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**Program EARLI Advanced Study Colloquia**

**14 JANUARY – 18 JANUARY 2008**

**SEMINAR – ROOM 3008  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY**



**RYNEVELD STREET  
STELLENBOSCH**

**MONDAY 14 JANUARY 2008**

8.30 – 9.00:	Registration	Goele Nickmans Shan Simmonds Ezanne Strydom	Third floor
9.00 – 9.30	Opening	Yusef Waghid Filip Dochy Arend Carl	Room 3008
9.30 – 10.30	<b>Session 1(a)</b>	Prof. Paul Vedder	Room 3008
10.30-10.50	Tea / Coffee		Caterer-Fifth floor Tea room
10.50-12.50	<b>Session 1(b)</b>	Student Mitch Van Geel	Room 3008
13.00-14.00	Lunch		Caterer-Fifth floor Tea room
14.00 – 15.00	<b>Session 2(a)</b>	Prof. Sangeeta Bagga- Gupta	Room 3008
15.00 – 15.20	Tea / Coffee		Caterer-Fifth floor Tea room
15.20- 17.20	<b>Session 2(b)</b>	Student Olivier Sint-John	Room 3008
19.00	Welcome dinner	Faculty of Education	De Ouwe Werf Restaurant Church Street Stellenbosch

**TUESDAY 15 JANUARY 2008**

9.00 – 9.10	Conference announcement		Room 3008
9.10 – 10.10	<b>Session 3(a)</b>	Prof. Cornelia Roux	Room 3008
10.10-10.30	Tea / Coffee		Caterer-Fifth floor Tea room
10.30-12.30	<b>Session 3(b)</b>	Student Petro du Preez	Room 3008

12.30-13.30	Lunch		Caterer-Fifth floor Tea room
13.30 – 14.30	<b>Session 4(a)</b>	Prof. Helen Penn	Room 3008
14.30 – 14.50	Tea / Coffee		Caterer-Fifth floor Tea room
14.50- 16.50	<b>Session 4(b)</b>	Student Hasina Ebrahim	Room 3008
16.50-17.00	Closing remarks		Room 3008
	Dinner	On own expense	Enjoy Stellenbosch cuisine

**WEDNESDAY 16 JANUARY 2008**  
**FREE EXCURSION**

9.00 – 9.10	Travel by bus	Gather at Faculty in front of building (parking area)	
9.10 – 12.45		Visit schools in Stellenbosch <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Township school</li> <li>• Integrated school</li> <li>• Ex Model C school</li> </ul>	Schools to be visited will be announced at the conference
12.45-14.30	Lunch	Hillcrest Berry Farm: Pniel Beautiful panoramic view of the valley	
		Excursion with the group to Wine farms	In the valley of Pniel and Franschoek
	Tee / Coffee Own expenses	Franschoek - Settlers and refugee town of the French Huguenots (1688)	Walk in town and visit tourist attractions
17h30 – 18h00		Back at Stellenbosch	
	Dinner	On own expense in Stellenbosch	Enjoy Stellenbosch cuisine

**THURSDAY 17 JANUARY 2008**

9.00 – 9.10	Conference announcement	Filip Dochy Arend Carl	Room 3008
9.10 – 10.10	<b>Session 5(a)</b>	Prof. Carol Aubrey	Room 3008
10.10-10.30	Tea / Coffee		Caterer-Fifth floor Tea room
10.30-12.30	<b>Session 5(b)</b>	Student Sarah Dahl	Room 3008
12.30-13.30	Lunch		Caterer-Fifth floor Tea room
13.30 – 14.30	<b>Session 6(a)</b>	Prof Martin Valcke	Room 3008

14.30 – 14.50	Tea / Coffee		
14.50- 16.50	<b>Session 6(b)</b>	Student Chang Zhu	Room 3008
16.50-17.30	Conference closing Reflection Way forward		Room 3008
18.00	Closing: South African Braai and Stellenbosch Wines	Gather at Faculty in front of building (parking area)	Somerset-West: House of Cornelia Roux

### **Session formats:**

40 minutes presentation for the professor  
20 minutes discussion

60 minutes presentation for the PHD  
30 minutes discussion PHD research

30 minutes discussion on the total slot

### **List of participants:**

#### **Session 1:**

Paul Vedder, Leiden University, The Netherlands  
Mitch Van Geel, Leiden University, The Netherlands

#### **Session 2:**

Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta, Örebro University, Sweden  
Oliver Sint-John, Örebro University, Sweden

#### **Session 3:**

Cornelia Roux, Stellenbosch University, South Africa  
Petro Du Preez, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

#### **Session 4:**

Helen Penn, University of East London, UK  
Hasina Ebrahim, University of Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa

#### **Session 5:**

Carol Aubrey, University of Warwick, UK  
Sarah Dahl, University of Warwick, UK

#### **Session 6:**

Martin Valcke, Ghent University, Belgium  
Chang Zhu, Ghent University, Belgium

# MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

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## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I bring together the information from two sources: The first one is a review written for the new EARLI Review journal the Educational Research Review (Vedder, Horenczyk, Liebkind & Nickmans 2006) the other is the research program that I lead at Leiden University. The first is a state of the art description and the second is an overview of research that is conducted or being planned to extend, enrich or clarify the state of the art, dealing with theoretical, methodological issues as well as practical applications.

## MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION; SOME PRELIMINARY, CONCEPTUAL REMARKS

Multicultural education deals with contacts between culturally diverse groups either directly in educational settings or in terms of coping with earlier contacts or in terms of planned contacts in future situations. Both the coping and the planning part may deal with non educational situations. In this paper, we use the term multicultural education to refer to the variety of ways in which schools and the school system deal or may deal with cultural diversity.

### ***Multiculturalism and the risk of essentialism***

Some scholars point at the concept of multiculturalism as being the basis and the goal of multicultural education. According to these scholars, 'multiculturalism' is a notion which emphasizes 'the value of diversity as a core principle and that all cultural groups are treated with respect and as equals' (Flowers & Richardson 1996:609). They tend to depict culture as being 'natural and unchangeable' and they see the members of a culture as having particular attributes that define their cultural identity (Verkuyten 2005). The problem with this essentialist notion of culture is that it can be used to rationalize existing social hierarchies and thereby foster intergroup discrimination. This is precisely what we do not advocate. Essentialist notions of culture and cultural groups can be used by any ethnocultural group – national or immigrant, majority or minority. Many authors (Allport 1954; Haslam, Bastian, Bain & Kashima 2006; Levy, Stroessner & Dweck 1998) have argued that essentialist group beliefs, irrespective of who expresses them, are central to intergroup prejudice and racism. Verkuyten (2005) for example, showed that the more Dutch nationals believed in the essentialist nature of immigrant cultures, the less they endorsed multiculturalism. Another side of the same coin is that immigrants and other minority members themselves may use essentialist notions of their in-group in order to mobilize around cultural rights or against racial oppression. In general, multiculturalism is more important for ethnic minority groups than for majority groups.

In the study referred to above, Verkuyten (2005) showed that for Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese adolescents in the Netherlands, ingroup essentialism was positively related to the endorsement of multiculturalism.

### ***Where does “multi” refer to?***

From a Western perspective the issue of multicultural education or multiculturalism is primarily seen as akin to the influx of immigrants in what nationals perceive of as a religiously, linguistically and morally homogeneous society or community. In most other societies, like the USA or South Africa, immigration is an issue, but contacts between established ethno-cultural groups are the overarching issue. Researchers such as Obgu (1985; 1992) clarified that in the latter situation multicultural education may deal with original differences between groups (e.g. language differences, value appreciation differences, differences in customs and practices), which are differences that existed before the groups lived in contact, as well as with differences that were created after contact and that were created not only to express a strong wish for maintaining ones cultural heritage, but also to keep and confirm the cultural distance between ones own and the national or other more powerful groups. The latter is linked to a prolonged perception of discrimination and rejection between groups.

A third situation or definition of the “multi” is the more inclusive but still oppositional characterization put forward by such organizations as UNESCO and OECD. It is inclusive because it is far less characterized by ethnic boundaries than the first two. It is still oppositional, like the earlier approaches, but it no longer contrasts ethnic groups but focuses on particular situations, e.g., school, and contrasts the global school culture and its typical requirements and the locally available personal resources in terms of motivation, skills and other competencies. Scholars like Purves (1990) and Suarez-Orozco (2001) suggest that schools present to all their students a kind of culture that is independent of country or regional borders and that they therefore refer to as global culture. This worldly culture is expressed in routines for social interactions (e.g. teachers question students not to enrich their own knowledge, but to steer students’ learning) and a particular selection of knowledge and skills represented in books and assignments that to an increasing extend are tested using global measures (e.g. IEA: Vedder 1994 or OECD 2006). A very strange expression of this global culture is that youths all around the planet are forced into schools, where, by grading and evaluative remarks, many of them learn very quickly that they are not fit for learning the “important school stuff”. This experience as well as the experience of school success for the happy few, crosses ethnic boundaries. In Europe as well as in South Africa not only colored children are affected, but also white children: It is a confrontation between an arrogant global school culture and a variety of local cultures.

When working with either of these approaches or definitions it is important to keep the following in mind. In social research and in educational settings studies and discussions tend to focus on ethnic groups. They refer to the Dutch and the Turks or the Afrikaanders and the Bantu and suggest that ethnicity or nationality overlap with culture or that ethnicity is an easy criterion to distinguish persons. This crude approach is problematic in at least three respects (cf. Hermans & Kempen 1998). The first is that boundaries between ethnic groups and nationalities are not as clear cut as suggested by the labels used. Persons may have double nationalities or children may come from interethnic marriages. The second problem is that scholars

too often contrast groups without exploring or taking into account acculturation processes that have already and continue to take shape and that may vary between members of the groups; categorization is similar to homogenization. A third problem is that children and youth participating in research indicate that they themselves do not like a representation in which it is suggested that they have to deal with two or three cultures where they are asked to indicate their preference for each or one of the cultural phrases. Defining their own ethnic or cultural position by contrasting cultures or ethnic groups is experienced as a stressful task (Arnett 2002). They prefer to perceive of and represent their own position in more dynamic, task and situation related words. E.g., in a school or sports situation they tend to be more out-group oriented and in religious or domestic situations they are more in-group oriented (Birman, Trickett & Vinokurov 2002). Also they point at similarities between youths as a group with an own more or less global culture when it comes to music, dance and dress codes and a career perspective that is increasingly affected by notions of inter- or transnational opportunities (Portes 2003).

In the remainder of this text we will mostly deal with the situation most typical of Western-European countries, viz. the educational situation of immigrant children.

### ***What is culture?***

There are many definitions of culture. To me the definition presented by Kroeber and Parsons (1958) is particularly interesting. They defined culture as “transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced through behavior.” (Kroeber & Parsons 1958:583). The non-transmitted, the non-transmittable, the taken for granted elements that we move around in like weather, unspoiled land, water and air are non-cultural and yet impact on human development. Apart from values, including religion, judicial codes etc., culture also deals with organizational aspects of the human society, like families, administrative bodies, the labor market and labor unions, as well as with technological developments reflected in e.g., energy production and consumption and in the health system (cf. Müller 2006).

Kroeber and Parsons’ definition is particularly interesting because in referring to “transmitted and created content” it stresses the dynamic nature of culture. It clarifies that culture is an entity or process that is negotiated and transformed in interactions between peoples. In designing acculturation studies researchers may choose to look at culture as a product, as a process or at both. If they are interested in particular value systems or codes of conduct or in classifications of societies in terms of meaning systems, organizations, and technological developments (cf. Müller 2006), this is more akin to a product oriented approach, whereas an analysis of particular processes of information exchange or educational practices between parents and their children (family culture; e.g. Schönpflug 2001), or interactions within peer networks (youth culture; e.g. Stanton-Salazar & Spina 2005), would most likely represent a process approach.

### ***The role of the ethnic culture***

Earlier we suggested that holding an essentialist view on multiculturalism may coincide with extreme positions in the wish to maintain one’s own ethnic culture. That being said it is also important to stress that celebrating cultural diversity or having a



strong cultural identity does not necessarily imply holding essentialist views about culture or cultures. A person may have strong multiple or hybrid identities, which can not be combined with an essentialist notion of cultures. Cultural identity involves a sense of belonging to one or more cultural groups and the feelings associated with group membership (Phinney 1990). Results obtained by Branscombe and her colleagues (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey 1999; Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz & Owen 2002) illustrated that; among low-status groups, perceived discrimination that can be attributed to prejudice towards one's group strengthens the orientation toward the ethnic ingroup as a source of comfort or as a defence against further discrimination. This same effect was confirmed in European samples (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder 2006). In addition, research shows that academic success in some minority groups may originate in more collectivistic motives for achievement. For example, when 'giving back' to families and communities is an important value, and when there is a strong sense of belongingness, i.e. high cultural identity, there is a greater chance for successful academic achievement (Freeburg & Stein 1996). Moreover, researchers (e.g. Nesdale, Rooney & Smith 1997) have pointed out that immigrants may for whatever reason cut their ties with the own ethnic Group at an untimely stage in their acculturation process. They still feel a strong need for social, emotional and material support but closed important gates behind them, hoping that gates guarded by members of the national group would open, whereas they remain shut. They get isolated in the middle, and are at higher risk of developing stress symptoms (cf. Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder 2006). The lesson to be learned from all this is that educators should be careful when judging the role of strong identification with the own ethnic group in students' learning and development. Educators are well advised not to deny or neglect the educational and developmental importance of more enduring identities with long-term commitments and connections to, for example, former and future generations (Verkuyten 2005).

In the context of multicultural education, it is also important to know that it is possible for an individual to have a sense of belongingness to two or more different cultures, without compromising his or her sense of cultural identity (LaFromboise, Coleman & Gerton 1993). Mostly, an adherence to one or more ethnic culture combined with a positive attitude toward the national culture is more adaptive than preference for a single culture (cf. Berry, *et al.* 2006; Vedder & Virta 2005). Identities in multicultural contexts may also converge, blend or mix, sometimes challenging existing category conceptions. Increasingly, notions of heterogeneity and multiple identities are being advanced. However, often 'multiple identities' refer, in fact, to "partial identities", as social identities are always composed of several different social categories and can thus be flexibly categorized in a multitude of ways. Individuals may thus alternate their behavior to fit into the cultures in which they are involved (Liebkind 2001; Verkuyten 2005). Research has shown that such individuals will feel less stress and anxiety than those who undergo a process of linear acculturation, i.e. assimilating into the dominant culture. Multiculturalism is, in this framework, essentially multicultural competence, allowing minority youth to master the shifting challenges and resources they encounter in their different "worlds". This is an additive model of cultural acquisition parallel to the code-switching theories found in the research on multilingualism (Liebkind 2001).

## **EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES RELATED TO ETHNO – CULTURALLY DIVERSE SOCIETIES**

Most immigrants perceive the school as a chance or an opportunity for social and economic (upward) mobility (Vedder & Horenczyk 2006). And, indeed, many have succeeded in establishing a better life in their new societies than they would have had in their societies of origin. Nevertheless, for many of them, the process of acculturation is a painful one, due to the loss of personal relationships and of the culturally known (cf. Glenn & De Jong 1996; OECD 2006). Too many of these youngsters leave schools without the necessary certificates and qualifications (Hijzen, Boekaerts & Vedder 2006; Driscoll 1999). These findings lead to the formulation of a first challenge to the school: The school must cater for educational needs and interests of all students alike, irrespective of their ethnic background. When suggesting that immigrant students' school performance is somewhat problematic it is important to stress also that immigrant students' academic performance may lag behind, but they are usually better motivated for learning than national students are. Moreover, when focusing on measures of psychological wellbeing and social adjustment away from the school context, immigrant youths tend to have similar or more positive scores than national youths (Berry, *et al.* 2006).

A second challenge for the school is related to the fact that cultural pluralism, i.e. an ethno-culturally diverse society, is not necessarily a desired state of affairs for everyone. Surveys in a variety of countries have indicated a growing intolerance among nationals towards immigrants' presence and a loss of patience with immigrants' integration, which growing numbers of nationals consider to proceed too slowly (Berry, *et al.* 2006; Heath & Cheung 2006; Pettigrew 1998). This growing impatience is increasingly seen as a justification for avoiding a further influx of new immigrants. At the same time this rejection of new immigrants is being experienced by second and third generation immigrants as a depreciation of their presence. Relatively high percentages of youth in England, Germany and Denmark hold negative attitudes towards immigrants (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald & Schulz 2001). Furthermore, immigrant youth reports discrimination in Germany, England, Norway, Sweden, Netherlands and France (Berry, *et al.* 2006). The second challenge of the school is thus to successfully reduce the uncertainty and tensions that have evolved in interethnic relationships, both inside and outside the school. A common goal of educational institutions should be the achievement and fostering of healthy intercultural relationships.

## **STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH ETHNO-CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

### ***Language competence***

Being proficient in the national language is essential for social participation in all kinds of social settings. Language carries information and is an instrument for structuring thinking processes. As such, its role for learning and development is evident and indisputable. However, with language minority children and youth who have to acquire proficiency in the national language, learning that language is not the only educational challenge. An equally important challenge, at least as long as these students are not sufficiently proficient in the national language, is to optimally capitalize on the cognitive, linguistic and emotional resources that come with the students' proficiency in their first or ethnic language. In European countries many

children enter primary school at a stage where their ethnic language proficiency has developed far further than their proficiency in the national language, which generally is also the language of instruction (Extra & Yağmur 2004). For these children, it is beneficial to start to learn to read in their own language, provided there is support from a first language reading method and a first language teacher (Verhoeven 1994). But even when language minority children start school with good proficiency in the national language, it may be beneficial for these children's learning opportunities to stimulate the further acquisition of their ethnic language. Good ethnic language proficiency may allow parents or siblings to better support a child's school learning (Extra & Yağmur 2006).

Available research findings and theoretical models seem of little help for solving this problem, given the many unresolved controversies and the abundance of models proposed by researchers. Nevertheless, we will suggest three models that seem most influential. The ethnic identity model (Alkan 1998) assumes that immigrant youth grow up between at least two cultures, which leads to identity confusion and adaptation problems if the children experience a lack of appreciation for the skills, knowledge and feelings that are typical of their ethnic background. The model proposes that a strong ethnic identity is important for immigrants' healthy integration and well-being in the new society. The model, albeit not necessarily under this name, has had a clear impact on the school curriculum for ethno-cultural minority students in countries like the Netherlands and Sweden (Alkan 1998; Viberg 1994). Lessons in students' first language and classes on the students' cultural heritage are seen as important for preventing or overcoming adaptation problems. Such lessons are deemed to allow ethnic minority youth to experience appreciation for their parents' language and culture. The assumptions are that language maintenance and a good knowledge of one's own culture contribute to the adolescents' ethnic identity, and a strong ethnic identity is conducive to well-being and social adjustment. Research supports the expectation that ethnic language proficiency affects adolescents' ethnic identity and that a strong ethnic identity is related to positive adaptation of minority youth (Horenczyk & Ben-Shalom 2001; Virta, Sam & Westin 2004). The ethnic identity model stresses the role of attitudinal factors for learning, not only language learning.

The second model, the language assimilation model, focuses on the direct relationship between national language proficiency and adolescents' learning and development. This model suggests that language minority students' proficiency in the national language is a better predictor of academic performance than their proficiency in the ethnic language and that therefore these children should learn the national language as rapidly and as well as possible, even if this is detrimental to their use and learning of the ethnic language. Several studies found support for this model (cf. Driessen 2000; Vedder 2005).

Lastly, the language integration model is inspired by research on multilingualism showing that children who acquired high levels of proficiency in more than one language developed extra cognitive resources as compared to children who grew up with one language only (for an overview of research, see Baker 2001). Accordingly, it is expected that language minority students who are proficient in both their ethnic and the national language will report higher well-being and acquire more positive social adjustment scores than students who are less balanced in their bilingualism or

who lack proficiency in either language. In a sample of Turkish adolescents living in Sweden we found support for the language integration model (Vedder & Virta 2005).

The fact that support could be found for the validity of each of these models is indicative of the plain truth that one size (or one model) does not fit all (school situations and students). Policy makers and educators will have to find out what model is best for their students, their parents and their teachers.

### ***The teachers' attitudes and views***

Knowledge and attitudes are closely and mutually interrelated, and both are likely to affect the classroom practice. As indicated by , teachers' beliefs have a strong impact on the classroom's educational and social climate. Often, teachers are unaware of their ideological assumptions which have been "naturalized" to such an extent that they are finally seen as being part of the daily routine. Among teachers who work with immigrant students, these ideological assumptions might include the societal beliefs regarding newcomers' acculturation and the role of the school in this process. Although the multicultural rhetoric is slowly permeating the educational discourse, actual educational practices in many immigrant-receiving societies suggest that schools continue to seek to integrate immigrant children into the societal mainstream . For simplicity's sake we distinguish a pluralist, an assimilationist and a separatist or segregationist attitude in teachers. The first stands for respect of cultural diversity and a proactive approach to seeking to optimize cognitive and linguistic resources from diverse cultures that support a person's development and wellbeing. An assimilationist attitude stands for an approach focusing on a rigorous inclusion in the main stream culture, even at the expense of resources from and bonds with the ethnic culture. A separatist or isolationist attitude stands for efforts to maintain strict borders between ethnic groups and their cultures.

One may ask whether pluralistic attitudes held by teachers are always beneficial to the immigrant student, and whether assimilationist expectations are necessarily detrimental. It has been widely argued that a multicultural climate promotes newcomers' psychological and socio-cultural adaptation . A pluralistic attitude by members and major agencies of the receiving society is likely to encourage the adoption and development of a multicultural orientation by the immigrants. Multiple positive cultural identities, in turn, have been shown to be related to higher school adjustment among immigrants , probably by exposing them to a wider range of available social and cultural resources . The teacher can play a significant role in legitimizing and fostering the maintenance and development of multiple cultural and social identities . However, we would like to call for a more cautious and complex analysis of multiculturalism at the teacher-student interface, by researchers as well as by educators. As proposed by the "interactional" or "ecological" approach to acculturation, we see that the fit between the ethnic minority's own orientation and that of his or her relevant environment is an important factor related to adaptation (Vedder 2004). This implies that the pluralistic attitudes of teachers and schools are not always beneficial to students, and assimilationist expectations do not always have to be detrimental. Even a separatist approach can be beneficial in the short run. Although generally a pluralistic stance by teachers is likely to be more conducive to the adaptation of their ethnic minority students, it cannot be ruled out that in some cases ethnic minority students holding assimilationist orientations will adjust better

when their teachers and other educational agents also hold assimilationist expectations.

### ***Attention to the teachers' problems***

Teachers and other educational agents play a central role in the well-being and social adjustment of ethnic minority youth. For most of these students, the behaviour and attitudes of the teacher seems to epitomize the expectations held by the new culture with regard to the proper role of youths and students, and they are also perceived as reflecting the criteria for success in their society. Moreover, teachers exert major control over crucial rewards and punishments affecting academic and social behaviour inside – and also outside – the school setting. It is thus imperative to address the complex and intricate challenges facing teachers who work with culturally diverse student populations. One major problem reported by these teachers is insufficient knowledge. In spite of the growing number of immigrant children entering schools all over the world, research evidence shows that teachers usually lack the information, skills, and, on occasion, motivation necessary to cope successfully with the challenges posed by the increasing cultural heterogeneity (e.g. ).

