion

The study was undertaken to explore whether development of social play of at-risk children in regular primary education would differ from those placed in special primary education.

The comparison on group level revealed that emergent mathematics came forward stronger in the experimental condition than in the control condition. The findings suggest that mathematical knowledge was higher in the experimental condition than in the control condition. This finding was due largely to the results in the special primary schools.

The results available with respect to processes during sessions do not allow us to conclude on the findings at this point in time. Therefore, the findings on collaboration and utterances of emergent numeracy were presented with respect to dyads from two special primary schools. All the dyads in the experimental condition revealed that utterances of emergent mathematics were evident more often in episodes than during solitary play. The figures, however, show that the starting point of collaboration and emergent mathematics differs remarkably between dyads. An ANCOVA is required to decide whether the patterns found are related to differences between experimental conditions.

The findings presented in this study provide insight into the role of the classroom as a community of practice. Profiting from collaboration may be more significant for children attending special primary schools than for those from regular primary schools. All the children in the study made efforts to achieve shared understandings and actions. They were eager to take part in the sessions and displayed rich imagination in responding to the materials offered. By using a multi-step procedure, we can compare findings both quantitatively and qualitatively between conditions. The transcripts allow us to follow separate dyads and relate their interactions during social play to child characteristics (Anfara, Brown and Mangione, 2002; Rourke, Wozniak and Cassidy, 1999). Moreover, we expect that the study presented will clarify the role of school type in how young at-risk children intertwine social play with developing concepts of academic knowledge within the school as a context. A pilot-study, preceding the study presented here, allowed us to gain insight in how children-at risk develop skills to play together (Van der Aalsvoort, Van Tol and Karemaker, 2004).

Finally, the social play did not seem to be constrained by the poor language level of the participants. Moreover, the participants showed even within a very short period of time, their potential to collaborate and exchange their emerging knowledge on numbers and use of mathematical knowledge thus inviting teachers to make use of their potential in the classroom. The design of the study presented here suggests that there are many opportunities to observe the process of development in a child.

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What is the rate of acceptance/ rejection?

The following statistics for 2002 and 2003 provide an indication of the pattern of acceptance/ non acceptance:

| Year | Accepted with no or minor revisions | Accepted after revisions | Not accepted |
|------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| 2002 | 9 | 7 | 41 |
| 2003 | 15 | 9 | 47 |

Even an increase in the number of issues each year will not keep pace with the ever-increasing number of submissions. We can do little to mitigate the competition engendered by state funding policy and the kinds of incentive schemes that have become a feature of the higher education landscape.

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We understand this as implying that articles should represent a rigorous enquiry (conducted through argumentation or empirically) into the understanding of educational issues. Such inquiry originates in a problem rather than a solution, and it is rare for such enquiry to have no reference to, or engagement with, a broader literature and theory. Advocacy in the form of prescriptions or ‘how to do it’ recipe knowledge for practitioners seldom finds favour with referees. The question of audience is key. The assumed audience is the collective body of researchers rather than those more narrowly concerned with the effective implementation of specific policies.

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