The increasing cultural diversity in schools and classrooms weighs heavily on teachers, and one can say that the reality of the educational setting at present is one of increasing 'cultural mismatch' (Cockrell, Placier, Cockrell & Middleton 1999) between teachers and their students on the one hand and between teachers and their students' parents on the other hand (Shor 2005). This affects teachers working with immigrant students and makes teachers less able to face the challenges posed by multicultural educational contexts. Lucas (1997) discussed the mismatch between teaching styles developed for – and successfully implemented with – native-born children and those necessary for immigrant students, and on classroom difficulties related to the students' lack of basic knowledge about how the school functions. The result of this mismatch is immigrant children performing worse in academic tasks and showing behavioural problems in class. All these 'acculturative stressors' may negatively affect the personal and professional well-being of teachers who work with ethnic minority students. An effect of this can be 'diversity-related burnout' (Horenczyk & Tatar 2002) among teachers. This type of burnout has been shown to be related to the degree of cultural heterogeneity of the school and to the teachers own views toward multiculturalism: The highest level of diversity-related burnout was found among teachers holding assimilationist views who were working in a school that was perceived by them as promoting a policy of 'assimilation'.

### ***Creating conditions for successful intergroup contact***

Intergroup contact has long been considered to be one of the most effective strategies for improving intergroup relationships and for solving problems related to ethnocultural diversity. As school and other educational institutions are traditionally viewed as major arenas for intergroup contact and acculturation, they are perceived to be of great importance for attaining the desired goal of creating 'multicultural societies'. As a consequence, when there is an increase of ethnicity- and culture-related problems in the society, it is easy to point a finger at the schools and to blame them for failing to contribute to the successful integration of immigrants.

To improve intergroup relations, the contact hypothesis has offered a promising and popular strategy for reducing intergroup conflict. This hypothesis proposes that simple contact between groups is a start, but in order to be successful, there must be certain features present in the contact. Groups must enter the contact situation with equal status, there must be cooperative interdependence between the groups and the contact must occur in the context of supportive norms (Allport 1954). Other critical conditions for successful intergroup contact are that there is an opportunity for personal acquaintance and friendship between group members and that the category membership of the individuals in the interaction is of at least minimal salience. This is necessary in order to ensure the generalization of the improved intergroup attitudes to the outgroup as a whole (Dovidio, *et al.* 2003). Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) commented that acquaintance and friendship take time to occur and have an impact. They therefore define time of exposure between members of different groups as an additional important feature of efforts to improve intergroup relations. Oortwijn, Boekaerts and Vedder (in press) showed that this latter variable is important to student relationships in ethnically mixed primary schools.

A number of studies have reported significant correlations between adolescents' racial attitudes and the attitudes of their peers. Conformity to ingroup norms regarding intergroup attitudes may be particularly important during adolescence (Duckitt 1992). Furthermore, social and institutional support is very important to help create a new social climate in which more tolerant norms can emerge. The so called Extended Contact Hypothesis takes these conditions as a starting point. This hypothesis maintains, and empirical evidence supports (Liebkind & McAlister 1997), that observing an ingroup member having a close relationship with an outgroup member is sufficient for more positive intergroup attitudes to emerge. The ingroup friendship partner provides a positive model for more tolerant norms for interaction with the outgroup, and the outgroup member - if perceived as typical - provides a positive exemplar that disconfirms negative expectations and beliefs about the outgroup. Through extended contact, therefore, widespread reduction in prejudice is possible without everyone needing to have out-group friends themselves (Liebkind & McAlister 1997).

Many schools seem to be 'multicultural', and thus ensure intergroup contact. Everyday contact between ethnic groups is perceived to be an inherent feature of multicultural schools. The fact is, however, that everyday contact between ethnic groups in a multicultural school setting often bears little resemblance to the ideal contact conditions outlined by the contact hypothesis (Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux 2005). If these conditions are not taken into account, segregation and avoidance remain the norms in many multicultural settings, including the school.

### ***School segregation***

Schools are generally seen as major arenas for intercultural contact. However, not all schools are ethno-culturally diverse, at least not when looking at the cultural make-up of the student body. Segregation along cultural, religious and, as a consequence, ethnic lines, is characteristic of many Western societies, albeit in different degrees. For example, it is quite common in the Netherlands, but not in Sweden.

The discussion on this topic is typically characterized by segregation being depicted mainly in negative terms and by the assumption that ethnic and religious segregation between schools is a matter of choice that can be changed at will. Research on the

effectiveness of attempts to avoid or undo ethnic and religious segregation between schools conducted in the USA and the Netherlands concluded very clearly that these attempts have failed. Demographic processes, housing policies and parental school choices are so influential that school policies or national educational policies cannot counteract these forces, except in rare, individual cases (Kahlenberg 2002; Orfield 2001; Rutten 2004; Vedder 2006; Vermeulen 2001).

Is the commonly negative attitude towards school segregation justified? Are religiously or ethnically segregated schools preparing their students less adequately for social participation than do non-segregated schools? A review of research by Westerbeek (1999) suggested that immigrant students may feel more self-confident in groups of predominantly immigrant children and that this may result in stronger engagement in learning situations. However, she also reviews studies that did not confirm this regularity.

In this same review Westerbeek concluded that research evidence with respect to school and class composition and students' academic and linguistic achievement is largely inconclusive. A recent Danish study (Rangvid 2005) explored the impact of school factors on the achievement gap between native and immigrant students. It concluded that immigrant students are worse off in schools with a high proportion of fellow immigrant students than in schools with a high proportion of fellow national students, despite relatively better resources and smaller classes in the former schools. Rangvid (2005) suggests that this might be due to the quality of the teachers. A study in the Netherlands, however, suggests that with time, schools with higher percentages of immigrant students may develop sufficient levels of expertise and resources in working with immigrant students in order for immigrant students to perform better in these schools. Immigrant students in these schools simply progress more rapidly in acquiring the Dutch language, which is beneficial for their learning in general (Gijsberts & Dagevos 2005). One specific and remarkable finding in the Westerbeek (1999) review is that both national and immigrant students perform worse in classes with higher numbers of recently arrived immigrants, children who have a low national language proficiency, and children who lack a preparation for learning in Dutch schools. The simple explanation is that in such classes teachers have to invest effort and time in supporting these least well prepared children even at the expense of time and effort needed for the national and better prepared immigrant children. These findings were largely confirmed in a more recent study (Rumberger & Palardy 2005). As stated earlier, however, teachers and curricula matter. Rumberger and Palardy contend that when teachers hold high expectations and the academic climate is geared towards raising effort and taking up cognitively more challenging tasks, the negative impact of the class composition of low performers can considerably be reduced.

## **PRACTICAL GUIDELINES, AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

### ***Practical guidelines***

As indicated earlier, a look at educational practices in many immigrant-receiving societies and countries with otherwise culturally diverse populations suggests that teachers and schools continue to reflect mainly the values and knowledge of the dominant society. At the same time in most North-Western European countries the multicultural education movement is underway, bringing about curriculum change so that all people living in these countries can find themselves represented in the classroom, without stereotyping or discrimination.

Research findings suggest that for individual immigrants a combined favorable attitude and orientation toward both the national and the ethnic culture contributes to the development and learning of immigrant youth. In order to achieve this, cultural maintenance should be desired by the immigrants, and enabled (even encouraged) by the broader society, including schools. Second, participation and inclusion in the life of the larger society should be sought by the immigrants, and permitted and supported by the school. This is not to say that all schools need to adopt and deliver multilingual curricula or that culture studies should get a more prominent position in the curriculum. It means that schools will start exploring wishes, attitudes, and resources that can clarify the need and may give clues as to opportunities to accentuate particular aspects of multicultural education. Expectations, attitudes and resources of students, their parents and teachers will have to be explored, because as suggested by Lewis (1981) either school management and policymakers carefully explore these and take them into account when planning changes, or else the educational change is likely to fail due to opposition by students, parents and teachers.

We also reported that discrimination has negative effects on personal well-being. Discrimination is unlikely to disappear by itself, and individuals need to be aware of its negative effects. Adolescents who are confident in their own ethnicity and proud of their ethnic group may be better able to deal constructively with discrimination, for example, by regarding it as the problem of the perpetrator or by taking proactive steps to combat it.

For changing schools into institutions that cherish cultural diversity as a resource for development and learning, multicultural teacher training plays an important role. Multicultural teacher training should focus on three major foci: knowledge, attitudes and skills. These three components are generally interrelated and they are likely to affect immigrant students' well-being and social adjustment, as well as the personal and professional well-being of teachers who work with them. Multicultural teacher training should be supported by interventions at the organizational level of the school. This support primarily consists of a clear mutual understanding between teachers and management regarding the implementation of educational and instructional practices aimed at improving the multicultural climate in schools. Teachers should be provided with sufficient decision space and resources to achieve the intended changes. Moreover, schools should make sure that colleagues and management are backing innovative teachers when they run into problems due to a high workload, opposition or misunderstanding from colleagues, students or their parents.



A second important issue is to allow and stimulate schools to develop expertise and to acquire resources that facilitate the learning and the performance of immigrant students. This is especially important if the schools are segregated ethnically, religiously or in terms of parents' SES.

Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to what the teacher expects of his or her students and to create a sufficiently rigorous and challenging academic climate that is both emotionally and instructionally supportive to students' needs. These are important ingredients for an educational intervention that counteracts the negative consequences of segregation. More specifically and concretely, teachers have to make sure that they allocate sufficient time to those subjects or knowledge domains that are more problematic to the low achieving students. For students with low academic achievements it is important to take basic skills training as a starting point for curriculum delivery instead of their social and emotional development. Moreover, teachers need to closely monitor students' progress and make sure to discuss students with learning and behavioural problems with colleagues, the students' parents and with students themselves, aiming at optimizing the educational resources for overcoming the problems (Weide 1993; Westerbeek 1999). Independently of the students' background, the same characteristics of the learning environment are generally important for improving academic achievements. In this way, and as suggested above, schools will be or will become better able to cater for educational needs and interests of national and immigrant students alike, in order for every student to have equal chances for social and economic mobility. However, in the case of specific efforts aimed at optimizing students' educational resources, these may vary depending on the students' and educators' background, for instance, when a students' parents or siblings organize learning support at home in their ethnic language or when a school arranges reading lessons in the student's ethnic language.

With respect to differentiation and individualisation efforts in class, a final remark is in place. We pointed out that a class composition with many students who lack proficiency in the national language may result in a disproportional amount of teacher efforts directed at these students even at the detriment of instructional attention for the other students. This can best be avoided by organizing differentiation practices within a whole class for instance by arranging more opportunities for cooperative learning and peer tutoring (cf. Orlich, Harder, Callahan & Gibson 1998).

### ***Further research***

Research that is being conducted in the Leiden research group deals with both issues identified in a previous section: to cater for educational needs and interests of all students alike, irrespective of their ethnic background and to reduce the uncertainty and tensions that have evolved in interethnic relationships, both inside and outside the school.

With respect to the first issue we conduct momentarily six studies.

### ***Structuring cooperative learning during math in multicultural elementary schools***

The study's goal is to contribute to the knowledge about possibilities to optimize the quality of cooperative learning in mathematics in primary schools and its learning

outcomes. An important question is what teachers can do to support the weaker students in their learning process while at the same time avoiding that the better students are hampered in their self-regulation within the context of cooperative problem solving.

We are particularly interested in the relationship between the students' ethnic background, the quality of cooperative learning and the learning outcomes. We hypothesize that students' ethnic background can be deconstructed in vocabulary knowledge and communication skills. This knowledge and these skills to a large extent determine the children's possibilities to contribute to and profit from cooperative learning. We will test the hypothesis that the relationship between these variables and the quality of cooperative learning is mediated by the way cooperation is regulated.

*Multicultural views and assessment attitudes in ethno-diverse classrooms as a predictor of student achievement motivation and school performance in junior vocational high schools*

As Western classrooms become increasingly culturally diverse, teachers face new challenges to adapt their curriculum to the individual student. While teachers are required to be culturally adaptive, they report increasing difficulties in communication with their students. Difficulties in communication could have a profound influence on the amount and quality of the feedback that teachers give to their students. This can pose problems for all levels of education, but it especially puts low-attaining students at a disadvantage, because for their motivation and learning they depend most on assessment procedures that involve regular and constructive feedback.

The study will be conducted in a junior vocational high school with a high level of cultural diversity. The three aims of the study are 1) to establish whether teachers' views of the multicultural society (and in particular, how they think their students want to adapt to society) and their views of how learning should be assessed correspond with their students' views. 2) To study whether patterns of correspondence influence student learning motivation and school performance. 3) To investigate whether coaching teachers in improving their assessment practices will increase their students' motivation and performance.

*Goal preferences and students' learning and well being; the influence of social networks*

Children's social networks are important for their well being as well as for their socialization. What network is chosen by children depends on children's characteristics and on the activities they deem important. These characteristics and activities may vary with respect to the extent to which they are conducive to children's learning in schools.

The present study has three goals: 1) Explore whether social networks can support children's learning and their well being; 2) Explore the way in which the social network affects its individual members. 3) Do gender and ethnicity have an impact on network building and maintenance and on the effects of network participation for learning? Subjects are 13-14 year old middle school students.

### *Future perspectives of immigrants in the Netherlands: the role of entrepreneurship*

The unemployment rates among non-western immigrants in the Netherlands are three times as high as among the indigenous population. Those who do have a job are in many cases employed in the lowest parts of the labour market. Several factors, such as low education and poor language proficiency, have contributed to the disadvantaged position of immigrants in the Netherlands. Those who have followed formal education, however, also have more difficulty in finding a job on the regular labour market than their indigenous counterparts (the unemployment rates of immigrant youth is twice as high as that of indigenous youth). In order to improve their position many immigrants consider entrepreneurship (either directly after finishing their formal education or after a few years of working experience on the regular labour market) or have turned to self-employment soon after arrival in the Netherlands. At the moment, a substantial number of the non-western immigrant labour force is self-employed (13 percent of a total of 1,019,000 entrepreneurs). The increase of self-employment among first-generation as well as second-generation non-western immigrants was in the period between 1999 and 2004 significantly larger than that of the indigenous population (+3.1 % for non-western immigrants vs. +0.3% for the indigenous population).

This study aims to determine to what extent entrepreneurship is an attractive career path for immigrants attending vocational education. In order to determine this, immigrant entrepreneurs as well as immigrant vocational students are included in this study. In case of the entrepreneurs we pursue to determine which factors have influenced their choice to become an entrepreneur and which factors have contributed to successfully starting and running a business. The factors included in this study are the contribution of human capital (formal education as well as work experience) to the development of knowledge and skills the entrepreneurs define as necessary for running their businesses successfully, and access to resources embedded in their social networks. Special attention will go out to whether the necessary resources are accessed by so-called strong or weak ties and the contribution of the differently accessed resources to the operation of their businesses. In case of immigrant vocational students focus will be on their future orientation in several life domains (education, family and work). Special attention will go out to which persons in their social networks influence orientation, setting goals and goal attainment in these domains, and whether entrepreneurship plays a role in their future orientation.

In order to determine to what extent (immigrant) entrepreneurs can contribute to the career development of (immigrant) vocational students, either directly (by functioning as mentors or coaches) or indirectly (by contributing to the development of school curricula in which the development of entrepreneurial skills are included), the results of this study will be discussed with policy makers, teachers, civil servants and entrepreneurs using a Delphi-procedure.

### *Multicultural education in junior vocational high schools*

During the last decades teachers have had to face new challenges when dealing with heterogeneous populations posing radically different educational, social, and

psychological demands. This is due, primarily, to marked changes in the population make-ups of Western countries. This study examines teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism and the extent to which these attitudes are related to their perceptions of the school organizational culture and to their views on the integration of immigrants in society in general. This research also examines the diversity-related burnout among teachers as a distinct construct that reflects the negative impact of the daily coping with culturally heterogeneous students on teachers' behaviors and attitudes. The study also analyses what consequences teachers's attitudes, views and experiences of burn-out have for their interaction with students and for students' performance and wellbeing.

#### *The implementation and evaluation of three models for bilingual education in Curacaoan primary school*

In this study we explore what model of bilingual education works best for schools in Curacao. In all models the first language is Papiamentu a local creole spoken daily by some 90% of all students. The second language is Dutch, which is the language that children need for senior high school and beyond. The basic model is a maintenance/heritage language model in which the Dutch language is introduced at an early stage as a foreign language. Models vary mainly with respect to the transition to an increased attention for acquiring Dutch. In the first model the transition takes shape in grade 2 (students 5-6 years). In the second model transition is realized in grade 4 and in model 3 in grades 5-6. The goal is for all students to develop balanced bilingualism that allows them to either continue their school career in either Dutch or Papiamentu. We try to develop a set of rules that can be used to decide what model fits what school. In the prediction we include student competencies and attitudes, teacher competencies and attitudes and the availability and quality of resources that students find at home. We assume that there is no single model that is best for all schools.

Our attention for the second issue is of a later date. Most available research and theoretical models deal with relatively mild forms of intergroup tensions (for an overview, see Liebkind 2004). We decided that we would try to study also the more extreme forms of prejudice and discrimination (see Hewstone, Rubin & Willis 2002). After all it is increasingly a social necessity to successfully meet the challenge formulated earlier, namely, to reduce the uncertainty and tensions that have evolved in interethnic relationships both inside and outside the school.

#### *Mutual Intercultural Relations in Plural Societies; MIRIPS*

This is a large international comparative study on intercultural relationships and what these do to individuals, both immigrants and indigenous.

Many societies are confronted with problems that their citizens have in establishing and maintaining positive relationships with other citizens, particularly if these others belong to religious and ethnic groups different from the own. Increasingly these interpersonal problems lead to serious tensions and conflicts. In order to confront, prevent or remedy these conflicts we need information on the nature of intercultural relationships and interactions, on the particular groups involved, the type of contact situations that are characteristics of conflicts and on the circumstances, rules, norms

and regulatory mechanisms that lead to or help avoiding problematic situations. The focus is not only on relationships between groups but also on relationships within groups and how these latter impact on the former, hence mutual intercultural relationships.

Our research group participates in this study, in which some 30 countries from all continents participate. In the Dutch part of the study we put in extra effort to explore the role of parenting, peer group activities and the transmission of values within families and peer groups that regulate intercultural relationships. MIRIPS primarily focuses on psychological and educational processes and influences, but it will adopt an eco-cultural perspective in which also the role of economics and politics will be explored.

The study seeks to answer such questions as:

1. What acculturation strategies and expectations are typical of immigrants and nationals living in the Netherlands?
2. Do feelings of security and belongingness linked to appraisals of the possibility to maintain manifestations of one's own culture, of the own actual and future economic and financial situation together with appraisals of the availability of jobs and job opportunities affect intercultural and intra-cultural relationships?
3. What role do parenting and peer group interactions play in the development of prejudice and racist attitudes?

### *Romaphobia and its explanations*

This research aims to explain negative attitudes towards Roma (Gypsies). Independent variables are derived from four dominant approaches to prejudice: social learning theory and Boehnke's theory on intergenerational transmission of values— particularly in relation to the question of how, and to what extent the anti-Roma bias is transmitted from parents to children; personality theory (Altemayer's re-conceptualized authoritarianism); group conflict theory, with special attention to the concept of perceived threat, and negative stereotyping of Roma; and Berry's acculturation theory focusing on intercultural relationships. From the latter perspective the study explores the relationships between intercultural attitudes, competencies, and interactions (between Roma and non-Roma) on anti-Roma bias. Data are collected from 500 secondary school students and their parents in each of three countries: Serbia, Hungary, and Holland.

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## **TEACHING IN A CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Classrooms in the Netherlands are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse. This ethnic diversity provides new challenges to both teachers and immigrant students alike. One of the major challenges for the teacher is the stress associated with teaching a multicultural group and helping immigrant students to explore their ethnic identity and supporting them to adapt to the Dutch society. For immigrant students, the major challenges are psychological and sociocultural adaptation. On the basis of existing literature a theoretical model is presented that describes the interaction between teachers' and immigrant students' acculturation profiles and the interaction's effects on diversity-related burnout and psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Plans for investigating this model are formulated.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many countries in the western world are becoming multicultural societies. The Netherlands is no exception. The percentage of immigrants in the Netherlands is steadily growing. As of 2006 almost 20 percent of the Dutch population is immigrant. The major immigrant groups in the Netherlands are Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans. The Turks and Moroccans first came to the Netherlands in the 1960s as guest workers, but many of them decided to take permanent residence in the Netherlands and form families there. The Surinamese and Antilleans were inhabitants of former Dutch colonies, and as such it was relatively easy for them to migrate to the Netherlands. The Turks and Moroccans are mostly Muslims, while the Antilleans and Surinamese mainly have a Christian background. Cultural diversity in the Netherlands is thus not just an issue of a high percentage of immigrants; it is also an issue of immigrants who have distinctly different cultural backgrounds. Most immigrants reside in the major Dutch cities. This provides a unique challenge for teachers in schools in the major cities: These teachers often have a high number of immigrant students in their classes with very different cultural backgrounds. These teachers need to have a level of understanding of students' cultural backgrounds and may have to deal with students whose mastery of the Dutch language is suboptimal. At the same time, it would be desirable if immigrant students could learn about Dutch culture in school. Using existing literature about immigrant adaptation and performing new research about the interaction between immigrant students and their teacher we wish to make a model that will help us understand some of the unique processes involved in educating a multicultural classroom. Such a model may improve the multicultural classroom practices not only in the Netherlands, but in multicultural societies in the entire western world.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A central issue in the immigration process is acculturation. Acculturation is defined as the psychological and behavioural changes an individual experiences as a result from prolonged contact with different cultural groups. Cultural changes include alterations in a group's customs and in the members' economic and personal lives. Psychological changes include alterations in individuals' attitudes toward the acculturation process, their cultural identities (Phinney 2003) and their social behaviours in relation to inter-group contact. The acculturation process may take years or even generations. In older literature, acculturation is often described as a unidimensional process; the immigrants take over the majority culture and lose their ethnic culture (Gordon 1964). However, more recent theories of acculturation view acculturation as a bidimensional process. This means that cultural maintenance and adaptation to the host culture are separate dimensions. The most well known bidimensional theory of acculturation has been formulated by Berry (1997; 2005). According to Berry people who acculturate have to answer two questions to decide how they want to acculturate: "Do I want to maintain my own culture?" and "Do I want to adapt to the majority culture?" Assuming that these questions can only be answered by yes or no, the answers to these questions lead to four different acculturation profiles<sup>1</sup>. Immigrants who wish to adapt to the majority culture and maintain ties with their own culture endorse an integration profile. Immigrants who want to adapt to the majority culture and discard their own culture endorse an assimilation profile. Immigrants who wish to maintain their own culture and refrain from adapting to the majority culture endorse a separation profile. Finally, immigrants who want to adapt to the majority culture nor maintain their own culture have a marginalization profile. Support for the bidimensional structure of acculturation has been found in several studies. (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus 2000; Ben-Shalom & Horenczyk 2003).

Another important question in the acculturation process is *how well* immigrants acculturate. This is labelled with the term adaptation. Two distinct types of adaptation have been proposed: psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Searle & Ward 1990). Sociocultural adaptation deals with how well an immigrant can live in the new environment: does the immigrant have the appropriate cultural skills to live in the new environment. Some of the more important factors of sociocultural adaptation are language mastery, making contact with the majority population, and behavioural problems. The factor sociocultural adaptation is especially interesting for educators, since it entails language mastery and behavioural problems, two very important variables in education. Psychological adaptation deals with immigrant well-being. Psychological adaptation is often measured with the variables, anxiety, depression, psychosomatic problems and self-esteem. From an educational viewpoint, psychological adaptation could be seen as student well-being. Unfortunately, in many studies sociocultural adaptation and psychological adaptation are operationalised in different manners. The acculturation preference is a strong indicator of adaptation,

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<sup>1</sup> In reality these are not "yes" or "no" matters but matters that are evaluated as interrelated issues. As a matter of fact questionnaires exploring these issues mostly use continuous rating scales, either enquiring the issues independently or by using questions that combine the two issues. Both approaches result in continuous scores for either each of the issues or for each of the acculturation types. In the first approach working with cut off scores results in the desired dichotomy that can be used for the categorization. Critics consider both approaches reductionist, conceptually as well as statistically and therefore suboptimal (Rudmin 2003).

the integration strategy is often found to be the most successful acculturation profile in terms of adaptation. It has been found that immigrants using an integration strategy have a better psychological adaptation as well as a better sociocultural adaptation than immigrants opting for other acculturation profiles. This would make it advisable for governments to promote integration as much as possible, while immigrants would do best to try to maintain their own culture and adapt to the new culture simultaneously. While integration is often found to be the single best acculturation profile, separation and assimilation have some positive effects on adaptation as well. While not as much as integration, separation does seem to have a positive influence on psychological adaptation. And while the effect is not as strong as integration, assimilation does seem to have a positive effect on sociocultural adaptation. Marginalization is the least preferable strategy in terms of acculturation, since immigrants opting for a marginalization profile generally tend to score poor on both sociocultural and psychological adaptation (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder 2006).

The acculturation experience is only partially attributable to the immigrants' acculturation profile. The wishes of the majority population also play a central role in the acculturation process (Piontkowski, Rohmann & Florack 2002; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault & Senecal 1997). And while the acculturation experience may have the strongest impact on immigrants, it also effects the host population, who have to decide in which way they want to interact with the immigrants. Four profiles have been proposed to describe the ways in which the host population can engage in contact with the immigrants. Integrationists accept that immigrants wish to maintain their own culture and allow immigrants to become a part of society by engaging in relations with them. Assimilationists do not accept cultural maintenance but do wish immigrants to become a part of society and engage in social contacts with them. Separationists allow immigrants to maintain their heritage culture but do not wish immigrants to engage in society or engage in social contacts with them. Finally, exclusionists neither wish to allow cultural maintenance or seek social contacts with immigrants. The immigrants and the host population have a different amount of influence on the acculturation process. Since the dominant group is most often the majority in a country, the majority groups' acculturation profile will have a strong influence on immigrants' chances for cultural maintenance and the opportunity for immigrants to participate in society. If an immigrant wishes to integrate, maintaining the own culture and adapting to the new culture, but the majority culture wishes immigrants to assimilate, the room for cultural maintenance is very small. The degree in which the wishes of immigrants and majority population about acculturation strategies coincide is called concordance of acculturation (Piontkowski, Rohmann & Florack 2002). When the wishes about the acculturation strategy of the majority population and the immigrant population are highly similar, this will lead to less perceived threat and more enrichment for both the immigrants and the host population. An ideal situation would be a society wherein both the immigrant population as well as the host population would endorse an integration strategy: this would simultaneously lead to the most beneficial adaptation for immigrants as well as the best relationships between immigrants and host population.

While the concordance model of acculturation deals with society as a whole, similar processes may take place in the classroom. Especially the relationship between the teacher and the immigrant students is interesting. When there is little concordance

between the acculturation wishes of the teacher and the immigrant students, this may lead to detrimental effects for both the students and the teacher. In society, when the acculturation wishes of the host population differ from the acculturation wishes of the immigrant population it is at least possible to avoid one another. While avoidance is not conducive to mutual understanding, it may at least help to diminish the detrimental effects of a low acculturation concordance as much as possible. However, in a classroom no avoidance is possible. Both students and teachers have to deal with each other on an almost daily basis. A classroom where there is very little concordance of acculturation between the immigrant students and the teacher may have detrimental effects for both the teacher and the students.

Tatar and Horenczyk (2002) have already found some evidence that working in a classroom with immigrant students provides a unique challenge to teachers. Especially teachers with assimilationist attitudes may encounter problems when working with immigrant students. It seems that when working with immigrant students a teacher may come to suffer from a specific form of burn-out: diversity related burnout. This is a distinct form of burn-out, although it is related to traditional burn-out. It is caused by working with a culturally diverse student group. Teachers with assimilationist attitudes are at higher risk for developing diversity related burn-out than their more pluralistic colleagues. This may be because teachers who endorse an assimilationist attitude may become frustrated with their immigrant students because in their perception the immigrant students are unwilling to abandon their heritage culture, or because they perceive that immigrant students are not assimilating into the host society fast enough. Tatar and Horenczyk clearly showed that the acculturation attitude of the teacher has a major influence on his capacity to work with immigrant students. Unfortunately, in their study the immigrant student perspective has not been taken into account. It could be that immigrant students who are more willing to assimilate, cause less stress for a teacher with an assimilationist attitude, because there is a higher level of concordance between the immigrant students and the teacher. Even although this issue has not been completely resolved yet, their study has clearly shown that acculturation attitudes play an important role in the classroom, and the acculturation preference of the teacher may even cause diversity-related burnout.

Vollmer (2000) has indicated that teachers' beliefs have a strong influence on a classroom's educational and social climate. When a teacher is dealing with a multicultural classroom his preferences about acculturation may influence the immigrant students in several ways. A teacher who has a preference for assimilation may discourage immigrant students to explore their cultural identities. By doing so, the teacher is narrowing the immigrant students' possibilities for integration and in some way the teacher is forcing students into an assimilation profile. This seems undesirable because a strong integration profile seems more beneficial for students' sociocultural and psychological adaptation. And, since most immigrants opt for an integration profile, conflict between the teacher and immigrant students opting for an integration profile may arise, thus putting the teacher at odds with most of his immigrant students. A teacher who opts for an integrationist approach may help and encourage immigrant students to discover their cultural identities and teach them the cultural skills needed to function in the host society. Such a teacher is actively helping his immigrant students achieving a good psychological and sociocultural

adaptation by helping his immigrant students in developing the most beneficial integration profile.

The study by Tatar and Horenczyk (2002) shows that acculturation in the classroom needs to be taken seriously, since it is an indicator of diversity-related burnout. The results from the ICSEY study (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder 2006) indicate how important acculturation is for immigrant adolescents: it affects major factors in their lives, most notably psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Vollmer (2000) has indicated that teachers' beliefs have a strong influence on the classroom climate. The model of concordance of acculturation (Piontkowski, Rohmann & Florack 2002) and the theory of acculturation (Berry 1997; 2005) state that reciprocal influences between immigrants and host nationals will take place. These theories and results taken together suggest two important things: 1) multiculturalism in the classroom is an issue that needs to be taken seriously and 2) teachers' and immigrant students' acculturation profiles will probably interact and affect both student adaptation and teacher burnout. Clearly, a lot of work is still to be done to further our understanding of teaching immigrant student populations. Using the concordance model of acculturation some further interesting predictions can be made that as of yet have not been addressed.

## **THE PRESENT RESEARCH**

The influence of teachers on immigrant students' psychological and sociocultural adaptation needs to be further investigated. While it is known that the students' acculturation profile influences psychological and sociocultural adaptation, the influence teachers' acculturation preferences have on immigrant students' psychological and sociocultural adaptation has not yet been investigated. And while Tatar and Horenczyk (2002) have found that a teachers' acculturation attitude influences diversity-related burnout, nothing is known about how a immigrant student's attitude towards acculturation may influence a teacher's burnout. Important effects of acculturation attitudes on both students and teachers have been found, but no interaction between students and teachers acculturation attitudes has ever been found. Because interaction between teacher and students is central to classroom practice, these effects must be investigated, if we are to fully understand what the effects of acculturation are on teaching. In light of the concordance theory of acculturation and previous work on acculturation and adaptation several hypotheses and a model about student and teacher acculturation attitudes will be formulated.

When applying the theory of acculturation and the concordance model of acculturation to classroom practice, certain predictions about the burn-out of teachers and the adaptation of students can be made. Of course, earlier results will need to be replicated: this means that it is assumed that immigrant students opting for an integration profile will perform best in terms of psychological and sociocultural adaptation and teachers opting for a assimilationist profile will show the highest degree of diversity-related burnout. In this study interactions between the teachers' acculturation preference and the immigrant students' acculturation profile will be investigated.

To study these interactions questionnaires will be administered to both teachers and immigrant students. The questionnaire for the immigrant students will measure

acculturation strategies, psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. The teacher questionnaire will measure burnout, diversity related burnout and acculturation preferences. Eventually, the teachers' acculturation preferences and the immigrant students' acculturation profile and its interaction can be studied. Most importantly, the effects of these interactions on a teachers burn-out and on the immigrant students' psychological and sociocultural adaptation can be studied.

However, merely finding interaction effects is not enough. We suggested that such interaction do impact on students, i.e., we suggest a causal relationship. However, to prove causation it has to be found that teachers with more integrationist approaches to teaching multicultural classrooms have beneficial effects on their immigrant students' development: When immigrant students have teachers with integrationist approaches towards acculturation, their psychological and sociocultural adaptation has to improve over time. This would imply that the teachers' integrationist approach is causing the immigrant students' positive development. To find such causal relations, this study will be conducted as a longitudinal study, measuring immigrant students three times over the course of a school year.

#### Hypotheses:

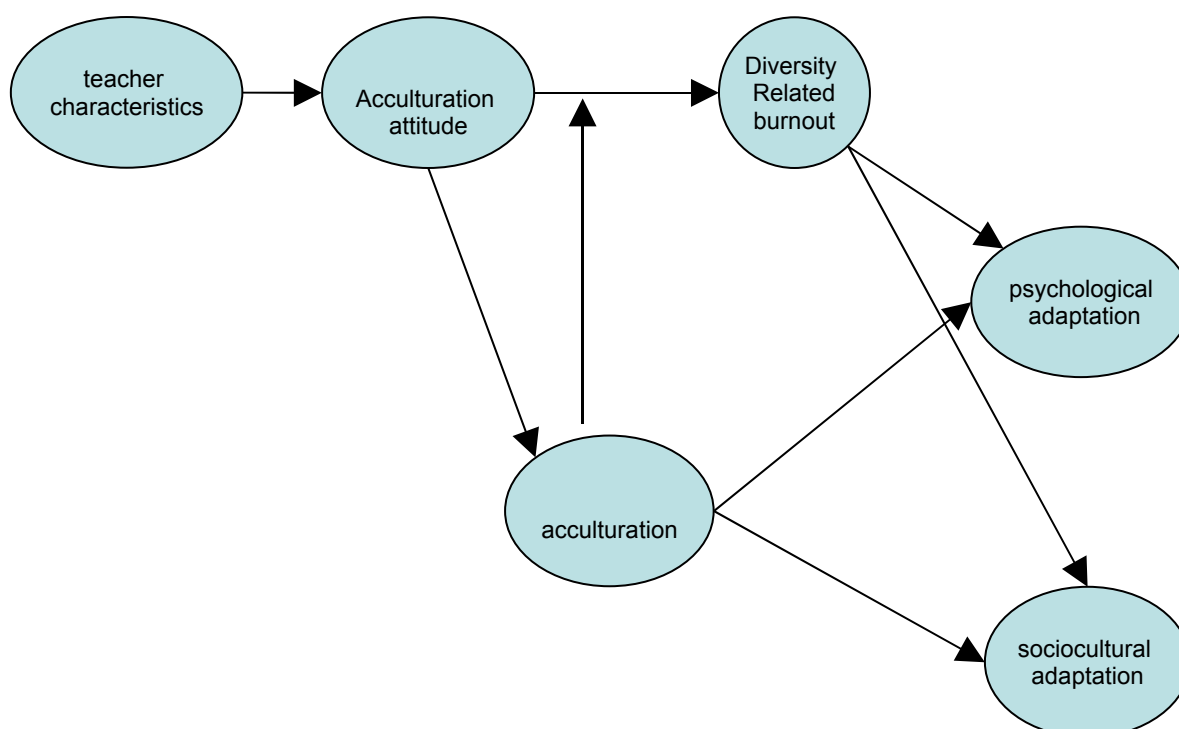
- Students will show most optimal psychological and sociocultural adaptation when the teachers' acculturation expectations correspond to the students' acculturation preference.
- Teachers with an assimilation approach to acculturation will show higher levels of diversity related burnout.
- Teachers who have low concordance of acculturation with their students will show higher levels of diversity related burnout.
- Teachers' preferences towards acculturation will influence his immigrant students' acculturation profile.
- Teachers' acculturation expectations will influence immigrant students' psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

#### THE MODEL AND ITS EXPLANATION

The relationships described in this paper can be described in a single model. Model 1 describes the influences immigrant students have on their teacher and the influences the teacher has on his immigrant students. This model describes reciprocal relationships between immigrant students and their teachers. A teacher influences the immigrant students' identity exploration as is indicated by the influence of the teachers' acculturation attitude towards the student's acculturation profile. The students' acculturation profile is a moderator for teacher diversity-related burnout. A teacher's level of burnout is an indicator for the students' psychological and sociocultural adaptation. This model will be tested by using structural equation modelling. Using structural equation modelling has some important benefits: The entire model and all specified relationships can be tested in one run, multilevel effects (students nested under teachers) can be modelled, and should the need arise certain adjustments and improvements to the model can be easily made.

Model 1 describes all the interactions we wish to test in this study, but it does not prove causation, since our multiple measurements are not represented in the model.

To test for the causation effects, a teachers attitudes will affect immigrants students' adaptation, a separate analysis will be conducted which does utilize the multiple measurements in this study. The test used will be a multilevel analysis in the statistical package mlwin. Multilevel modelling offers some benefits above the more traditional repeated measures ANOVA, benefits that are especially interesting for educational researchers. By allowing the specification of multiple levels error variance is reduced, thus improving the generalizability of the results and missing data can be handled in more elegant ways than in repeated measures ANOVA, where missing data will cause the exclusion of cases. Teacher characteristics will be at the first level of measurement and immigrant students' adaptation characteristics across three measurements at the second level of measurement. A multilevel model with teacher characteristics and several measurements of students' adaptation can be used to find causal effects.



**Model 1:** The model to be investigated in the future studies.

## METHOD

Data will be collected in secondary schools across major cities in the Netherlands. Teachers will fill out a questionnaire once. In this questionnaire burnout, diversity related burnout, the perception of acculturation and multiculturalism will be measured. The students will fill out a questionnaire three times per year: once at the beginning of the school year once in the middle, and once near the end of a school year. The questionnaire will measure psychological adaptation, ethnic and national contacts, national and ethnic language use and competence, sociocultural adaptation, acculturation and ethnic identity. The different scales of the questionnaires will be presented in the next subsection.

### Students' questionnaire

### *Acculturation*

Acculturation will be measured using a revised questionnaire from a study of Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk (2003). This questionnaire measures integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization using items about contact preference, language preference, romantic preferences and preference for living circumstances.

### *Psychological adaptation.*

Psychological adaptation will be measured using scales for psychological problems, psychosomatic problems, and self esteem.

### *Sociocultural adaptation*

Sociocultural adaptation will be measured using a scale for behavioural problems and Ward's scale for sociocultural adaptation. In Ward's scale several aspects of day to day live are covered like dealing with authority figures, understanding humour and dealing with people staring at you. The behavioural problems scale is aimed at adolescents and mostly deals with problems in school.

## **Teacher questionnaire**

### *Acculturation preference*

Acculturation preference will be measured using a revised questionnaire from a study of Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk (2003). This questionnaire measures integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization using items about immigrant students' supposed contact preference, language preference, romantic preferences and preference for living circumstances.

### *Diversity-related burnout & Burnout*

Both diversity related burnout and burnout will be measured with a questionnaire from Tatar & Horenczyk (2002). This questionnaire measures both general burnout and diversity-related burnout, caused by working with immigrant students.

## **Population**

The immigrant student sample will consist of immigrant students attending junior vocational secondary education. They will range in ages from 12 years old up to 18 years old. Their ethnicities will mostly be Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese and Antillean.

The teacher sample will consist of teachers teaching at the same junior vocational secondary education schools that the students visit. We will try to sample a sample of teachers that is representative of the teacher population in the major Dutch cities with regards to sex, ethnicity and years of teaching experience.

## **SCIENTIFIC VALUE AND SOCIAL RELEVANCE**



This study not only deals with several important aspects of intercultural education but will serve to further our understanding of immigrant acculturation as well. We will gain insight in which aspects of teaching a multicultural classroom are potential causes of burn-out for teachers. We will learn which acculturation profile is most beneficial for secondary education students in the Netherlands. But most important is that data will be gathered about the interaction of teachers and immigrant students in multicultural classrooms: How should a teacher confront immigrant students and what acculturation profiles should be encouraged for immigrant students in order to create an optimal learning environment for both the teacher and the immigrant students?

This study may also prove to be of great social relevance. Dutch media frequently report on the poor adjustment, radicalisation and behavioural maladjustment of immigrant adolescents. They voice a growing concern in Dutch society with the nature and rate of immigrants' acculturation and adaptation. Specialists suggest that this is more caused by the Dutch community's lack of acculturation than to the immigrants, but nevertheless, eventually the Dutch increasingly feel and talk about ethnic tensions in their society. Investigating how teachers can optimally teach a multicultural classroom, will serve both teachers and students and will help to improve acculturation processes and adaptation outcomes. Researching multicultural education in such a way that both teachers and immigrant students may benefit from it is not only scientifically interesting, but necessary.

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# CRITICAL EXPLORATIONS IN UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION, CULTURE AND DIVERSITY

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## INTRODUCTION

Issues related to culture, identity and diversity constitute both pressing concerns and are important dimensions of democratic agendas both in the North and the South. Schools are not merely operational sites for national and international level policies with a bearing on multilingualism and diversity. Schools, I argue, are sites where we privilege certain understandings vis-à-vis language, culture and diversity and repress other understandings. Schools are also settings that are normatively understood as being the locations where learning occurs. A shift in understandings where schools can be seen as one of many sites or locations where children are socialized into their primary languages – ie. ways with words – and primary cultures – ie. ways of being – allows us to understand the problems inherent with more narrow selective positions vis-à-vis learning. Such a shift in positions, I argue in this working paper, has the potential to contribute towards furthering our understandings regarding pluralistic societies and throwing light on “the ongoing tension of the multilingual balancing act” in education (Hult 2004:196).

This working paper presents thoughts at the crossroads of a traditional review of research and a discussion of theoretical framework(s). In addition, it explores emerging ideas at the intersection of different academic arenas. As such, the critical perspectives presented here need to be understood as work-in-progress in both a real and a metaphorical sense.

The work presented here has emerged from research being conducted at the KOM-DS, *Communication, Culture and Diversity – Deaf Studies*, research group at Örebro University, Sweden. The ideas presented here build upon previous and on-going doctoral, post-doctoral projects and national developmental projects in the research group and present day Swedish discussions of significance to cultural diversity inside and outside school settings. In addition, the ideas explored here are inspired from different research projects that I have personally worked in during the last two decades. My projects have studied the lives and situation of different groups – women, immigrants, minorities and functional disabled human beings – within the frameworks of different types of institutionalized educational everyday practices or

meta-level analysis of research that focuses different groups.<sup>2</sup> The KKOM-DS research group is relatively young, nationally unique and that has (for reasons that I have highlighted elsewhere) challenged dominant perspectives in both the Diversity arena and in the Deaf field during the recent years. The group has contributed to national level discussions in the areas of literacy, multilingualism, diversity and identity. It was established during the second half of the 1990s. It's decade long existence is a blink in terms of academic life spans and the explorations offered here need to be understood in terms of emerging ideas at the crossroads of different academic fields and as an attempt at making sense of the present. One of my underlying intentions here is reflected in the words of Kathryn P. Meadow-Orlans (2001:143).

we can best move ahead in the future by knowing what has been accomplished in the past, acknowledging the achievements and assessing the gaps with a broad brush without dwelling on them for too long.

Completed and the on-going projects at the KKOM-DS research group have focused identity and communication issues in school contexts during the last decade primarily from sociocultural points of departure. More recently researchers in the group have been inspired from postcolonial perspectives. Thus, one of the two foci in this paper is an exploration of central ideas within these two theoretical perspectives, including an analysis of how some key concepts like culture, diversity, multilingualism etc can be explored.

In addition, I will suggest that important concepts such as language, culture, identity and diversity have run astray in at least Swedish, but perhaps also other Northern, contexts and can be re-conceptualised using critical perspectives that bring together research that has previously been conducted in separate academic areas. This paper attempts to present a preliminary analysis of these ideas with the explicit aim of soliciting critical feedback and to enable a refinement of these thoughts.

### **A brief note on institutional perspectives and research agendas**

Institutionalised education is an enterprise that has strong historical traditions and is based upon accumulated collective knowledge at the societal level. The initiation of mandatory schooling for *all* children in northern societies after World War II brought issues of human diversity and difference centre stage in institutional education. Research activities that focus educational arenas have been and continue in large measure to be viewed as important for addressing issues of equality and diversity. Research is thus often understood in terms of a neutral tool that will help us arrive at better and more refined educational methods so that everyone can be included in

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<sup>2</sup> Results from classroom based interactional studies conducted in different school and working life arenas during the last two decades have been made available in the national and international peer-reviewed literature and through book chapters and reports. My Ph.D. thesis focused everyday life and literacy practices of adult women and migrant worker's children in a national multilingual/multicultural NGO in South Asia. In addition, I have conducted meta-level research in the areas of literacies, deaf education, participation-equity and functional disabilities. Results from these different ethnographically focused and meta-research projects have important implications for learning and human identity.

education. While this understanding holds generally in the area of education, it is particularly the case that research that gets labelled as “handicap”, “special” or “bilingual”, has a tendency to focus primarily upon “better models and methods” (compare also Bagga-Gupta 2004a; Vislie 1997).

Here there is an important need to reflect upon the role that research can play in the human sciences. There is need to draw attention to an often overlooked and significant distinction between general education, special education or language education in terms of *research areas* and general education, special education or language education as *activity and institutional fields*.<sup>3</sup> A research enterprise focused upon general education, special education or language education represents critical analysis and reflection on the institutional activity field of education, special education or language education. This means that the analysis of the institutional field of special education, for instance, is done from an explicit theoretical perspective and through the use of conceptually driven questions, methodologies and theories that are dominant during a given time period within the educational and human sciences (see also Jacob 2001). This distinction highlights important issues and suggests that the activity of reflecting critically upon the institutional field of education (ie doing research) is different from being engaged in activities as a professional within the institutional field of education. In other words, these are two different activity systems and while research traditionally has occupied a higher status, neither activity is superior to the other. This leads to an important qualification: while research is important, it has limited possibilities and cannot be used as a neutral tool from which we can distil or arrive at “educational methods”.

The above distinction has specific implications. To illustrate: a number of different models or ideologies of communication are understood as having shaped the organisation of education for deaf students all over the world during the last couple of centuries. However, there is a fair amount of confusion in the reported literature regarding “research on the oral, manual, total-communication or bilingual models” and “research that focuses the communicative-practices that make up the different models” (Bagga-Gupta 2004a). The label and the explicit communicative rationale of any given deaf education model tends to be equated with and is seen as representing the everyday communicative-practices that constitute that model. This *subtle slip* has confounded the field of deaf education, and researchers and professionals have in vain since the 1600s tried to pursue magic bullet solutions to what is viewed as problematic at the institutional level.

The point that is important here is that there is a fundamental difference in the logic of the institutional field of deaf education or the ideologies of communication that underlie any given model and the need to reflect upon this institutional field in the activity of research. Different ethnographical classroom empirical projects at the KKOM-DS research group have, in terms of the distinction drawn upon here, focused upon the study of the communicative-practices that make up the present bilingual model in Swedish deaf education and other models and methods employed in general education. One can say that an analytical descriptive agenda – and not a

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<sup>3</sup> Parallel distinctions between special education as a research enterprise and special education as an institutional field have also been made recently (see Bagga-Gupta 2002, 2004a, Nilholm 2003; see also Nilholm & Björck-Åkesson 2007).

*prescriptive* agenda – has been the point of departure in such research (see Bagga-Gupta 2004b for an overview of projects that have focused deaf education). The descriptive-prescriptive distinction is represented in Figure 1:

Descriptive research agenda	Prescriptive or ideological research agenda
<p>Studying and analyzing everyday life.</p> <p>What do we know about communication in educational settings and what does <i>language use</i> look like in a given deaf educational model?</p> <p>When, how, together with whom and why are different modalities and languages used inside and outside classroom settings?</p> <p>What are the central assumptions regarding language, communication, learning and development in any given educational model?</p>	<p>Identifying the most superior model or method of communication which is deemed to be applicable in all subjects and classroom situations.</p> <p>Focusing upon what we or others think we should be doing in schools.</p> <p>An underlying assumption here equates the communicative model with the communicative-practices in that model.</p>

**Figure 1:** Different research agendas

A point of departure in an analytical-descriptive perspective is problematizing and studying that which is taken for granted or that which is “normal” and not merely focusing what is seen as the explicit “problem” at the institutional field level. Here the significance of the “best methods”, the “form of communication” and the “how” to teach issues become subordinate to issues of “communicative content”, who is participating in the educational setting, what is being focused and why. A descriptive agenda in research concomitantly attempts to (i) throw light upon patterned ways with words or ways of communicating in institutional settings and (ii) understanding the underlying central assumptions vis-à-vis communication, learning and development that guide the practices in a given educational model.

The need for research focus on communicative-practices is further explicated because knowledge regarding the “inner world” of school settings generally remain a “black box” in a metaphorical sense:

The inner world of schools remains in many respects a black box and people have all kinds of ideas about schools, but the actual knowledge about this activity system is very poor. There exists very little research on what actually happens during teaching in schools and a very limited analysis of how success and failure are produced in direct teaching (Säljö 1997a:365, my translation).

What we know about schools is what members of educational arenas say about what happens in schools and this is different from the “actual” everyday practices that constitute life in schools. The distinction that I raise here becomes even more significant given the recent criticism levelled against Swedish “handicap” and “special education” research.<sup>4</sup> The Swedish national commission report – Proposition 1998/99 – that focused issues related to students with functional disabilities in school arenas maintained that:

<sup>4</sup> Meta-analysis of research indicates that a similar gap in knowledge exists in the areas of bilingualism, multilingualism, multiliteracies.

A systematic research based knowledge concerned with the teaching and instruction of students in need of special support is missing. The existent research in the area is dominated by an analysis of handicaps, their origins, remedial programs and outcomes. [...] There is a lack of research based knowledge for specific groups. A concrete example is regarding deaf children's learning, and specifically deaf children's learning of Swedish (Proposition 1998/99:21, my translation; see Knoors [1997] for a critique from an international horizon levelled at Swedish research in the area of deaf education and literacy).

The above critique is also echoed in the evaluation of Swedish educational and special educational research by the Swedish Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, HSFR, in 1997 (see Rosengren & Öhngren 1997). This national evaluation suggested, among others things, that a narrow focus on handicap categories was clear even at the end of the 20th century and that theoretical frameworks employed in Swedish special educational research were weak: "common themes across categories are seldom identified, neither are the links to the educational research agenda or to theory building in general" (Vislie 1997:139). The evaluation also suggested that strong interest groups often have control over the special education research agenda and findings.

### **Working paper outline**

The rest of this working paper is divided into five parts. The next section discusses the sociocultural and postcolonial perspectives by raising issues of relevance to the areas of communication, culture and diversity. Salient features from these perspectives are illustrated by introducing some issues at the crossroads of different areas of research related to communication, culture and diversity. Sections 3, 4 and 5 focus academic areas where research has been conducted within the KKOM-DS research group (these explorations go beyond the work that has been initiated in the group). Section 3 focuses language and communication, section 4 explores special education and deaf research and section 5 discusses the areas of culture and diversity. An explicit attempt is made to highlight shifts that have been or can be accrued through the lenses of sociocultural and postcolonial perspectives and by juxtaposing at least two separate research areas simultaneously. The concluding section of this working paper reflects upon the challenges that emerge when different theoretical perspectives and findings from separate academic areas are focused upon simultaneously. It is suggested that such critical explorations and reconceptualisations have important implications in the educational sciences field.

### **IDEAS AND TRENDS WITHIN AND AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF DIFFERENT ACADEMIC ARENAS AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

The question 'What is a review?' is disconcertingly complex. [...] Equally complex is the question 'What counts as research?' The more we consider multiple forms of human diversity and multiple ways of knowing that emerge from different histories and disciplines, the more complicated these questions become (Sleeter 2001:209).

The above quote resonates further when an attempt is made to blur out boundaries and instead focus upon the intersections of different academic areas and disciplines. It is my hope that the explorations presented here both will solicit critical feedback and at the same time offer new insights at disciplinary crossroads, insights that are important in furthering our understandings related to learning and instruction.

Research on language and literacy issues during the last couple of decades can be used as an illustrative starting point in order to understand central assumptions within the sociocultural perspective. This can be represented by research in fields as diverse as Communication Studies<sup>5</sup>, Literacy Studies or New Literacy Studies<sup>6</sup>, Deaf Studies and Disability Studies<sup>7</sup> and Cultural and/or Ethnicity Studies<sup>8</sup>. Each of these constitutes a vast and emerging or established academic area in itself. I will here introduce some of these fields in terms of a discussion of salient features that emerge at the intersectional spaces of these fields and highlight theoretical assumptions within both the sociocultural and postcolonial perspectives (I will return to some of these fields in the following sections).

Pioneering studies during the last few decades have led to a major shift – at least at the theoretical level – in how issues related to communication, multi- or plurilingualism, literacies and identities are currently understood. These newer, pluralistic and dynamic understandings of communication, literacies and cultures have grown from studies of *language use* with an empirical ethnographically inspired approach to the study of human practices and identities inside and outside school arenas (eg. Corbett 1996; Erting 1994; Heath 1983; Lave 1988; Wikan 2002). In other words, insights derived from such studies emerge from research on the uses of oral, written and signed languages in different institutional settings.

The conceptual shifts in the theoretical understandings of literacy and languages have occurred within a larger shift in the Social Sciences and Humanities that have shaped newer understandings of human learning, human development and human communication. Language is no longer only viewed as something that exists in a social vacuum and neither is language understood as mirroring reality in some neutral fashion (Linell 1998, Säljö 1997b). Meaning and interpretations occur in and through the use of language and in a sense we create our realities through the use of language itself. As cultural tools that have been created sociohistorically, the symbols and signs that have become codified into different human languages in themselves mediate the world to us. In this sense these symbols and signs are tools and mediational means through which we can understand and interpret the world (Wertsch 1998; 1985).

Language is not only the most powerful of our human “inventions” and artefacts but it is also the unique cultural tool that makes us human (Bakhtin 1986; Linell 1998; Säljö 2000; Wertsch 1998). Language permeates our entire lives and it is as invisible to us as is the air that surrounds us. While there is a concrete physical world “out there”, it is use of language that allows us to give meaning to this world and thereby create our

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<sup>5</sup> Eg. Bakhtin 1986; Linell 2005; Säljö 2000; Wertsch 1998; Vygotsky 1934/1986.

<sup>6</sup> Eg. Barton 1994; Barton & Hamilton 1998; Heath 1983; Knobel 1999; Martin-Jones & Jones 2000; Scribner & Cole 1981; Street 1984; 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Eg. Corbett 1996; Davis 1996 Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan 1996; Lucas 2001; Padden 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Eg. Benhabib 2002; Bhabha 2002; Said 1978/2002.

realities. And languages change keeping pace with our changing needs. Much of this kind of thinking has led to the theoretical orientation that is, both in the international and in the Scandinavian contexts, commonly known as the *sociocultural* or *sociohistorical perspective* (Bliss & Säljö 1999; Dysthe 2001; Rogoff 1990; Säljö 2000; Wertsch 1998; 1985).

While this understanding of language has found prominence in recent paradigmatic shifts in the human sciences, its essence has been recognized and intrigued philosophers and scholars in different parts of the world for many centuries. The current prominence accorded to the meaning-making and social practices positions accorded to human language and communication, notwithstanding, there appears to exist a “great divide” between these more recent social-constructionistic and sociocultural perspectives, and the ways in which many branches of the language sciences are conceptualized. For present analytical purposes one could differentiate between a dominant perspective in the language sciences where form, structure and monological approaches flourish, and newer communicatively oriented perspectives that challenge the above hegemony. In the latter, the language sciences are approached from dialogical points of departure (see for instance discussions in Dysthe 2001; Linell 1998; Säljö 2000). Linked to this divide is a particular perspective on human development that has contributed strongly to dominant views regarding learning generally and language learning specifically.

Our understanding of development – regardless of whether it is societal or ontogenetical development that is focused upon – is dominated by a linear construct. Societies are viewed in terms of “developing – under-developed – developed”. While these terms are related to assumptions vis-à-vis economic welfare, two issues can be raised for present purposes. Firstly, these terms are arbitrary and reductionistic “where the less-to-a-more developed progression [...] perspective fails to view development in terms of both time and space” (Bagga-Gupta 1995:xix). Secondly, education is viewed as playing a pivotal role in bringing about both ontogenetical and societal development. While a linear development in the biological sense needs to be acknowledged, (visible) physical changes in a human being between birth and death has led to a rational transfer to other areas of human development. Linear trajectories are however perhaps not the most appropriate metaphors for understanding human intellectual development in general and human language development in particular. For instance, the human capacity or “brain as container” metaphor has close semblance to the dominant and reductionistic understanding related to language development and learning. A couple of examples from the school field could illustrate these issues.

A basic conceptualisation in the language sciences is exemplified in the organisational and administrative division between different *language codes* eg. Swedish, English, French, Hindi, Turkish, Swedish Sign Language, American Sign Language, British Sign Language, etc., and *different codes for different learner categories*. The latter administrative and organizational set of categories can be exemplified by the following subjects in the Swedish national syllabi:

- Swedish (for ethnic Swedes),
- Swedish as a second language (for ethnic minorities or immigrant students in schools),



- Swedish for (adult) immigrants,
- Swedish as a second language for the deaf,
- English as a second language (for ethnic Swedes and ethnic minority Swedes),
- French as a foreign language (for ethnic Swedes and ethnic minority Swedes),
- Turkish as a home language (for ethnic minority or immigrant Swedish students), etc.

These two primary ways of organizing and managing language and language teaching-learning can be called the horizontal division (i.e. different language codes) and the vertical division (i.e. different codes for different learner categories) in the language landscape of the Swedish educational system.

Furthermore, I have argued elsewhere that concepts in the language sciences with a numerical connotation (eg. first, second, third, bilingual, etc), relational signification (eg. my language, your language, their language, mother tongue, native language) or geographical emphasis (eg. national language, home language, foreign language, etc.) contribute to creating simplistic and reductionistic boundaries (Bagga-Gupta 2003). It is here significant to recognize that these numerical, relational and geographical concepts in the language sciences are also pushed by a selective individual centred tradition vis-à-vis human learning and development. The “skill focused” and “signal focused” conceptualisation of human communication in the overwhelming majority of research on languages and literacy has thus more recently come under critique and its assumptions have been challenged within the human sciences.

Postcolonial and post-structural perspectives can be understood as both supporting but also complementing sociocultural perspectives in that they too allow for important ways of conceptualising issues of representation and human identities (see Gomes, Bigestans, Magnusson & Ramberg 2002; Said 1978/2002). Issues related to human identity are an important, but implicit, concern in sociocultural theory. Postcolonial perspectives address issues of identity head-on. In addition, the recent recognition accorded to the significance of postcolonial perspectives in Swedish contexts is analytically important:

The increasing focus on postcolonial theory can be attributed to the fact that it allows us to focus attention upon a number of current areas of concern [...] Colonialism is not an issue that belongs to the past, rather it in large measure continues to characterize the world, not only in economical terms, but also culturally. It is far from only post-colonial states that are marked by colonialism – its heritage also has significance for the creation of cultural identities in ‘multilingual societies’ in the North (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn 2002:14-5, my translation).

This means that educational institutions and research that has a bearing on human identities in non-colonial nation states like Sweden cannot be assumed to be exempt from colonial markings. On the contrary, postcolonial perspectives are highly relevant in the study of spaces like Sweden that are becoming conscious of their past *and* present heterogeneity. In other words, such perspectives further our understandings

of present day issues like globalisation, cultures, human identities and diversity, etc. both in and across national contexts.

Postcolonial traditions, arose through the sharp critique of the hegemonic northern misrepresentation and treatment of Islam in terms of the Other by the late professor of literature Edward Said, are regarded as having contributed to a creative (re)interpretation of category identities. These discussions received further impetus when issues related to democracy and difference came centre stage in the post-communist world. Benhabib (1996) characterizes the new global social movement politics of the 1970s and 1980s in terms of a tension between liberal democracy on the one hand and various forms of category differences on the other. Thus issues of representation, identity and diversity became, in one way or another, framed in terms of tensions or challenges at the societal level.

In his classical text, *Orientalism*, Said (1978/2002) suggests that there is a burning need for research to bridge general aspects of human existence to experiences at the local level. He and other central postcolonial thinkers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha are, both in personal and academic arenas, understood as paying allegiance to a number of different representations at the local level simultaneously. One could say that postcolonial theorists are migrants in their personal lives and who are often situated at the crossroads of different academic disciplines as well. As Young (2001) suggests, they do not easily or only belong to any one side. The point that is of interest in the present context is that the personal and/or academic tensions that arise when allegiance is distributed to more than one identity potentially allows for the emergence of bridges and new positions at crossroads. To live at an area of tension between scientific disciplines that one feels solidarity towards and a field that is categorically fixed and in which one is situated as a researcher demands new tools and intellectual spaces. Bhabha's (2002) phrase, hybridity in the third space, has the potential to function as a fruitful tool and an intellectual space for such an enterprise (I will return to these ideas in the final section of this article).

My discussions thus far suggest that while postcolonial and sociocultural perspectives have different roots they share important common assumptions. Firstly, human identity is understood in both traditions in terms of re-negotiations and narratives in different everyday and textual practices and processes. While it is important to recognise that many human categories have organisational and administrative relevance in educational settings, postcolonial and even sociocultural positions call attention to the need for research to be critical towards such categorization since it is argued that human attributes become meaningful within the context of social interactions and in situated practices. The analytical concept of *situated diversity* has been suggested as offering a more relevant point of departure and as also marking the sociohistorical processes that have selectively focused certain (marginalised) differences over other differences (eg. Bagga-Gupta & Nilholm 2002; Kramsch 1996). Secondly, the very use of language – be it oral, written or signed – and the use of discursive resources are, in both traditions, seen as mediating and constitutive of human realities and identities. Thirdly, highlighting the fluid nature of boundaries and hybridity allows for interrogating newer positions or third spaces in multilingual and multicultural identities and language learning, instruction and use.

The discussions so far have introduced the fact that issues related to communication, culture and identities have more recently questioned the static notions ascribed often to Self and Other in research (see Bagga-Gupta 2004a; Hjörne 2004; Wikan 1999). Meaning making processes in social practices are seen as important avenues for raising new and significant issues in third spaces. Here notions of intersectionality and hybridity allow for the identification of empirical questions that go beyond the reductionism inherent when different areas of language education and human identity are isolated from one another in research endeavours. Thus the joint construction of identities and meanings in the context of *communication-practices* is seen as being central and worthy of empirical scrutiny.

Scholars working in the different fields enumerated at the beginning of this section often take sociolinguistic and discourse analytical points of departure. They emphasize that the original epistemological sense of the concept "communication" is often forgotten, not least in research which focuses on (i) maintaining boundaries between languages and human beings (and thereby categorizing them), and the (ii) measurement of communicative competencies, skills and learning processes. The following brief introduction of a few examples can serve to illustrate these issues (these examples will be followed up in the later sections of this paper).

Insights from recent research in the field of Deaf Studies (eg. Erting 1994; 1999; Lucas 2001; Padden 1996) that explicitly focus communication-practices in deaf or "visually oriented" (see Bagga-Gupta 2004b) arenas offer examples of how theoretically driven work can be used at the crossroads of different fields in order to shape conceptualizations of language, literacy and identity within deaf and hearing multilingual research agendas (see further below).

A similar tendency can be seen in how "bilingualism", "foreign languages", "home languages" etc are conceptualized in the literature that focuses school arenas. Processes of globalisation, multilingual and multicultural diversification within Swedish society, have together contributed to changing conceptions of the former monolingual Swedish school into arenas where a large number of languages are spoken and many different cultures are understood as being represented. However, at the research level there is a paucity of knowledge vis-à-vis the everyday activities in these evolving and complex Swedish school arenas. A specific language area can be used to introduce this issue.

Studies of everyday language use (primarily in the international literature) have shown us that bilingualism can no longer be understood in terms of competencies in two language codes. While many researchers situated within new paradigms in the human sciences acknowledge that such a view is an idealization, the misleading nature of this conceptualization is more seldom highlighted. Monolingualism continues to be – incorrectly – understood in the research literature as the human norm, despite the growing awareness that the majority of the people in the world are in fact bi- or multilingual. Research that focuses the everyday lives of human beings who use two or more languages has in addition started changing our understandings of literacy, identity issues and paradoxes in the multidisciplinary area of Communication Studies (eg. Hornberger 2002; Knobel 1999).

While research findings from such emerging and established research areas suggest broader ways of understanding human identities, communication, culture, learning and development, it is important to reflect whether and in what ways these newer understandings are shaping the very institution that is seen as having responsibility for learning and instruction in society. Here it is equally relevant (and this is relatively unexplored terrain) to ask what kinds of identities are endorsed in different language education arenas today in both school sites and in teacher education.

In parallel, and as outlined earlier, recent meta-level studies of research conducted in Sweden in areas that are identified as “special education” and “handicap research”, including “deaf research”, have been characterized in terms of (i) being less systematic, (ii) as having weaker links to theoretical frameworks and (iii) as lagging behind the paradigmatic shifts within the general disciplinary areas of which they are a part. These studies suggest that analytically framed and empirically driven research with a clear educational point of departure is wanting. More recent Swedish and international studies also suggest a shift away from the dichotomised status of Disability Studies and Deaf Studies research fields and the establishment of a third research tradition that distances itself from ideological methodologically oriented discussions about communication and instead focuses upon studies of communicative-practices. This new focus upon communication-practices can be seen as the common denominator in the different areas of interest in the KOM-DS research group. Results from the previous and present projects in the research group have raised issues regarding the *situated* and *distributed* nature of learning inside and outside formal language classrooms.

The exploration of ideas from the intersections of sociocultural and postcolonial perspectives that I have presented so far have weaved in trends from within and at the intersections of different academic arenas and fields. The synthesis of the conceptual framework that began in this section continues in the remainder of this working paper. I will now more explicitly discuss central concepts and fields in order to outline important shifts that have been enabled by sociocultural and postcolonial perspectives and contribute to furthering our understandings in areas such as communication, culture and diversity.

## LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

The terms literacy and numeracy have no adequate expressions in Swedish, though the last decade has seen Swedish researchers borrow the concept “literacy” into their Swedish writings and this borrowing is done often to differentiate between a technical understanding of reading and writing and a more expanded understanding of human language usage (Bagga-Gupta 2006). Interestingly, Carol Padden and Claire Ramsey (1993) – Deaf Studies and Literacy Studies researchers<sup>9</sup> – draw a distinction in English between “reading and writing” and “literacy”, a distinction that some Swedish researchers have started making between the Swedish concepts – “läsning och skrivning” and “literacy” – both more generally in the area of Communication Studies and also in the area of Deaf Studies research (see for instance Allard 2003;

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<sup>9</sup> Padden and Ramsey are both fluent users of American Sign Language and English; Padden, professor of Communication at University of California, San Diego, USA is a deaf child of deaf parents.

Bagga-Gupta 2006; 2002; 2001; Hågbrandt 2003; Skoog 2001; Söderberg 1997; Säljö 1997a.

We suggest that the crucial contrast between literacy and reading and writing is that literacy focuses on practices outside the individual, whereas reading and writing focus on processes occurring inside the individual. Literacy moves away from the idea that knowledge of basic skills resides in individuals' heads and toward groups of people who interact using print; who accomplish career, social and personal ends with print; and who hold sets of values and attitudes about print. Literacy also shifts our view away from classrooms and methods to a range of communication activities human beings engage in over their life spans. Reading might best be taught to six-year-olds, but literacy suggests a complex range of developmental moments that occur from infancy through schooling, to adult work, family and leisure. If young adults have failed to read and write by a certain age, it is often said that their opportunity to acquire basic skills has been lost. At worst, they are called 'illiterate', or perhaps only 'functionally literate'. However, if reading is regarded as part of a set of practices called literacy, different developmental timetables can hold for different people. Hence, if literacy is the focus, the school years are crucial, but so are the years before young children enter school as well as the years after formal education (Padden & Ramsey 1993:96-97).

In addition to the theoretically significant shift outlined in the quote above, it also exemplifies how theoretically driven work in the area of language and literacy can be used within the fields of Disability Studies and Deaf Studies, an important enterprise that can shape conceptualizations within disability and deaf research agendas more broadly (see further section 4). As introduced earlier, the newer and pluralistic view of literacies as being socially distributed and dialogical, and not bound to the individual or monological, can be seen in the growing literature in the field of Literacy Studies. This shift implies that literacy is not conceived as a technique that people acquire and then master. Rather, literacy is construed as a means for mediating and manipulating reality and real world events. Here literacy refers to

communicative practices which form a part of everyday social practices in different social arenas. As a technology for communication, reading and writing exist in relation to other systems of information exchange which are concerned with the reproduction and redistribution of knowledge in different arenas in society (Bagga-Gupta 1995:242).

Literacy and numeracy, thus, stand for much more than the ability to read, write and calculate as such. They indicate ways of relating to reality, and refer to communicative practices that form part of social activities in education, health care and other sectors in society. Being able to read and write in a technical sense of being able to decipher and produce written statements can be construed as one type of skill, to participate in textual practices and to master social processes which are mediated through literacy is a completely different and much more complex matter.

However, reading and writing skills have and, for the most, continue to be generally seen as vital ingredients at both the *individual* and *societal* developmental levels.

Projects which have attempted to promote literacy, in both the North and the South, have had difficulty in delivering the goods, and their meager outcomes can be ascribed to an essentially administrative and “a-cultural” (Hannerz 1983) conception of what literacy is.<sup>10</sup> In this respect it is interesting to note that far too many studies seem to report that school leaving reading levels of deaf students in different countries and different historical periods rarely advance beyond the 4th grade level. Projects aimed at enhancing the reading and writing skills of deaf and hard-of-hearing students and different models<sup>11</sup> for organizing deaf school education too have had difficulties in delivering the goods (see also Chamberlain & Mayberry 2000). Here a parallel can be drawn to findings that report achievement levels of minority pupils majority language competencies in different parts of the world.

A Literacy Studies position suggests that literacy skills at the societal and individual levels in third world projects and settings in the North, have been conceived as essentially technical and autonomous, and in terms of skills that can be acquired *per se* and applied outside the context of formal educational settings (LeVine & White 1986). When attempts to promote literacy (through usually large-scale undertakings in the South and individualised instruction in the North) fail, there is a tendency to construe this as *failures of teaching*, rather than understanding the need to focus on what literacy is, what role text-related activities play in the lives of children and adults, and, more generally, what it means to live in a “written world” (Säljö 1988; see also Bagga-Gupta 2006; Olson 1994).

A *similar tendency* can be seen in how “bilingualism” is conceptualized in educational settings. Traditionally bilingualism is understood in terms of competencies in two language codes (Grosjean 1996; 1982). However, “few areas of linguistics are surrounded by as many misconceptions as is bilingualism” (Grosjean 1996:20; see also Cromdal 2000; Cromdal & Evaldsson 2003). A growing body of empirical literature during the last few decades has established that bilingual (and multilingual) human beings rarely ever have “matched” or “equal” competencies in the different language codes that they use in their different life domains:

The failure to understand that bilinguals normally use their languages for different purposes, with different people, and in different domains of life has been a major obstacle to obtaining a clear picture of bilinguals and has had many negative consequences: bilinguals have been described and evaluated in terms of the fluency and balance they have in their two languages; language skills in bilinguals have almost always been appraised in terms of monolingual standards; research in bilingualism has in large part been conducted in terms of the bilingual’s individual and separate languages; and, finally, many bilinguals evaluate their language skills as inadequate. Some criticize their mastery of language skills, others strive their hardest to reach monolingual norms, others hide their knowledge of their ‘weaker’ language, and most simply do not perceive themselves as being bilingual even though they use two (or more) languages in their everyday lives (Grosjean 1996:22).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For a critical analysis see for instance Barton 1994; Martin-Jones & Jones 2000; Säljö 1997a.

<sup>11</sup> Based on different communication ideologies.

The term bilingualism has a close bearing to a flora of related concepts in language education. The latter include subjects like “Swedish as a second language”, “Swedish as a second language for the deaf”, “first language”, “home language”, “mother tongue”, “foreign language”, etc (see also discussion in section 2).

Taking the monolingual native ethnic Swede as a given point of departure, and particular understandings of language learning and human development has given legitimacy to other areas of language in the curriculum. This naturalization process has become further cemented within academia with the institutionalisation of highly narrow research chairs in the language science areas at universities. In other words, the horizontal and vertical divisions in language education flourish both as administrative categories in Swedish school sites and within higher education (see section 2). However, and that is my point, all these terms exist in relation to an assumed static, correct and desired point of departure, ie. “Swedish”, and/or in relation to particular understandings of how (language) learning occurs.

Furthermore, since sociocultural and postcolonial perspectives enable us to see that the language we use (including the language that we use in academic discourses) creates in a very potent sense our realities, there is a need to question the recurring use of the concept “bilingual” in everyday life, in the mass-media, in policy documents and in our academic writings when reference is made to human beings and societies that are in fact multilingual. For instance, we continue to reduce multilingual human beings in Swedish society and present day Swedish educational settings to “bilingual” pupils and adults. An organisational logic requires that school sites offer “Swedish as a second language” to ethnic minority Swedes (i.e. immigrants and/or indigenous minorities) despite the fact that many of them are already at least bi- and trilingual. In addition, offering “third generation immigrants” (sic) the possibility to study the subject “Swedish as a second language” is not only difficult to understand (see also National School Improvement Authority 2004),<sup>13</sup> but categorizing human beings in terms of generational backgrounds is highly contentious and defies not just basic democratic doctrines but also analytical understandings of culture and diversity (see section 5). As I have illustrated and discussed elsewhere, the complexity of such organisational categorical thinking is particularly evident in school settings in Sweden that are reserved for audiologically deaf and hearing impaired students.

The specific, dominant traditions that allow us to categorize languages in numerical, relational and geographical terms build upon the “brain as container” learning model where it is believed that one’s “mother tongue” or “home language” (in singular) should naturally form the basis for learning any other language/s. Such eurocentrism disregards global human realities and the large numbers of ethnographic descriptions in the research literature that highlight the fact that (i) the majority of the world’s human beings are multilingual, (ii) language competencies develop throughout the life span and that (iii) language competencies are contingent upon domain specificity in the lives of most multilingual human beings.

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<sup>12</sup> For empirical accounts see Bagga-Gupta 2003; 1995; Blackledge 2000; Cromdal 2000; Heath 1983; Scribner & Cole 1981; Street 1984.

<sup>13</sup> It is furthermore interesting to note that recent evidence suggests that immigrant children who cannot, for different reasons, “cope” with (regular) Swedish are more often than not streamed into “Swedish as a second language” class.

Empirical research on the use of two or more languages in peoples' everyday lives has, interestingly enough, contributed to the shifts in our understandings of literacies. Studies of everyday life and languages used by human beings in different settings show that people develop the languages they use to the level of competencies required in different domains and arenas in life (for empirical accounts see Bagga-Gupta 1995; Heath 1983; Knobel 1999; Street 1984).

To develop literate skills (in a particular language), thus, requires contact with practical tasks that support and make such skills (in that particular language) functional and necessary. In research, this has been shown in different ways, among other things through studies that have shown that the capacity to read and write (in a specific code) cannot be seen as something neutral which an individual carries with him/her for use in any social situation. In a classical ethnography from Iran, Street (1984) showed how literacy related skills like reading, writing, book-keeping, contract writing, etc. (in a specific language) were required and used in the contexts of commerce and trade but hardly ever outside those situations. It is for such tasks that literacy has become a culturally accepted tool for mediating practical everyday life activities in a particular language and life domain. The point that I am raising, is that while these early studies of multilingual contexts contributed to important insights in the understandings of literacies in both monolingual and multilingual settings, their contributions to the field of bi- and multilingualism have remained more or else eclipsed.

Results pointing in a similar direction to Street's work can also be derived from Scribner and Cole's (1981) classical studies of "the psychology of literacy". These studies were carried out in Liberia among the Vai who, at the time the studies were conducted, had contact with three different language scripts; the alphabetic (through English), the indigenous syllabary, and Arabic (which moreover existed in two different versions). Scribner and Cole creatively showed how these scripts (and the oral languages as well) were used in different contexts and therefore mediated different types of experiences. The use of English script was tied to formal schooling and social practices in production, administration and other similar contexts, while Vai script was used for personal letters and "informal" messages. High Arabic script was exclusively connected with religious practices and the reading of the Koran.

One of the main issues that has been acknowledged through the accounts offered by Scribner and Cole and Street is that it is not mastery of written language that per se creates "a literate mind". Rather, the decisive issue is the connection between writing as a means for communicating experiences and codifying reality on the one hand, and certain social practices on the other. In particular, these accounts are seen as showing how formal schooling in Northern type of contexts constitutes an environment that makes extensive use of and reinforces practices in which written language becomes functional. But what is functional *inside* the school setting may not be functional in everyday life and work *outside* this setting, since literate activities may play no significant role or an altogether different role here. Little if any acknowledgement regarding the domain specificity of competencies in different language codes is attributed to these studies. Thus, while the above types of studies are acknowledged as having contributed to a shift in our understandings of literacy, "homage" is not paid to the fact that a large number of these studies were conducted



in multilingual settings. As such implications of such research towards the area of bi- and multilingualism have been eclipsed by the more dominant focus on literacy issues. Here it would be interesting to ask whether the more activity and practice oriented perspective on literacy, in general, could help throw light on some of the more pragmatic issues related to school achievement that have been and are a concern in minority multilingual education.

The attempts to study the relation between written language and concrete social practices in different domains of society have formed the background for abandoning the conception of a “great divide” between societies and groups which have or do not have access to scripts.<sup>14</sup> The notion of a Great Divide (in the language and literacies areas), epitomized by statements such as “speech makes us human and literacy makes us civilized” (Olson 1977), characterized research on literacy through the influences of pioneers such as Goody (1977), Havelock (1982, 1963), Olson (1994), Ong (1982) and others. It was not until the 1980s that this practice oriented perspective on literacy (and other cognitive competencies) became more prominent. Another parallel explanation and background for this change in perspective were contributions from studies which showed that in supposedly “fully literate” Northern type of societies, too, the concrete uses of literacy varied in systematic ways between groups (see for instance Barton & Hamilton 1998, Heath 1983, Knobel 1999).

A classical study of this type was carried out by Heath (1983) in southeastern USA, where she showed how different groups related very differently to written language. In a more recent study, Knobel (1999) – like Heath’s American study – analyzed everyday life, both inside and outside classrooms. By focusing on four very different Australian students, Knobel’s study showed how everyday literacies varied dramatically in the same time, place and language. A common thread in both Heath’s and Knobel’s research is that they take seriously language practices *outside* institutionalized school settings (see also Barton & Hamilton 1998). Studies like these show that on closer scrutiny written language is part of very different activities for different groups and the prototypical literate activity – the reading of an extended piece of text – may be an infrequent activity even among groups who, in conventional terms, can be understood as being literate. In this sense, there are many different kinds of literacies within the same community that shares a common language, and these literacies may or may not fit those employed within formal institutions such as the school. Such studies also show that while some kinds of *language skills* are focused upon in school settings, these may be quite dissimilar to – or at worst be at conflict with – everyday language practices that are focused outside classrooms. Knobel’s study (as does some of the work reported by members of the KKOM-DS research group) shows that some students are often unwittingly denied opportunities to become members of meaningful literacy discourses inside classrooms.

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<sup>14</sup> Of interest in this context is the fact that only about 100 of the world’s estimated approximately 6000 existent languages, have a written script that is associated with it. A further point of interest relates to the situation of the world’s different Signed Languages. They, like the overriding majority of the world’s oral languages, do not have socially accepted written scripts associated with them.

Similar analyses of numeracy, i.e. the mastery of systems for quantification, measurement and calculation, as a practice driven competence rather than an abstract and neutral knowledge about mathematics in an academic sense, have been conducted since the 1980s.<sup>15</sup> In the present context numeracy can be understood as an aspect of the wider concept of literacy, i.e. as a mode of codifying and manipulating reality through the symbolic means of scripts.

To summarise, the younger interactive school of thought, views literacy as being essentially plural, ie. different types of literacies are understood as existing in different societies and subgroups. In this – literacy as a set of discourse-patterns view – literacy is viewed as having different social and cultural contexts. Within this framework literacy is viewed as a complex, multi-faceted entity; as a set of discourse patterns ie. as ways of using language and meaning making, in writing *and* oral *or* signed communication. Accordingly, literacies and communication-practices are tied to world views, values and beliefs of particular social and cultural groups. These are integrally connected with the identity or sense of self of the people who practise them. Thus, a change of literacy practices entails a change of identity.

Thus, classical studies since primarily the early 1980s have led to a major shift in how issues related to literacy are being understood – at least at the theoretical level. These studies have analyzed both mono- and multilingual communities. The newer, pluralistic and dynamic understandings of literacies have grown from studies of *language use* with an empirically ethnographically inspired approach to the study of communication. Two decades down the road it is interesting to reflect in what ways these newer understandings have shaped the very institution that is seen as having responsibility for the teaching of literacy and more importantly, what implications can be derived, at the conceptual level – in the area of multilingualism.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION AND DEAF RESEARCH. FURTHER EXPLORATIONS AT OTHER CROSSROADS**

The above theoretical discussion assists in understanding the *two different ways* through which one can generally focus a human beings literacy status including a deaf students Swedish, English text related skills. These two ways subscribe to different philosophical traditions, and have a direct bearing on “what” phenomena are studied. These two traditions overlap considerably with the two different perspectives: pathological and cultural-linguistics *or* medical-psychological and social-cultural, that researchers have employed and continue to fall back upon in understanding deaf people and deaf education.

Analysis of research conducted within the special education/handicap areas suggests that the research field there too is dichotomised and here a categorical and positivistic medico-psycho perspective has historically occupied a hegemonic position.<sup>16</sup> In addition, such analysis suggests that a post-positivistic critical perspective that challenges this hegemony can be discerned during the last two decades. The latter deconstructivistic point of departure highlights three central

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<sup>15</sup> See Carraher, Carraher & Schliemann 1985; Khan 1999; Lave 1988; Säljö & Wyndhamn 1990; 1988a; 1988b; 1987; Wyndhamn 1993.

<sup>16</sup> Clark, Dyson & Millward 1998; compare also Corbett 1996; Davis 1996; Emanuelsson, Persson & Rosenqvist 2001.

issues: (i) it demonstrates that special educational needs are primarily a social product; (ii) in contrast to the medico-psycho perspective, it highlights the non-rational nature of special education (this, it is suggested, is similar to the nature of general education); (iii) it shows that special education – like other institutionalised activities – is value governed.

In a theoretically driven attempt to go beyond the medico-psycho and critical dichotomy that has perplexed the area of special education/handicap research during the recent decades, Clark, Dyson and Millward (1998) highlight an *important paradox* that arises within the empirically *limited or weak* post-positive paradigm. They suggest, and I agree, that “the more [the critical perspective] has sought to deconstruct special education, the more it has confined it to an intellectual ghetto” (172). They call attention to the need for an alternative third position that “does not seek to demolish the significant contributions” of the critical perspective (171). This alternative position calls for (i) a non-ideologically pushed recognition of dilemmas that face the institution of special education and (ii) the need for a dialectical analysis that takes into consideration issues of complexity, historicity and power. Of particular interest is that (iii) empirical enquiry into the practices of special education are called for in this third position since empirical enquiry received a limited, illustrative role in research within the critical perspective.

Following on the footsteps of Clark, Dyson and Millward, Swedish special education researcher Nilholm (2003), acknowledges that while the first two perspectives dominate the field of “special education” and the study of “disability” generally, a pattern is emerging where the focus is neither the study of the pathology of the individual that needs to be corrected nor specifically the study of social processes in order to deconstruct the reality of “handicaps” and “special education”. Highlighting the dilemmas inherent in the institutionalized education of *all* children calls for the need to focus on the study of human beings’ social practices and cognitive processes (see also Bagga-Gupta & Nilholm 2002).

A meta-research project that has studied international and Swedish literature within the deaf education field (with special focus upon issues related to literacy), has identified trends that can be related to the discussions above in a number of ways (see Bagga-Gupta 2004a). The medical-technical and the cultural-linguistic perspectives identified in deaf education research bear semblance to the medicopsycho-critical dichotomy in the field of special education research. The former are related to diametrically different communicative philosophical traditions that advocate different communicative *methods*: oralism and manualism. This dichotomy is reported to have plagued the deaf education field for a number of centuries.<sup>17</sup> However, there is evidence that suggests a shift in focus with the recent emergence of a new third research tradition in the literature that distances itself from ideological discussions about communication methods and instead focuses upon studies of communicative-practices. Discussing the importance of this recent shift I have previously emphasised that,

It is significant to look closely at research that focuses on Deaf communication-practices, has a descriptive agenda and that goes beyond the labels used to describe different educational programs or ‘methods’. It

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<sup>17</sup> Eriksson 1993; Jankowski 1997; Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan 1996; Winefield 1987.

is contended here that such a non-political and non-ideological agenda is important in order to understand the ‘tensions’ between the medical-technical and cultural-linguistic perspectives with the goal of going beyond the strong pendulum shifts and foci that these two perspectives have given rise to in institutionalized educational settings (Bagga-Gupta 2004a: 183-184).

The identification of this shift has relevance in that research agendas in this third position build upon (i) theoretical perspectives that are in synchrony with newer paradigmatic positions in the educational sciences generally and (ii) have arisen through research activities where deaf and hearing researchers cooperate.

In other words, the alternative position within the area of special education and the third position identified in deafness research overlap in a number of interesting ways. Here studies of political contexts, micro-political processes and concrete educational communication-practices and activities are either called for or have been identified.<sup>18</sup> Such studies have an important potential in that they can contribute to research agendas that include local and situated participant perspectives and throw light upon how processes and environments are (re)created in educational settings. The identification of cooperation between deaf and hearing academicians is important since it means that researchers who belong to the identity or population in focus receive a legitimate (and real rather than a symbolic) status in research arenas.

The alternative “third positions” in special education and deaf education, are identified as having been inspired from sociocultural perspectives that allow for understanding human development, learning and communication in broader ways. As discussed in section 2 earlier, it is this third sociocultural perspective that is understood as contributing to a changed conceptualization of areas such as communication, learning and human cognition and is seen as being significant to present day understandings of the importance of a developmental approach in both ontogenesis and phylogenesis, the social origins of human higher functions and the role of cultural tools in human activity.

The third position also points towards the underlying fallacy of viewing either educational methods or research as providing “total fixes” for student problems in school settings. Studies that adopt a sociocultural perspective rather attempt to understand how human beings live and communicate in everyday mundane activities and try to understand patterns of everyday behaviour that are then seen as socializing sites. Thus, for instance, achievement in school can be understood in this perspective by throwing light on the everyday contexts and routine patterns in which children are socialized (both inside and outside schools) in order to understand how problems in school contexts arise and get framed. Usually in depth studies, for instance, of the kind conducted by the literacy researchers discussed earlier, are needed in order to understand these patterns.

## **UNDERSTANDING CULTURE AND DIVERSITY AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF COMMUNICATION**

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<sup>18</sup> See Bagga-Gupta 2004a:Chapter 7; Bagga-Gupta & Nilholm 2002; Clark, Dyson & Millward 1998.

This section focuses two central concepts – culture and diversity – and contributes further to the conceptual framework under synthesis in this working paper. Inspired by the engaging critique of issues regarding race and culture in Norway by social anthropologist Unni Wikan, I have in the previous sections emphasised the fact that in addition to culture and diversity, language too is loose in school sites in Sweden. Wikan (1999:57–58) suggests that,

‘Culture’ has run astray. And it is now being used helter-skelter to promote all kinds of special interests [...] Culture is no thing with an objective, material existence. It is just an idea, a word that can be filled with various kinds of contents depending on one’s vantage point<sup>19</sup> [...] ‘Culture’ has become a new concept of race in that it functions in a reductionist manner to make ‘them’ lesser human beings than ‘us’.

Language and culture cannot, for a number of reasons, be viewed as separate entities. They are enmeshed in one another in very significant ways. Postcolonial ideas suggest that the collective understanding of Ourselves as more informed Europeans, Scandinavians and Swedes and the boundaries that we draw against the less fortunate and less developed Others has a very long history.<sup>19</sup> The eurocentrism (including US-centrism) and naivety of many of the ideas that contribute to essentialistic boundary marking are so well entrenched in our collective consciousness and collective identities that we become nonplussed when we are reminded that not only can Europe, from a historical perspective, be held responsible for what we conceive of as chaos in the southern nations but that many untold atrocities are being committed within our own national and European contexts even today (compare for instance Wikan 2002; 2004). Postcolonial perspectives highlight the importance of our socially constructed collective understandings of who we are, our constructions of the Other and boundary marking processes that enable these understandings.

Implicit and central in the discussion regarding multiculturalism in Sweden is that processes of globalisation and cultural diversification within Swedish society, have together contributed to changing (what is commonly understood as being) the former monolingual Swedish school into settings where a large number of languages are spoken and multiculturalism is seen as becoming dominant. Swedish society, for instance, has been a diverse space for a very long time and the meetings of peoples from other spaces with a multitude of linguistic and cultural backgrounds has contributed to and shaped popular images of what we today consider to be the “original and authentic” homogenous Swedish culture. The explosive access to contemporary media has given rise to specific understandings where recent diversifying processes are viewed as being more dramatic and as having created a more heterogeneous society. These popular understandings also seep into the academic literature. However, some critical literature suggests that these understandings of recent diversifying processes in Sweden is a myth:

Sweden might best be characterized as a multilingual polity with a monolingual image. Though the stereotype of Sweden as homogenous is widespread, its historically homogenous monolingual culture is as mythological as the gnomes and orcs who were said in folklore to inhabit

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<sup>19</sup> Bhabha 2002; Ericksson, Ericksson Baaz & Thörn 2002; Said 1978/2002; 1981.

the nation's forests. The social topography of Sweden is, in fact, quite complex [...] *Although Sweden has a long history of both linguistic and cultural diversity dating back to antiquity, the Swedish language has been, and indeed still is, central in shaping what it means to be Swedish* (Hult 2004:181, emphasis added).

At the same time one can discern an increase in collective reflections over “Swedishness” in recent day writings.<sup>20</sup> What does it mean to be “Swedish” in the 21st century? This question appears to engage many in society today not merely as a result of the post World War II immigrations and concomitant demographic changes in Sweden but also because of the recent outcomes of national referendums for joining the European Union (whereby Sweden has joined the EU but voted to remain outside it's economic framework). The geographical and mental space that we call Sweden has been witness to various types of both immigration and emigration through the ages (Norström & Svensson 1995).<sup>21</sup>

In the area of schooling, the 1960s have also witnessed the evolution of a new institution regulated by the first national curriculum for the compulsory comprehensive school level. This meant that for the first time a common school form encompassed all children in society and for a longer time period. The parallel changes in demographics thus became visible and needed to be attended to in the new evolving school settings during the 1960s. My point is that the sense of ongoing changes in Swedish society is a result of complex social phenomena and cannot be solely and directly attributed to the traditional understandings of culture or multiculturalism.

Other common conceptualizations of culture can be discerned in the different metaphors commonly used in the research literature and mass media when discussing multiculturalism. The term multiculturalism<sup>22</sup> is itself a metaphor that upholds a static essentialistic view of cultures that exist side by side. The same pertains to the essentialism inherent in Swedish and Norwegian concepts that allure to “cultural meetings” and “cultural collisions” (see for instance SOU 1996:143: “Clash or meeting. On the multicultural school. Part report from the national school committee”). As Wikan (2002:83) argues:

Cultures Don't Meet, People Do

[...] Cultures cannot meet, for ‘culture’ has no agency. It is just a word, a concept, and concepts do not meet. So talking as if cultures could do this or that – meet, collide, or clash – begs the question of what drives people.

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<sup>20</sup> See for instance Tell (2004) and contributions in Johansson (2001). My use of the concept “diversifying and/or pluralistic societies” relates to this collective consciousness regarding these more recent processes.

<sup>21</sup> For changes in Sweden's population (births, deaths, immigration, emigration, marriages and divorces) during the period 1749-2003, see SCB (2004a), [http://www.scb.se/templates/tableOrChart\\_\\_\\_\\_26046.asp](http://www.scb.se/templates/tableOrChart____26046.asp) (August 2004); also see The Statistical Year Book of Sweden, SCB (2004b), [http://www.scb.se/statistik/OV/OV0904/2004A01/OV0904\\_2004A01\\_BR\\_A01SA0401\\_EN.pdf](http://www.scb.se/statistik/OV/OV0904/2004A01/OV0904_2004A01_BR_A01SA0401_EN.pdf) (August 2004).

<sup>22</sup> And interculturalism.

It is people, not culture, who have the power to act. And it is people, not culture, who can change life for better or for worse.

Some other common metaphors used when discussing multicultural societies include the “melting pot”, “mosaic”, “kaleidoscope”, “salad bowl” etc. Inspired by urban ideologies in the United States in the early 19th century, Swedish theologist Roth (1998) has more recently offered the metaphor of a “garden park” when discussing what he sees as dramatic changes in the ethnic landscape of Sweden. These different metaphors at the core suggest collective and individual level identities that are static. They also take as points of departure identities that are represented by ownership and boundary marking. In other words, these commonly available metaphors in the literature contribute to understandings of “culture” that get reduced to ownership terms like “my, your, our, their culture” and where constructions of Self and the Other lie at the heart.

Tornberg’s (2000) analysis of the discourses of culture in curricular texts pertaining to foreign languages in Sweden further suggests the dominance of two positions that are problematic. The “culture as a fact fulfilled” position enables a view of culture closely built upon national definitions and the “culture as a future competence” position both encompasses a skills perspective vis-à-vis learning and the idea that knowledge about a given culture is static and can be reduced to a given number of factual bits that can be learned (see also Wikan 1999).

There are two other concepts that flourish in the popular and academic literature when discussions of issues related to culture take place. These are “background” and “roots”. Both these concepts make salient our obsession with the past in our attempts to describe and understand Ourselves and Others. Few, if any, discussions in the educational sciences (or general social sciences) literature challenge these types of reductionisms. Inspired from philosophical perspectives, Tornberg offers a potential third position in terms of an “encounter” that allows us to focus upon the present and the future, so that processes vis-à-vis ways of being are highlighted when culture is discussed.

Understanding culture in terms of ongoing processes and re-negotiated human ways of being where (i) communication plays a central role and (ii) human beings are active allows us to give up some dimensions of the obsession that essentializes culture. Focusing the present and the future, i.e. what we do and where we are going (and not only our past, i.e. where we come from) when attempting to understand human identities and cultures are ways that enable a shift in positions.

The point that is important here is the need to highlight different conceptualizations and the dominance of traditional ways in which culture gets operationalized in school settings. Thus for instance, it is selective interpretations that allow school settings to focus upon either (i) human attributes, behaviour, dress codes, food habits etc., or (ii) an elitist interpretation where literature, theatre, etc., are canonized when culture is discussed, celebrated or seen to be at stake.

Understanding culture as non-categorised potential ways of being, therefore, allows us to see the processes that evolve in human encounters in different institutional settings. This shift simultaneously enables us to see how and why culture becomes

reduced either to the dress codes or food habits of different ethnic or other sub-groupings in society or to the elitist canonization of selective traditions in the literature and the arts. Current celebrations of multiculturalism in school settings, discussions regarding the legitimacy of culturally appropriate dress codes and the status accorded to pre-ordained fine and high status artefacts are therefore not only reductionist, but they in a real sense lose sight of issues regarding communication and diversity in present day educational settings.

Human diversity and issues of representation constitute central themes within a number of research areas currently. While the concept diversity has generally been associated with a minority status related to either ethnicity or race, other identities like class, gender, sexual orientation and different types of functional disabilities have been primarily considered in terms of marginalized groups. Some of these groups, including the deaf, have also received minority status on the basis of special linguistic or cultural aspects.

What is central to such categorization is that characteristics that are the key to a groups' identity is seen as having a homogenous nature by both insiders and outsiders. In other words, differences are conceptualized in terms of a naturalized state with an essentialistic core. This core is taken as a point of departure and often legitimizes the importance of multicultural projects in order to improve relations between different groups whose identities are preconceived on the basis of these natural differences. Such arbitrary, and naïve, assumptions take as their point of departure mono-linguistic, mono-cultural, normality focused understandings of Ourselves and contrasting understandings of Others both in and outside Northern societies.

The recent past has also been witness to major changes in how we understand diversity in complex Northern societies more generally. For instance, Sweden has recently witnessed legal ratification of and the institutionalisation of a number of important democratic efforts based upon traditional categories like gender, ethnicity, class, etc. An explicit recognition of these historically significant identity markers and the concomitant inclusion of human beings who are seen as bearers of these identities in different institutions – like educational settings, work places, etc. – can be understood in terms of the acceptance of diversity at the societal level. Functional disabilities were recently added to this list of traditional categories. For instance, Proposition 2001/02:15 The Open University highlights the need for understanding higher education in a more encompassing sense than was the case previously.

This more inclusive conceptualisation of diversity can also be noted in other policy contexts at the turn of the millennium and is in line with democratic agendas in Swedish society. In the present context one can also note that all types of collective educational activities in Sweden are expected to play a key role in socializing pupils and students towards democratic citizenship (see Englund 2006). At the same time educational institutions are expected to function as arenas of diversity where it is considered important to identify and cater to the different backgrounds/needs of individual pupils. This multifaceted task has fascinated academicians and professionals interested in educational institutions for a long time. However, this situation is not without concerns since science is itself in a dependent situation in that specific characteristics receive a central position in certain academic domains and



subsequently become the focus of researchers attention. In addition, certain areas e.g. functional disabilities and special education are, not infrequently, focused upon by academicians who themselves are 'functionally able' or 'normal' and who implicitly become normative identities (Corbett 1996). While the same may apply to the area of ethnicity, it can be illustrative in this context to compare this to the situation of areas such as gender, class and sexual orientation. It is thus significant to note that 'coloured people', ethnic minorities in the North, women and homo- and bisexuals themselves have played a crucial role in establishing the academic areas of Ethnicity and Migration Studies, Gender and/or Women Studies area and Queer Studies within the academic world. These research and educational areas were established after a critical mass within academia itself started describing identities and ways of being that were representative of emic or insider voices. The latter domains are represented almost exclusively by academicians whose lives are rich sites of marginalisation as far as gender, class or sexual orientation are concerned and their voices become the norm-giving identities within these more recently established research areas.

While the history of special education can be understood in terms of a shift: "from isolation to integration" (Winzer 1993), and despite the fact that concepts such as integration and inclusion are often related to special education, these are in fact borrowed from discourses of equality and equity (see also Sayed, Soudien & Carrim 2003).

Inclusion is not exclusive to special education but, rather, it is the adopted child. The call for inclusive education is the outcome of a complex set of discourses about the equality of education that is driven by changing demographics, ideologies, and perceptions of marginalized groups as well as by associated social issues [...] During the 1960s, educational institutions at all levels began to respond to the Civil Rights movement in various ways and from different perspectives. *Inclusion emerged as a broad notion of social justice that was manifested as an expression of concern for safeguarding the rights of all students* (Winzer & Mazurek 2000: ix, emphasis added).

Thus, while issues of integration and inclusion emerged from the broader Civil Rights movement, they are today invariably and primarily seen as being related to the domain of special education. The segregation of research generated knowledge in the special education domain raises particular challenges. One can say that there exists a dire need to integrate knowledge from situated categorical narratives about difference (for instance with regards to functional disability) to other local experiences (for instance experiences with regards to gender, ethnicity, class, etc.), and from situated local experiences to general human values and rights.

It is also worth noting that the vast majority of studies that focus diversity and human categories like class, gender, sexual orientation, functional disabilities, etc analyse what has happened and not on how human interaction co-creates human realities and identities:

many dominating scientific theories and perspectives within the human sciences have in a systematic manner rendered communication and

interaction invisible as objects of analysis, and thereby also made us insensitive to their role in the (re)creation of social order and human identities. What gets focused in many analysis are the symptoms and results of human activities (these are generally easier to tabulate), but the processes and environments where society continuously gets (re)created remains a black box that remains unopened (Säljö & Mäkitalo 2002:207, my translation; see also Lindblad & Sahlström 2001).

A related dimension regarding human identity and diversity pertains to how an understanding of it is created and studied via research activities in themselves. Dahlberg (2003:8), for instance, highlights that “concepts, conventions, classifications and categories that we use for analysing, constructing and describing reality” (my translation) allow us to demarcate and co-create our experiences in terms of normal-abnormal, right-wrong, etc. dichotomy pairs. While such ideas are in line with the philosophical orientation commonly known as the social construction of reality, they are seldom applied to research itself. For instance, the above mentioned dominating focus in research (i.e. on what has happened) in itself strongly contributes to the creation of categories, which in turn creates work for researchers:

It is remarkable that those who live around the social sciences have so quickly become comfortable in using [category terms] as if those to whom the term is applied have enough in common so that significant things can be said about them as a whole. Just as there are iatrogenic disorders caused by the work that physicians do (which gives them more work to do), so there are categories of persons who are created by students of society, and then studied by them (Goffman 1963:140).

In other words, researchers themselves essentialise human identity – in singular – through their own activities. Such concerns highlight the dire need for researchers to be attentive to their own roles in the (re)creation of human identities in and through their own research activities. Having said this, it is important to recognize that we have limited possibilities to be on our guard since the most significant “cultural tools” available to us in this enterprise is language! This tension can be compared with the concerns raised by two differently-abled<sup>23</sup> professional academicians in two very different texts: one a poignant self-biographical account by a Finnish-Swedish psychotherapist and the other a post-modern critique of the dominating discourses regarding difference by a British special educational researcher:

It is a reality that I sit in a wheel-chair and am blind, and I must accept the fact that when people describe me they perhaps say the following: ‘Ya, Petri, yes, he is the guy in the wheel-chair who is blind’. There exists a risk in that my entire personality gets judged against the background of my handicap and the negative prejudices that follow with it (Mykkänen 2001:29, my translation).

As the disability movement has gained strength in the discourses, it has become abrasive in attacking the dominant language of professional power and categorization. The language ‘for’ disabled people is rejected. It has to

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<sup>23</sup> Compare with dis-abled.

be as much 'of' disabled people as possible – even if this involves changing the membership of discourse arenas [...] Diversity and difference need to be valued and celebrated. Then we all become special; yet none of us is so special that we are more or less than human (Corbett 1996:83-84).

Introducing differently-abled minority perspectives via voices that represent emic or insider perspectives is significant here. In addition, researchers' reflections regarding human diversity and changes in complex societies challenge traditional images and metaphors regarding the singular, static and characteristic related nature of identities (see also Brantefors 1999; Dahlberg 2003; Säfström 1999). Such a line of argumentation suggests that "life is richer than categories" (Gomes, Bigestans, Magnusson & Ramberg 2002:17).

## **RE-CONCEPTUALISATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES**

The significance of hybridization lies not in the ability to identify two original elements or positions from which a third can then emerge, hybridization represents rather the 'third creative room' where totally new positions can develop. This third room *transforms* historical understandings, from which it is constituted, and instead new structures of authority can be instituted, new political initiatives that could hardly be open for interpretations from traditional conceptual frameworks can arise (Bhabha 2002:286, emphasis added, my translation).

The theoretically important distinctions focused in this working paper have both evolved from and have in turn defined the agenda in the work being carried out at the KKOM-DS group in Örebro, Sweden. Thus, for instance, an attempt is made to focus human interaction and participation in educational settings and not preconceived notions of language categories, human identity or the ideologies or models at the institutional levels. This resonates with implications that arise from taking sociocultural and postcolonial frameworks as points of departure when conducting research in the educational sciences.

These perspectives deemphasize categorical thinking. In the research agenda this means that everyday interactions and social practices are focused against the backdrop of sociohistorical processes since a central assumption is that it is not human characteristics like deafness, gender, nationality or ethnicity per se that are significant, but rather issues of human diversity in relation to language use that are important. Here the role of research itself in marking and co-constructing human identities becomes highlighted. The complexity of everyday life and social practices is accorded attention in order to understand what participation in different institutional contexts, including the institution of research, means for human identity. Thus, introducing differently-abled minority voices that represent emic perspectives is seen as a dimension of both democracy and the politics of representation in academic areas and as important in the work that has been initiated at the young KKOM-DS research group.

Focusing upon language classifications, the structure of language, language as "stuff to be learnt" and language as "mirroring reality" emerges from theoretical positions

where ideological understandings of correctness and purity are highlighted. However, paying attention to the complex layers of issues involved in the communities of users of one or more languages whether it is a group of villagers in Iran (Street 1984) or a Mexican community in northern California (Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez & Shannon 1994) or a group of women working in an Indian NGO that provides services for migrant children and communities (Bagga-Gupta 1995), or deaf and hearing members of school communities in Sweden (Bagga-Gupta 2002; 2003) or deaf home communities in north-eastern USA (Erting 1999; Erting, Thumann-Prezioso & Benedict 2000) or members of pluralistic hearing settings in Sweden (Carlsson & Bagga-Gupta 2006; Cromdal 2000) throws light upon the distributed, collective, chained ownership and evolution of languages. In other words, insights derived from such literature emerges from research that has studied how human beings use oral, written and Signed Languages in different settings and what discourses are dominant and/or latent in the language sciences.

The dominant underlying assumptions that continue to guide discourses in language instruction, particularly in “foreign language pedagogy”, have been called “the impediment or curse of language instruction”. This impediment has been articulated as follows:

The assumption that language must first be developed before it can be used is one of the curses of language instruction, because it results in that [...] language instruction primarily becomes a matter of the development of skills and because the communicative linguistic actions and the pluralistic meanings that could be enabled in educational situations are left untouched (Tornberg 2000:265, my translation; compare with Linell 1998).

This insight from the area of foreign languages can be extended to other areas of language sciences in Sweden. For instance, Thavenius (1981) indicates that traditions in the area of Swedish language education during the 19th and 20th centuries can be traced back to the Middle Ages when Latin and Greek were status marked languages. He shows that language pedagogy that pertained to the “foreign languages” Latin and Greek were preserved even when curricular shifts occurred and enabled the introduction of “mother tongue” Swedish for ethnic Swedish students in the educational system.

In addition to highlighting what is understood as the “curse of language instruction”, there is a need to recognize the “language policy paradox” of the 20th century within education. This paradox allows us to “squander our ethnic language resources more generally while lamenting our lack of foreign language resources” (Hornberger 2002:47). This language policy paradox is highly salient in the North where current efforts attempt to give visibility to “heritage languages” in northern America, “community languages” in Australia and “ethnic indigenous languages” in Europe, so that these can survive the onslaught of current interpretations of globalization and market forces that emphasize our lack of “foreign language” resources. Shifts from the “language-as-a-problem” to the “language-as-a-human-right” perspective in the 1980s and 1990s notwithstanding, the language policy paradox continues to make itself felt in our midst.

And here we should ask ourselves what, if any, place “immigrant languages” like Turkish, Greek, Persian, etc., have in the education landscape of the Swedish language curricula in comparison to “foreign languages” like Spanish, French, German, etc. Such a question brings to centre stage, assumptions inherent in both the language policy paradox and the curse of language instruction situations. My intention here is not to create an either-or situation between so called immigrant languages and so called foreign languages. Rather my point is the need to recognize the current situation in the language curricula landscape in Sweden and its mismatch with the language profiles in society at large. Such recognition can be seen as the first step towards implementing policy changes such that languages used in Swedish society are given a legitimate place in the language curricula.

As outlined in this working paper, the “skill focused” and “signal focused” conceptualisations of human communication are under critique in more recent research on languages and literacies. Sense-making, meaning-creation, situatedness of meaning, the social as a pivot, the need to focus practices, attending to membership issues, taking into account the representative and interpretive nature of language, etc., make up some of the complex – though nevertheless important – issues that arise on the educational agenda in the newer positions. Individual psychological processes are here viewed as having their basis in the social, and these processes are understood as having (socio)historical roots. That is why communication-practices, and not merely language codes become analytically interesting.

In addition, here we can discuss a “cultural policy paradox” that, in my view, resembles Hornberger’s “language policy paradox” in that we currently focus our needs pertaining to international cultural resources while we at the same time either ignore or belittle and look upon our ethnic cultural resources in terms of a problem (compare The Swedish National School Board 1995). Issues related to the cultural policy paradox and the reductionism inherent in currently available metaphors of culture are, in my view, closely linked to the problems inherent in the language policy paradox and the curse of language instruction situation.

The conceptual framework that has evolved through the discussions presented here suggest that there is need to challenge the dominant deficit understandings of difference and diversity, how these influence the lives of human beings and how organizational strategies employed in educational settings currently aim to neutralize and normalize these deficits. From the vantage point of a researcher and teacher educator, I have also attempted to offer critical reflections on the often unacknowledged role that research discourses and the organization of academics themselves play in the maintenance and reproduction of selective understandings of communication, culture and diversity. The academic area of educational sciences is young in the history of science generally, and in the administrative and allocation of research resources in the Swedish context more specifically (The Swedish Research Council 2003). The areas of communication, culture and diversity that have been focused upon in this article are central to present day conceptualisations of the educational sciences. They are also areas that exemplify multidisciplinary in that a number of other scientific domains have focused their energies into studying them. In addition, these areas are illustrative if we focus the educational sciences and attempt to rescue them from the throngs of reductionistic methodologies.

We can, irrespective of our disciplinary backgrounds and special areas of research focus, at one level agree that science in general deals with the production of knowledge and facts. This production is also intimately related to an openness in terms of critical questioning, researching and re-thinking processes. Despite the status related hierarchies of different areas of sciences, there is need to reiterate an important and often overlooked issue: an area of science and research in that area only makes available partial and preliminary results that will be questioned, confirmed, discarded, re-interpreted by future researchers situated in the same, different or newer paradigms. This is the case in both the (so called) hard natural sciences and the softer human sciences.

I have highlighted that knowledge generated during the last few decades regarding the social nature of communication have seriously questioned the reductionistic ways in which communication is understood generally and language learning particularly. Researchers interested in communication in the new paradigm are, for the most, acutely aware of the fact that the only tools available to them are linguistic ones. In other words, a principle premise within this position is that use of language always presents a given perspective of the world – rather than mirroring the world. This premise creates an interesting situation for researchers who focus language in that language is both their tool and their focus. This and some of the other theoretically driven assumptions about the nature of language discussed in this working paper have fundamental consequences for conceptualizing both language development ontogenetically and issues related to language learning and instruction.

Further more, inspired from a postcolonial perspective, human and societal identities can be further understood in terms of re-negotiated processes and co-constructions in different everyday and textual practices, rather than on the basis of categories and attributes. This means that it is problematic to understand identities in terms of fixed ideological differences that exist on the basis of gender, place of origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, functional disability, religion or other human attribute. While many within the new paradigm have challenged the naivety and inherent reductionism that builds upon essentialistic ways of understanding such human attributes, issues related to the “language and culture policy paradoxes” and the ways in which language and culture are operationalized in school sites (including for instance teacher education and research areas), are more seldom highlighted.

The critique raised vis-à-vis traditional understandings of communication, culture and diversity in this working paper brings to the forefront aspects of the common “monolingual and monoethnic bias” that many of us within academics have brought to the field of language education, especially in the post World War II period. Classifying languages in terms of a horizontal division, i.e. different language codes, in the educational curricula is important from an administrative point of view. Thus, curricula, syllabi and the organisation of time and space in school settings require that one pays attention to a differentiation between different language codes. But, furthering this classification and maintaining it in terms of essentialistic categories and in terms of different student groups’ different learning abilities (i.e. the vertical division) is a problematic contention. These latter conceptualizations draw upon particular assumptions related to views about “how language learning is conceptualised as occurring” and “what language and culture are”.

There is need to both make visible and also recognize the multilingual and multicultural nature of Swedish schools today. As Hult (2004:183) reminds us,

A number of different languages are present in the linguistic ecology of Sweden including Swedish; sign languages; English and other foreign languages; regional languages or varieties of Swedish; “neighbour languages” like Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, etc.; national minority languages; and the immigrant and refugee languages of those who have come to live in Sweden.

In addition, there is need to make visible and recognize that these languages contribute to complexities in Swedish classrooms. At the same time there is need to understand that this scenario is far from unique or peculiar to Swedish school sites. The rise of English as a global language and the concomitant shift in status for nationally dominant languages together with the rise in status of regional or ethnic or heritage or community languages at national levels, are two significant forces that have more recently seriously questioned the one nation-one language myth (Hornberger 2002, Hult 2004). In addition, pitting the number of nation-states (ca 250) against the most recent estimates of the number of human languages (ca 6000) puts to rest this widespread myth. The complex nature of classroom diversity requires that research itself attends to the concerns that professionals experience in institutional settings by both reframing these concerns and also through critical re-searching activities such that analytically new issues can be raised and positions can be shifted. As Hornberger (2002:43) decisively points out:

The challenge of negotiating across multiple languages, cultures, and identities is a very real one in classrooms all over the world, one not to be lightly dismissed. Yet, on the whole, educational policy and practice continues blithely to disregard the presence of multiple languages, cultures, and identities in today's classrooms.

Thus, it is giving prominence to dimensions of diversity in classrooms and the curricula (including the language and culture paradoxes) that will enable important shifts in positions that have a bearing on everyday life in school settings. This, I have argued, will allow attention to be paid to challenges in current conceptualisations of language and culture and allow for democratic potentials in education to come centre stage.

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## **LISA 21 AND PILOT STUDY FINDINGS**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

LISA 21 is a one-year-old project supported by the Swedish Research Council which focuses on plurilingualism, identity work and learning in multicultural secondary school settings. It is part of the Communication, Culture & Diversity – Deaf Studies research group at Örebro university, Sweden. This text aims to present the project group's emerging research interest with reference to some preliminary findings of a pilot study conducted in the spring of 2007. It is envisaged that these preliminary findings provide impetus and direction for PhD research work.

The full title of this project – Languages and Identities in School Arenas at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – points to the immediate need for some clarification of the title's terms 'language', 'identity' and 'culture' and why a focus on language and identities may be vital to understanding learning in plurilingual and culturally-diverse educational environments. Broadly put, LISA 21 takes a sociocultural perspective on learning, is informed by a post-colonial understanding of human identity, seeks to build on classroom interaction studies and embraces an ethnographically-inspired methodology. However, this overview needs qualifying since the project's interest has been aroused by questions which have perhaps not received sustained research focus. Moreover, there is a determination among the project members to identify unexplored spaces which lie at the intersections between several theoretical perspectives. We hope these vantage points will yield novel approaches to the project's fieldwork and subsequent analysis of empirical data. In the following paragraphs, our understanding of the terms 'language', 'identities' and 'culture' will be outlined and serve as a very rough sketch of the project's theoretical framework. This is followed by a brief rationale for the project's dual focus on language and identities in school learning settings.

### **Language**

Language is viewed as a primary social sign system which plays a central role in mediating human action, consciousness and conceptual development (Vygotsky 1978). It takes on relevance and currency as its meanings are shared and renewed through collective social practices (Dewey 1916). It comprises "an array of social practices, an extensive set of social actions" (Watson 1992) through which social life, order and learning are managed and realized. The organization and institutions of a society are brought about communicatively, primarily through the medium of speech. Such heavy and extensive service inevitably leaves its mark on the medium. Language functions as a social instrument of change, mediating ways of perceiving and understanding the world (Whorf 1956) but is itself being continuously transfigured as individuals struggle to wrench it from conventional codes and make it

serve their own purposes and meanings (Bakhtin 1981). To make language one's own is to diversify its usage.

The concern that studies inspired by a 'sociocultural perspective' have focused too exclusively on 'micro' factors (see, for example, Watson 1992) aligns with our commitment to give balanced attention to both micro and macro levels in our study. With regard to language, any single utterance is integral to a specific instance of speech exchange which is itself part and parcel of an ongoing, intermeshed, process of social interaction among a particular group of people living under particular cultural and historical circumstances. Any single utterance reverberates with, and in some way reconstitutes, the social order of both the verbal exchange and the wider sociocultural context (Hirst & Renshaw 2004). This implies that the analysis of language (e.g. in a school classroom) *is* the analysis of communicative patterns (e.g. teacher question-student answer sequence) as well as of wider discursive practices (e.g. curricular guidelines, goals and educational authority directives). In the following two paragraphs, two examples are sketched to illustrate the way a resolve to maintain balance between 'micro' and 'macro' approaches prompts the need to qualify currently popular sociocultural views on language and knowledge which tend to emphasize the 'micro' or at least one perspective among a range of possible views.

In our view, Bakhtin's notion of individuals appropriating words by populating them with their own intentions offers a highly useful perspective on the constitution of social movement, the psychological plane and the individual self. However, it must be noted that this process does not divest language of the cultural meanings and connotations that commonly attach to it. Having made a word his or her own idiosyncratically, an individual still has to use it within the surrounding systems of discourse (see Kramsch 1998) and their generally agreed meanings that prevail socially. If 'appropriation' meant that words lost the colouring of cultural codes and understandings, communication and other social practices would be seriously hampered. It is compounded by the ongoing tensions between individual and 'collective' meanings, that sense has to be *made* and mutual understanding *achieved*. Vygotsky's emphasis on the significance of sociohistorical forces affecting human development over generations seems to give complementary counterbalance to the "self-contained, internally coherent" and yet 'inside' view of some ethnomethodology and conversation analysis -inspired studies (see Sharrock & Watson 1988, for a defence of this observation).

In an attempt to shed more light on achieving skills and understanding, there has been the gradual, but widespread tendency within sociocultural research approaches to equate knowledge and participation. Dewey (1916) describes knowledge as "a mode of participation". Lave (1990) focuses on situated learning *in doing* and Rogoff (1995) argues that *participatory appropriation* is the process by which people transform their understanding of activities through their own participation. While siding with Dewey's criticism of the idea of knowledge as an external, ready-made "accumulation of cognitions" on which the individual draws when studying, the need to hold both macro and micro perspectives in balance warns against viewing knowledge simply as participation. Knowing is also a precondition for participation. Because we know things and how to do things, we are able to participate in activity. Dewey points out that, for example, social participation is not only facilitated by, but is

insured by knowing how to communicate. This factor is clearly demonstrated in foreign language classrooms.

Knowing (how) is not only a prelude to participation, it is a phenomenon that transcends the specific setting where participation and engagement was achieved. As Dewey suggests, social and cultural continuity assumes that what is learned and known is transmitted from those with experience to those without experience, from context to context. This life-renewing process assumes the transferability of knowledge beyond the situation in which it was gained. The 'participation' metaphor associated with the concept of "situatedness" has not accommodated the idea of 'transfer' easily. Sfard (1998) concludes that a model of learning is only going to be convincing if it builds on the notion of acquired, situationally invariant competence and skills which learners carry with them from situation to situation. Other metaphors are needed to complement 'participation' for a fuller picture of the way knowledge is generated, retained and applied to new situations.

Schools, like all institutions, reflect complex mergings and managements of macro and micro forces. Recent project fieldwork suggested that schools continue to be formidable cultural institutions wielding certain powers and authority and yet sites of enormous struggle between, for example, curricular mandates and vision, teacher beliefs, educational traditions and ethos, parental demands and student identities. Data suggested that a teacher's conception of how pupils can become more knowledgeable has a decisive effect on the aims, the roles, expectations, interaction patterns, learning activity and outcomes in the classroom.

### **Identities**

Identities are of special interest in this project. As postmodernists have stressed, the idea of a self-contained, essential and unified self is highly questionable (Rorty 1985). The self is invaded by its surrounding culture, (Donald 2000) changes with it and, like postmodern culture, is fragmented and veined with conflict. The human self is assumed as a relatively fluid and socially situated quantity, both facilitating and formed through human social activity (Dewey 1916). As mentioned, our conception of 'identity' is inspired by a post-colonial perspective which expresses human identity as re-negotiations and narratives in different everyday and textual practices and processes (Giddens 1991). From this position, describing identities in terms of organizational and institutional roles and rituals does not account for their contingent, dynamic and multilayered natures. Post-colonialists contend that a person's attributes or self-representations only become meaningful and socially necessary when individuals interact with significant others in specific sociocultural situations. They highlight the way identities are constructed and manifested, the way people position themselves in socially optimal ways, through communication practices in social contexts (Luk & Lin 2007).

However, in our view, qualification of this position is called for. While acknowledging that human identities are conditioned, contingent and multiple, it seems that they add up to more than the sum total of different positionings an individual achieves in his or her social dealings with others. There is a strand of historical continuity and coherence to the self which is revealed in every encounter with others and gives a certain predictability to everyday social life. As Beck (1993) insists "[i]ndividuals are only *in part* identifiable in terms of the various categories to which they belong". Gee

(2001) describes identity as being recognized as a certain kind of person in a given context and outlines four ways to view identity – nature, institution, discourse and affinity-identities. He stresses that these are not discrete categories; they interrelate in complex ways and may well all be present when a person acts in a particular context, but different societies and historical periods have tended to foreground one or other of these aspects as a way of explaining how identities are formed and sustained. Dewey (1916) equates the self with interest – a perspective which brings out both the shifting and more anchored qualities of ‘identity’. Human interest naturally has many layers of intensity and value; the least intense ‘interest’ may fluctuate considerably across time and contexts, but interests that are attached to personal beliefs and ‘core’ values are notoriously resistant to change and tend to have a pervading influence on human decisions and actions (see Pajares 1992).

In approaching identities, it appears that there is *disposition* and *position* at play in every social interaction; there is the human gap between the person we recognize ourselves to be and the person we would like to be seen as through our social performances. Given the complex and paradoxical nature of identities, multiple perspectives and intersectionality will be especially useful for exploring the concept and gaining deeper understanding of its dimensions.

### **Culture**

The diversification of culture as a construct has been widely recognized (see for example, Kramsch 1993; Tornberg 2001; Van Esch & St. John 2003:40-41). An individual’s culture is nourished and niched by the many different groups to which individuals ‘belong’ and forge loyalties. Such a spectrum of layers and boundaries includes not only national, ethnic and religious bearings, but a host of other cultural differences that might relate to gender, generation, education, social class, region or city, language community, special interest group, family and life experiences. This perspective shows the national dimension to be simply one category in a wide spectrum of cultural differences and identities individuals bear, rendering the one nation-one language-one culture model of limited use as a tool for competent, comprehensive multicultural analysis (Baumann 1999:84).

However, the forever changing and unfolding quality of culture has perhaps received less widespread attention and certainly the pedagogical prospects of recognizing culture as constant opportunity for renewal and re-creation have not been worked through into school arenas (St. John 2004b). LISA 21 assumes culture as both *difference* and *dynamic*. It seeks to develop a conception of culture which comprehends both culture as something people bear which contributes to social activity, constrains their behaviour, affects their understanding and culture as a process they constantly shape and are shaped by. From this perspective, all human communication is intercultural (Van Esch & St. John 2003) and all classrooms are multicultural (St. John 2004a).

Research into cultural diversity and differences is crucial because conceptions of culture can limit or open up pedagogical opportunities in the classroom. For example, a vision of culture that recognizes the existence of cultural differences at many levels will allow a language teacher to use the cultures of the classroom (e.g. small/ large families, teenagers/ pensioners, snowboarders/ non-snowboarders) to engage her students on a cultural journey which may cross less familiar boundaries towards



foreign cultural frontiers. By making the learners and their own 'backyards' the initial point of cultural reference, what was remote and condemned to the horizon can be related to and comprehended on the basis of cultural differences and boundaries that immediately surround them. Though different in degree, these cultural phenomena nonetheless trigger the same kind of responses and offer parallel learning experiences. With a *differentiated* view of culture, every classroom can be exploited for its multicultural resources. Moreover, a *dynamic* conception of culture will allow for a pedagogy which anticipates the possibility of cultural change; it recognizes that students are not simply victims of their own 'cultures', but can experience and channel multicultural change and progress.

### **Language and identities**

It is also assumed that language and identities are inextricably related when learning is in focus; that they interweave in learning activity. Language is culturally produced for a host of different purposes and its use presupposes a culturally susceptible 'self', capable of cooperation, but also of idiosyncrasy, which is grappling with and growing through the appropriation of words, genres and discourses. Once made one's own, the language becomes a defining dimension of a person's identity. In social situations, individual language habits and practices reveal, even 'betray', personal identities – the kind of person an individual is recognized as being (Gee 2001). To talk, to write, to engage in communication practices therefore "necessarily involves identity work" (Renshaw, 2004). At the same time, human identities are formed and reformed through the appropriation of particular language practices, the revoicing of discourses, as people communicate and act in relation to each other (Bakhtin 1981; 1984).

We believe that a research focus on language and identities in plurilingual and multicultural learning environments is vital because both language and identities are implicated fundamentally when individuals learn. The learning of language is a very personal venture (Ellis 1993). It impacts already existing and often very fragile language egos and self-constitutions (Guiora, *et al.* 1972) which lie at the heart of people's sense of who they are. Humanistic language teaching (see Harmer 2001) and methodologies which stress the affective dimension of learning as critical (e.g. Krashen 1982) have made significant statements about the way classroom resources should be used to meet learners' socioaffective needs for solid learning. The pedagogical implications of the intimate relationship between language and identities are clear – identities must be recognized, must be accommodated, in language learning activity and classroom communication practices. No one is going to throw themselves into language learning unless they see the process as addressing the kind of person they perceive themselves to be and as contributing to their capacity to be recognized as significant.

### **SOME PRELIMINARY PILOT STUDY FINDINGS**

The following section of this text offers, firstly, brief descriptions of the project's research settings and methods and, secondly, some preliminary findings and questions from an initial, but far-from-complete, analysis of data gathered during a pilot study in the spring of 2007.

## **Project aims and methods**

Over the coming three years, in-depth fieldwork has been planned in three very different kinds of school – a school of the Deaf, an ‘international’ school and a multicultural school. These schools have been chosen because of their “good practice” status and all offer the opportunity to study plurilingual practices in teaching-learning situations. The fieldwork sites are secondary schools, specifically pupils in grades 7 to 9, since it is at these levels that it becomes possible to study the communicative practices of teachers and pupils in environments where they are using different languages for classroom communication.

Since LISA 21 is interested in gaining insight into learning processes and identity work by exploring communication practices in plurilingual and culturally-diverse classrooms, an ethnographic approach has been chosen. Ethnographic methods in the context of prolonged field presence and relationship-building lend themselves well to exploring and mapping culturally complex phenomena. Fieldwork will involve both participant and nonparticipant observation techniques as well as a study of national, school and classroom texts which bear relevance for pupils’ learning experiences.

## **Pilot studies, 2007**

During the spring of 2007, two pilot studies were conducted with a fellow PhD student in a school for the Deaf and an ‘international’ school with the aim of identifying key areas of commonality and contrast for forthcoming ethnographic investigation. The studies involved ‘shadowing’ two classes through their daily schedule over ten-day periods in order to piece together a picture of the pupils’ daily school lives and routines. Video and audio recording of lesson activity as well as field notes were the primary methods used to collect data. A preliminary analysis of the data has pointed to several areas of potential significance for further fieldwork. They are of particular interest because they suggest educational incongruities, even contradictions, whose tensions and resolutions have important bearings on learning and development at school. In the following paragraphs, I outline three of these areas which hopefully will contribute impetus to the project’s focused fieldwork and analytical framework.

### **1. Suspending and resourcing dialogue**

It was evident that the way teachers coordinate and conduct student attempts to contribute to the lesson has important repercussions for the extent to which pupils are allowed to engage with the subject matter and therefore for the generation of certain kinds of knowledge. Teachers exercised their monopoly on communication rights in the classroom by gate keeping access to the ‘floor’ and orchestrating student participation. Factors that governed teachers’ decisions to constrain rather than encourage student contributions included the teacher’s need to protect the delivery of his/her points from competing contributions. Behind this tendency is often a teacher-constructed body of material that the teacher feels pressure to ‘get through’ as well as conceptions of what counts as legitimate or ‘real’ school work.

If knowing is viewed as an internal storing up, layer after layer, of factual information which students receive as a result of expert teacher presentation, then preparing and delivering this ‘knowledge’ package becomes a central steering mechanism in the classroom, always at the expense of student contributions and participation. Indeed, a conception of knowledge as a mode of *packing* brains rather than *participating* in

social activity is likely to foster an attitude that students' questions are superfluous, even unfruitful, to what is most educationally rewarding and valuable to focus on at school.

Given the patterns of participation these constraints imply, what kind of learning do they lead to? If learning is an aspect of participation (Lave & Wenger 1991) and people change and transform their understanding of activity through participation (Rogoff 1995), then there is the strong possibility that pupils will be learning more about school culture and classroom practice than becoming competent in a subject. At the same time, a constraint on classroom participation and a suspension of dialogical rights tended to divert participation and, with it learning, to the 'edges', centrifugally, where plenty of knowledge sharing was going on, but which was not directly related to the activity in the 'official' arena. The term *diverted learning* perhaps describes the kind of learning that emerges when pupils are denied an 'official' opportunity to gain a discursive grip on a particular issue or concept. *Diverted* learning seems to entail a loss of potential power and to lead to a more fragmentary and shallow learning experience.

Despite considerable constraint on student contributions, there is clear evidence of the way student contributions served as a *conversational resource* and facilitated a deeper level of understanding in the lesson. Student responses added meanings and ideas to the 'discussion'. Students often asked probing questions and made remarks which helped clarify the conceptual boundaries of terms the teacher introduced. Sometimes the teacher took his cue from student questions and interjections. On a few occasions, initiated by a student question, the contributor managed to draw the teacher into a dialogic exchange. In these cases, both parties are engaged on unpremeditated terms, both are responding with direct reference to the other's stances and together they are converging on mutual understanding. Data suggests that these short bursts of dialogic activity affected student understanding and satisfaction most significantly.

Since participation in classroom activity is so central to learning and gaining knowledge (Dewey 1916; Rogoff 1995) and others are highly significant in coming to understand concepts and experience (Bakhtin 1981), individual and collective contributions and engagement is a highly critical pedagogical classroom component. Greater recognition of the way student contributions can resource meaning making and understanding may encourage teachers to seek a more sensitive balance between conducting participation and creating conditions for genuine dialogic activity. Without such awareness and the pedagogical practices it would suggest, there is the danger of lesson activity that may result in teacher satisfaction while leaving students indifferent, without having gained greater interest in or understanding of the topic than they brought to the lesson.

There were also discursive barriers to student lesson participation which some teachers failed to break down, but which others managed to bridge. One teacher – a teacher of Swedish – stood out as particularly successful in mobilizing 'free' and fluent intercourse, almost effortlessly, between all members of a class of 29 students. How did she facilitate and sustain *whole-class* discussion in the classroom? Generally, the teacher was able to create conditions which successfully drew all the students into dialogical interaction by allowing them to participate on their own terms

with the language resources they were most familiar with and could deploy most easily. The Swedish teacher managed to achieve this discursive involvement by:

- *Prioritizing and harnessing students' contributions as a vital dialogic resource.*
- *Legitimizing the everyday vernacular language familiar to the students.*
- *Praising the students sincerely and giving acknowledgement where it was due.*
- *Building a bridge from student contributions (the concrete and immediate) to new concepts.*

To achieve dialogical activity the teacher relaxed the reins of power and established more symmetrical relations between herself and pupils. The result was not disorder or chaos. Although initially there was considerable chatter – “How talkative you are today!” (My translation) – and jostling for the floor, responsibility for the social order and discipline in the classroom (listening to and respecting turns, etc.) quickly became a cooperative venture – a joint responsibility. Perhaps, above all, the students felt they *owned* the discussion and this sense of ownership quickly created accountability and its own regulated order. The ‘unofficial’ became the ‘official’; the teacher led from within, more participant than conductor; language resources were recycled and voices revoiced into a rich and energized discourse; meaning was constructed interactively and learning took on a cooperative character. Time sped past and rather than the discussion fizzling out, the teacher had to round things off while the discussion was moving forward purposely and promisingly. It was a remarkable achievement by most accounts. Interestingly enough, the teacher in question was the youngest and least experienced of those we observed during this pilot study.

#### **11. Transferring and transforming understanding**

In many of the lessons observed (Science and Social studies being prime examples), there seemed to be a paradox or at least a critical tension with regard to the learning aims and needs in the classroom. This tension is reflected more widely in the dichotomy between knowledge as acquisition and knowledge as participation (see Sfard 1998). Gaining knowledge or competence seemed to be conceived blatantly as ‘receiving’ rather than reconstructing a body of ‘knowledge’. The teacher’s “lecturing” was presumably rationalized by the view that the material is received to be reproduced (e.g. in a test) rather than transformed or reconstructed to be understood. There did not seem to be a concern to relate the new information to other areas of pupils’ personal lives or involve them creatively as co-producers of understanding. To put it more crudely, in these lessons, the gaining of knowledge seemed to be viewed as a cumulative packing of brains with bits and pieces of information which the teacher and pupils, by speaking and listening respectively, transfer intact from an external to an internal plane to become subject knowledge in the pupils’ minds. Knowledge is assumed to come in ‘bytes’ of what students can say or do; progress is seen very much in terms of ‘completing’ certain sections, assignments and exercises in course and workbooks.

*Three incidents which illustrate this critical tension in different ways:*

In a social studies lesson, the teacher pointed out that the highest grades would be given to those students who showed a reflective stance and were able to relate the topic to their own experiences and other issues. Despite this challenge, the whole

thrust of the lesson was geared to pieces of factual information highlighted by 'decontextualised' propositions and convergent questions. This practice suggested that knowledge can be learned bit by bit in an cumulative process of acquisition. There was little room for engaging reflectively with the material and for the kind of interaction that encourages the co-production of understanding.

In a science lesson, the teacher seemed determined that students should understand atomic structure ("We are going to fata"); however, she seemed unable or unconcerned to give full answers to the students' pertinent questions, preferring to drag them back to the safety of her 'script' which she seemed very dependent on. In order to help pupils understand and to allay their anxiety about a forthcoming test, the teacher delivered her "lecture" consisting of a series of statements – scientific facts and terms – about atomic structure which students transferred to their notebooks ("It goes in your brain more easily when you take notes"). To elicit this information (since this was recapitulation), she asked display, fact-oriented questions (e.g. "What is an atom?"). After the "lecture", she gave the pupils exercises to work on "so that it [the material] will stick in your brain".

In contrast, the students asked many sensitive and searching questions, demonstrating their real desire to understand (e.g. "Why does the nucleus weigh so much?"). Although the teacher 'took' all the questions, she did not address them satisfactorily, dismissing a good number of them with a trivial comment or joke. Why was this?

She did not know the answer. The teacher's static, fragmentary knowledge was seen to limit the kind of answers and discussion students were afforded.

She felt the need to get back to the safety of her script, her set of discrete statements, and schedule. Several times, students' questions were literally marginalized as the teacher dragged pupil attention back to the secure ground of the statements.

She replied several times, "But we don't care about that". This response to some of the students' probing questions implied her lack of concern to engage students' curiosity and to help them transform their understanding of atomic structure and take responsibility for appropriating the new concepts.

What kind of understanding can we expect from this lesson? Was the teacher's goal to develop understanding about atomic structure or to help students retain a set of statements, facts, about atoms that could be reproduced, recalled in, for example, a test situation? The teacher's practices suggest she sees the development of knowledge as the transference or the internalization of words and terms without the transformation meaningful participation triggers, without the need for students to create their own conditions for learning.

In an English lesson, the teacher clearly expressed his aim – to stimulate the creative writing of student stories by reading aloud some model texts. However, when reading aloud the story models intended to inspire such creative writing, the teacher did not really allow the students to contribute to the interpretive process or co-produce meaning in relation to the narratives. He seemed to hold exclusive interpretive rights on the story. Did the teacher fail to see the importance of reading imaginatively and gaining multiple perspectives on the stories for writing creatively?

### **iii. Identity affordances and restraints in plurilingual learning environments**

A formal learning environment in which two or more languages are in operation as main means of classroom communication both creates opportunities for new identity positions, new roles and relationships in the classroom as well as conditions which restrain pupils' ability to identify themselves as significant and eligible selves.

On one hand, becoming 'bilingual' is a prized competence, an attractive goal, and students are well aware of its communicative and social benefits in a globalized world. A bilingual 'front' is an identity position that most students in this school are interested in being able to project and manoeuvre flexibly. The appropriation of new language practices, extends pupils' communicative capability and therefore their range of possibilities to be seen as personally significant, as worth including. As members of this 'international' school, they even borrow status and a certain amount of self-esteem from the school's special profile and reputation.

At the same time, the ability to contribute and participate actively in classroom activities with the new language demonstrates language competence and can boost esteem and status in front of teacher and peers. For example, the new language gives pupils with competence and confidence special opportunity to display their linguistic knowledge by their use of advanced vocabulary and 'up-to-date' phrases. Observations suggest the creation of new roles in bilingual learning environments which gives leverage to identity work. For example, in classes where the teacher could not or, for pedagogical reasons, did not use the pupils first language, the role of 'interpreter' of the teacher's meaning or instruction for peers emerged as vital to the learning process and important for positioning. It provided leverage on positioning in that it gave certain students something to offer their peers and created the relational aspect of helping another classmate who might not have previously had much in common with the 'helper'. This gave students a chance to 'tutor' even when their subject competence was not necessarily greater than their 'tutee's'.

On the other hand, there are restraints precipitated by bilingual learning environments. For some, the new language (which may be their third) threatens their language 'egos' so powerfully bound up with their mother tongues. At the same time, working in a second language can limit students' capacity to express meaning, reducing their opportunity to contribute and be seen as competent. The fluency and ease with which the native-speaker teachers deploy the language for instructions, descriptions and managing the classroom constantly underline the students' limited competence and undermine their self-confidence.

Perhaps above all, the new language they are immersed in carries a high cultural status, a prestige, which it is impossible to 'neutralize' in the classroom. For many students at international schools, a sense of being culturally over-shadowed underlines their view of their classroom position as less powerful, as disadvantaged, and may add to their feelings of inferiority and anxiety. A reduced view of oneself and one's place in the 'system of things' impinges on learners' identities and precipitates inner conflict. It can 'silence' their voices in the classroom. The dangers of pupils being alienated by the values and practices associated with the new language, cramped by feelings of inadequacy and cultural disqualification are very real in a classroom environment where a second or third language is dominant. Given these restraints, plurilingual learning settings, without considerable pedagogical care, can

war against inclusion. Whether these tensions are resolved or remain sharp depends on several factors which include second or third language competence, attitudes to this language, self-confidence and cultural affinity or remoteness.

## CONCLUSION

It is some of these preliminary findings and issues which we would like to present to and discuss with others at the Advanced Study Colloquium. The capacity to be comfortable alongside cultural differences, and to appreciate them, is perhaps the greatest gift education can offer pupils and teachers. To recognize one's place alongside, rather than above or in opposition to, other human beings lies at the heart of intercultural competence and the fostering of foundational values across the curriculum. Teachers need much support to make intercultural learning a priority in the midst of the many demands they face in school. At the same time, if a focus on intercultural capacities and competences and how to promote them is not introduced into teacher education courses, then this kind of learning will be sidelined in favour of the 'flavour of the day' rather than fostering a 'core' life skill.

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# UNDERSTANDING HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGH DIFFERENT BELIEF SYSTEMS: INTERCULTURAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The South African context and planning of the project**

During the pre-democratic era in South Africa, the state and by implication education, were based on a Christian Nationalist ideology. Religions, beliefs and values other than what was promoted by the state were disregarded. Together with this, violations of people's inalienable human rights also occurred on various levels. After the first democratic election in 1994, SA was declared a secular state and a new set of values based on human rights was introduced. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa ('the Constitution'), together with a Bill of Rights, was also drawn up and accepted in 1996. From the Constitution it became evident that it is expected of all South African citizens to conform to the country's human rights values (HRV). This expectation of conforming to the country's human rights values was articulated in the education realm in 2001 through the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy ('the Manifesto'), a support document to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). It provides those involved in education with an understanding of those shared or collective HRV derived from the Constitution (1996) to be cherished as a nation. Furthermore, it also offers possibilities for a collective democratic philosophy in SA education and it is envisaged that all teaching and learning activities should be rooted in the Manifesto's HRV. These HRV are democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, human dignity, open society, accountability/responsibility, rule of law, respect and reconciliation (Manifesto 2001). The document strongly directs the interpretation of education curricula in schools. One should however argue, consistent with the Manifesto, that in the SA context our shared human rights values must provide an adequate space in schools to begin the process of understanding difference – whether religious or cultural in nature.

Implementing appropriate and sustainable strategies of teaching and learning human rights in school settings was a question addressed by the research team in August 2004. The reason was that violence in the South African society and especially in schools with a lack of respect for human rights in classroom practices seemed to be reported at an alarming rate in the printed media. Reports and feedback to the Department of Education (DoE) indicated aggression (racism, sexism, intolerance of differences: religiously and culturally) and a lack of understanding of the values imbedded in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and the Bill of Rights (1996). The Constitution and its values expect of all South African citizens to conform to the country's human rights values. This expectation of conforming to the country's human rights values, which was articulated in the education realm through the Manifesto (2001) and the RNCS, provides those involved in education with an understanding of shared or collective human rights values derived from the

Constitution (1996) to be cherished as a nation. It is envisaged that all teaching and learning activities should be rooted in the Manifesto's human rights values (HRV). These HRV are defined as democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, human dignity, open society, accountability/responsibility, rule of law, respect and reconciliation (Manifesto 2001).

The concept *human rights values* (HRV) is not clearly defined in the school curriculum, and teachers seem to be unable to identify these values and sustainable teaching and learning skills. In 2003 the Educator Skills Developing Programme: Integrating Values and Human Rights into the Curriculum<sup>24</sup> was initiated by the DoE, with a steering committee to introduce an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE). Different tertiary institutions were nominated as service providers of this initiative to retrain in-service teachers who enrolled for the ACE in human rights education. The steering committee's document Framework on Values and Human Rights across the Curriculum (2003) also called for research projects on the provisioning and outcomes of the ACE in order to assess the successes or to identify problem areas. Research projects on facilitation strategies and perceptions of different belief and value systems in education (Roux 2000; Roux & Ferguson 2003a) indicated that teachers' abilities to adapt to a new paradigm are influenced by feelings and perceptions emanating from outside their professional skills (cf. Roux 1998). In order to facilitate and to understand basic human rights and belief systems, teachers' abilities and perceptions from their own frame of reference will influence the success of any initiative on promoting a culture of human rights and/or the facilitation of different belief and value systems. The research questions are therefore:

- Are teachers in the South African school (educational) community capable of facilitating human rights issues across the school curriculum in multicultural school settings?
- What type of dialogical strategies do they use in order to be successful?

Against this background, the research project was instigated and a research team was formed of four South African universities and a collaborative university in the Netherlands. This project, which was funded for three years (2005-2007) by the South African Netherlands Projects on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD), commenced officially in January 2005. The project leading university was Stellenbosch who secured a further funding for 2008 for the dissemination process of this project as well as seed money for the introduction of further initiatives.

This paper will present:

- a synopsis of the *process of the project's development* and illustrate how postgraduate projects infused the theoretical underpinning;
- describe the *theoretical underpinnings* of the different facets of the project; and
- explain the *dissemination processes* and future propositions.

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<sup>24</sup> Report of the **Advanced Certificate in Education** (ACE) task team and steering committee, for the Department of Education (DoE). Authors: Nasila Rembe (chair); Cornelia Roux; Oshadi Mangena; Ben Richards; Nazir Carrim ( See (2003) *Framework on values and Human Rights in the Curriculum*. National Department of Education. Pretoria. State Printers. (January).

## THE PROCESS OF THE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

In October 2004 a start-up workshop was held involving all the researchers of the project, together with the students involved in the project, with the service of an independent facilitator and two representatives of SANPAD. The project was discussed in detail and the researchers' and students' different participation and research domains were defined. This process was very important as the working schedule and timetables as well as the theoretical underpinning of the management processes were discussed. One of the most important aspects was the defining of the constituencies of the team members regarding multiculturalism and their personal position in the research team. An issue that was identified at the start-up workshop was the understanding of different cultural environments at tertiary institutions that may cause imbalances in teacher training. The problem that was identified was that these imbalances cannot enhance or develop all the different aspects of diversity and inclusivity in education. Another reason for the collaboration of the five tertiary institutions was to conceptualise theories and to identify practical implications applicable to teacher training in a multicultural society and to enhance human rights across the curriculum in school environments.

The main aim of the three-year project (2005-2007) was to explore the impact on teachers teaching a culture of human rights through intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The research focus of the project was ethnographic and qualitative in nature (cf. McCutcheon 1999; Hammersley 1990:1-3, 25), and theoretical notions with evaluative elements for programme evaluation and participatory action research guided it<sup>25</sup>. The project had two subprojects: pre-service students in a four-year degree programme in teacher training, and in-service teachers enrolled in a two-year advanced diploma in human rights education.

The following research objectives were identified:

- To provide a critical and comparative review of existing literature in this field of study, focusing on ambiguities in terminology
- To provide a critical review of literature regarding dialogical theories and strategies in ethnographic environments and research terrains
- To identify and analyse the curricula of identified service providers on human rights issues and different belief systems
- To explore the perceptions of the selected groups of teachers (pre-service and in-service) involved in facilitation strategies
- To describe and evaluate the process and development of dialogue as a facilitation strategy by the service providers
- To describe and evaluate the process and development of dialogue as a facilitation strategy across the curriculum and, in some instances, in Life Orientation programmes
- To describe and evaluate the process and development of dialogue as a facilitation strategy across the curriculum and in schools

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<sup>25</sup> A forthcoming publication: *Understanding religious education through human rights values in a world of difference* (C Roux, P du Preez & R Ferguson 2008), a chapter for a book **Religious Education in a World of Difference** (Eds. Prof. dr. Siebren Miedema of the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam), reports substantially on the participating action research initiative in the pre-service training programmes, during the first phase of the project (2005).

- To define a framework and guidelines for dialogue strategies for service providers and teachers through the process of participatory action research

The first phase of the project was introduced in February 2005. The scope of the research would include educators in three sectors: pre-service student teachers, in-service teachers (2005; 2006) and a phase of dissemination of results amongst educators in a non-governmental community organisation as the community of practice (Wenger, 1998; 2006) in 2007. The reason for including educators in these three particular sectors of education in South Africa was to engage all who are involved in teaching and learning about human rights and/or the diversity of religions, beliefs and values to become informed by way of the research process. At the end of every year a workshop was held to reflect on the previous year's results and to plan the next year's final approach. At the end of 2006 the international collaborator<sup>26</sup> was part of the workshop. There were also two critical, independent referees who gave valuable input to the researchers. This was a very important aspect, as it influenced the dissemination process for the last phase in 2007. This also resulted in extra funding from the sponsor for dissemination processes.

### **The first phase (2005)**

In the first phase of the project three universities responsible for pre-service teachers (third- and fourth-year pre-service teachers), namely Stellenbosch University (the US), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal took the lead. Data was collected using two empirical methods, namely: a qualitative questionnaire implemented to determine student teachers' understanding of human rights in relation to religious and cultural diversity; and reflective journals (Moon 2000) that were distributed and which students used for reflection on their teaching practices in schools on one occasion. The reflective journals were used to detect firstly, whether human rights are infused in the classroom by teachers in general, secondly whether human rights are infused across the curriculum, and thirdly as a means of reflection by pre-service teachers on their lessons presented on human rights in the learning area Life Orientation. The University of the Western Cape (UWC), which was the service provider for the ACE, distributed the questionnaire to their students in the first semester of their studies. These students reflected on their experiences in their teaching classes as in-service teachers.

The analyses of the questionnaires and reflective journals were completed and reported at two international conferences (see outputs).

The theoretical underpinning for a literature review of human rights in different curricula was done through an MEd thesis (part of the project) and therefore gave the point of departure for the understanding of human rights values in the curriculum used by the South African education system (outcomes-based education).

### **The second phase (2006)**

In the second phase the researchers at each tertiary institution did a follow-up of the pre-service students in their pre-service year (fourth academic year) during their school practices. Students completed questionnaires on explaining academic

<sup>26</sup> The international collaborator must be an academic person at a University in the Netherlands with the task to act as reviewer and critical reader of the project. Publications on the project were evaluated by peer evaluation of academic journals, and postgraduate studies were evaluated by independent internal and external examiners.

content and concepts acquired during their third year. They also received a refreshing lecture where they were exposed to the key aspects (i.e. interreligious and intercultural dialogue, human rights values and human rights in the context of various religions and belief systems). Students were also required to write reflective notes on their experiences in school practices in relation to the new content they received.

All these participants were followed up in their school environments during school practices. Various schools were visited and lessons observed. The reason for the follow-up exercise was mainly to determine whether, after a year of initially being exposed to the relevant content, they were adequately prepared to deal with human rights values and matters across various learning areas and in Life Orientation (where the diversity of religions and cultures are taught).

The following structure will be used to explain the various lesson proceedings observed:

- Context of lesson, learning outcomes and content
- Facilitation strategies and media
- Assessment of learning outcomes
- Explanation of lesson progress
- Discussion with teacher after the lesson<sup>27</sup>
- Comments regarding the lesson

Each student was given a copy of the observation schedule. Ethical questions were put regarding taking photos during lessons and recording the individual interviews after their lesson.

Beginner in-service teachers (first year as professionals) who were students in 2005 were also visited and interviewed. These visits and interviews were only conducted in the Gauteng province. The reason was that these teachers were fourth-year students at Wits in the Gauteng area and part of the 2005 research phase. The team wanted to explore the beginner teachers' ability to cope in real professional circumstances and observe their approach after their professional training of four years and modules in human rights education. It was an opportunity to investigate their ability to cope in *real praxis*. These teachers' lessons were observed, recorded and discussed. Interviews were also conducted by an independent researcher from the US during a round trip to all the universities involved.

### **Contact with ACE students and reflection on the research process**

After selecting and inviting ten students to become participants in the research project, attempts have been made since September 2005 to arrange school visits and focus group interviews. Upon reflection, it was perhaps too optimistic to wish to schedule school visits for the month of January. Students completed the ACE course in June 2005, and thereafter contact could only be made via telephone or fax, since these in-service students do not represent a captive audience, but are educators. Some of them are in management positions and therefore they have busy work schedules. Through a process of continuous reflection and attention a committed voluntary core of teachers was selected to generate qualitative work. The students

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<sup>27</sup> In some instances a discussion between the teacher and me was not conducted after the lesson, because some of the pre-service teacher participants had other duties to attend to after the lessons.

took part in smaller dissertations on topics related to human rights education in the different learning areas of the school curriculum. The preliminary conclusion was that the two researchers' reflections had wider implications:

- Firstly, the researchers came to the project with particular pasts and positionings which affected how the research should be conducted.
- Secondly, the collaboration as designers of the project, fieldworkers and analysts gave them first-hand experience of the different stages of the research process.
- Thirdly, the fact that the in-service teachers were constrained by time, impacting negatively on the time schedule, militated against their intentions regarding the research process.

This sub-project was not very successful, as the initial outcomes of a comparison could not be made. Restraints regarding the availability of in-service teachers and their commitment were one of the major problems.

The empirical section of the project ended in 2006 (as planned and as approved by the funding organisation).

### **The third phase (2007)**

The third phase was the final dissemination process with the community of practice (in-service teachers) (Wenger 1998; 2006). The group of in-service teachers was selected in the in the North West province in Mafikeng/Mmabatho in South Africa. The region was chosen because it had not been covered by the previous empirical processes and investigations of the project. The purpose of this phase was to explore the possibility of an innovative curriculum and approach in human rights values in the learning area Life Orientation with in-service teachers who had never had the opportunity to be introduced to the content and teaching and learning approaches. The research was conducted in a PhD study (Du Preez 2007) as part of a project that was based on sound theoretical underpinnings of dialogue as a facilitation strategy for infusing a culture of human rights on a moral level, with intervention research as research design. The intervention research design was chosen because it could serve as foundation for the professional development of in-service educators.

The final stage of this project in 2007 is the dissemination process of the findings of the project. In this regard the academic dissemination processes in the form of papers, articles, workshops and suchlike have been accomplished. However, the funding organisation also defines part of the dissemination process as providing policy documents to government (Departments of Education) that can bring about change. The project leader was part of a committee responsible for developing a policy document on Human Rights across the curriculum (2003). This part of the project still needs to be dealt with. Chancing policy is not an easy task and the project team is working on strategies to elaborate the project and to join hands with other organisations and colleagues in the faculty of law to establish a joint project in this regard.

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE DIFFERENT FACETS OF THE PROJECT**

Programmes on citizenship in diverse cultures, human rights and different belief and value systems are part of education programmes in many countries. Ferguson and Roux (2003a; 2003b) have highlighted the lack of knowledge of teachers on, for example, the content of different beliefs and values when dealing with content other than that from their own in multicultural school environments. One can assume that some of the findings of the research of Ferguson and Roux (2003b) can also be applicable when facilitating human rights issues. Since teachers' perceptions of different issues play such an important role in the facilitation of content in life skills programmes, the facilitation of human rights issues across the curriculum might be a bigger obstacle. Taking the above-mentioned arguments into consideration, it was inevitable that the research team would need a well-defined theoretical foundation for the processes outlined.

### ***Motivation for a literature review for the project***

An outstanding aspect of this project was that from the beginning every phase or implementation strategy of the project was grounded by a theoretical underpinning. Postgraduate studies and published articles and chapters in international books indicated the standing of this project in academic circles. Papers at international and national conferences were not added to the list (see list of academic disseminations).

The following issues were based on the development of theories:

- 10. the *management structure* of the project (Roux 2008)
- 11. the *understanding of human rights values in the curriculum* (Du Preez 2005)
- 12. the feedback on the *empirical research questions and reflective journals* (Roux, Ferguson & Du Preez 2008 [forthcoming publication]; Roux 2007b)
- 13. the *voices of in-service teachers on the human right of religious freedom* (Jarvis 2007)
- 14. the theoretical underpinning for a *community of practice* (Ferguson 2006; Du Preez 2007)
- 15. the philosophy and theory for understanding *dialogue as a facilitation strategy* for teacher education and teachers' professional development (Du Preez 2007)

### ***The management structure of the project (Roux 2008)***

The process described below is deducted from an article, 'Collaboration in teacher education through research in multicultural education' in the South African Journal for Higher Education (Roux 2008).

***The process of managing the project with two sub-projects was a challenge and urged the project leader to define the processes and include the research team at all different levels of management. The researchers of the two programmes and projects worked independently, and the notion of a merging of understanding was resiliently debated. There was consensus in the research group that, in order to collaborate in a critical discourse on emancipatory processes, in-service and pre-service students in teacher education had to contextualise a new dimension of theory and praxis. Interesting to note is that the PhD students drew important unresolved issues from the first phase of the project into their research proposals. Students took***

***ownership of their own projects and – to a degree – of the bigger picture and of the potential for further collaboration with one another.***

The process of managing a project, with two sub-projects, over long distances in South African and abroad made it necessary for the project leader to expand her knowledge of project management, since she was on unfamiliar territory. The multiculturalism forced the project leader to submit a challenging managing process to the team. It was always met with rigorous discussion on processes, the planning of empirical research strategies and the researchers' presenting *the constituency* (making of their students) as well as the researchers' input on their understanding of *multiculturalism* and its meaning in terms of the project. This was a valuable process, and gave guidelines for managing the project for the next three years. As the senior researchers were all senior, full-time, well-qualified women academics, the collaboration and input in this project were based purely on the notion of *women academics* from different cultural backgrounds and tertiary institutions working collaboratively within a feminist research paradigm. It was during the first phase of collaboration in the project that the nuances of this feminist paradigm were identified.

***The notion of using autoethnography as Patton (2002:84) describes it, namely understanding and studying one's own culture and oneself as part of that culture – and its many variations was part of the managing processes and it fitted the feminist research paradigm of the team. Patton (2002:85) quotes Goodall, who emphasises that this new ethnography creates narratives shaped out of a writer's personal experiences within a culture and [is] addressed to academic and public audiences. This type of ethnography firstly answers the foundational question of the researchers' own experiences and insight about the culture or situation and secondly determines the approach of the two specific spheres of the researchers with their students (participants in in-service and pre-service programmes) in multicultural and multireligious environments.***

***The research design also consisted of reflexive work (journals) in all three phases of the project. This was done by the researchers and the participants of the pre-service and in-service programmes that resulted in reflexivity as an important part of understanding the social construct of the collaboration of the researchers and the outcomes of the project. This approach further strengthened the process of collaboration in the team during the project. One can therefore describe the specific feminist research paradigm for this collaborative group as a feminist research paradigm with narration and reflexivity that engaged a self-critical sympathetic introspection and autoethnography.***

***The consensus approach that was followed by the project leader was a rewarding experience. Various theoretical discussions were underpinned by practical examples from the different institutions as well as by the deconstruction of the knowledge claims of the researchers. This bore out the principle that an understanding of one's own marked subjectivity enables the maintenance of a distanced position. The illusion of authority from experienced researchers was also recognisable (Domosh 2005:5).***



***An important issue that should be further explored in future projects is the so-called island situation of some researchers in the project. These members of the team have no other academic support or colleagues in this research domain. They are working on their own at their institutions. This means that the only support for their research is from members of the so-called scattered team, who are situated at the collaborative institutions. Although collaboration takes place via e-mail and other electronic media, the absence of a personal connectedness and discussions caused a difference in the period of reconstructing theory and understandings of applicable research philosophies on the relevant theories, and one can argue that the consensus approach was tested. The once-a-year workshop seems to be insufficient to foster the spirit of collaboration within the feminist research paradigm. Due to a lack of funds and the distance between the collaborators, it is not possible for them to meet personally on a regular basis.***

***Academic dissemination processes in the form of publications were very important outcomes of the project. It was important to achieve these outcomes, which were outlined in the research proposal. The project leader of the project tried to set an example to the other researchers in helping them to publish and finish their postgraduate studies. The project funded five MEd and two PhD students. Three MEd and one PhD candidate have successfully completed their studies.***

***Facilitating human rights values across the curriculum (Du Preez 2005)***

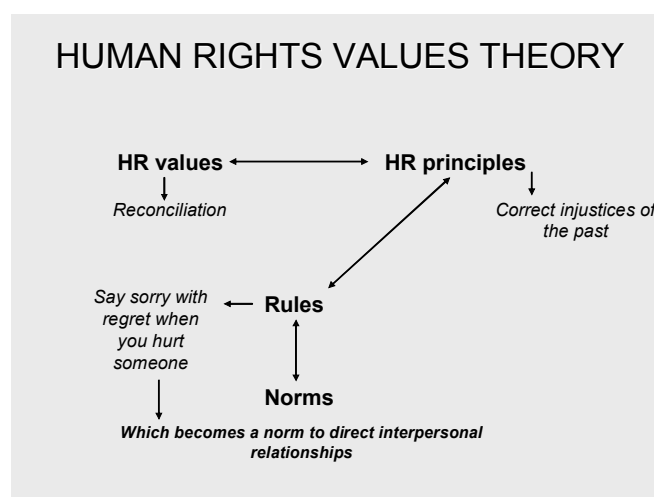
As indicated on the introduction, the aim of the project was to understand human rights through interreligious and intercultural dialogue in education. In defining *human rights values* (HRV), the aim is not to provide a fixed mode of thinking about HRV, but rather to provide a generic idea of how it emanated, thus indicating the link between values and the principles underscored by the Bill of Rights (1996) in SA. The suggested generic scheme also provides a sufficient starting point in the mediation process between lecturers and pre-service teachers (students) on topics related to HRV in the context of diverse religions, beliefs and values.

HRV might broadly be described as *universal and communal values* since they are grounded in the principles underpinning the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) as maintained in the South African Bill of Rights (1996). HRV could therefore be characterised as those values to be cherished both globally and locally. This characteristic broadens the scope of HRV to include the concept of identity and identity formation and “respect (for) religious and social distinctions” (Morrison 2000:124-125), which are also relevant in a world of religious difference.

Not all authors, however, acknowledge the use of the concept HRV. Beckmann and Nieuwenhuis (2004), for instance, deny the existence of this concept. An attempt was therefore made to clarify the use of the term by referring primarily to the work of David Morrison (2000). Beckmann and Nieuwenhuis (2004:59) argue that rights are important to assure the continued existence of any community, but they are not recognised or viewed equally in all communities. They also argue that human rights can neither be viewed as values nor be transformed into personal and societal value structures. Thus, in their view the notion of HRV does not hold credence. Their argument was challenged by exploiting one of their own arguments regarding what

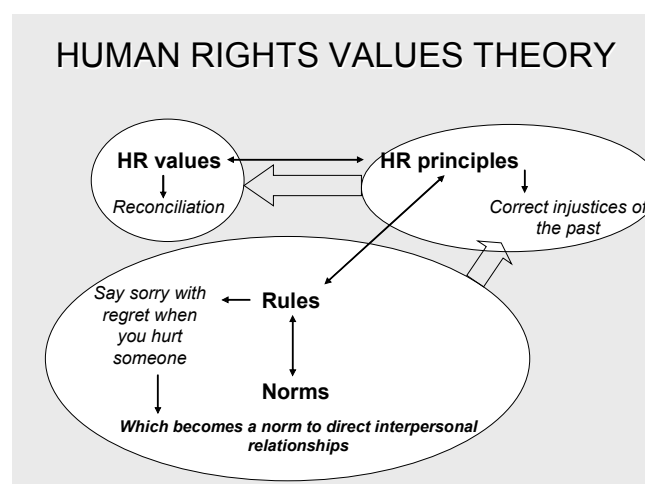
norms are (Beckmann & Nieuwenhuis 2004:58-59). This was done in the context of Morrison's (2000:123-132) views regarding human rights principles and underlying HRV.

Beckmann and Nieuwenhuis (2004:58) argue that values shape the behaviour and choices people make. Since people attach value to that which is important to them, it is possible to derive values from certain principles that direct how one should live. Such principles manifest themselves as rules. These authors furthermore maintain that rules become norms that regulate our interpersonal relationships (Beckmann & Nieuwenhuis 2004:58). The following example illustrates their argument: If value is attached to *reconciliation* (the value), an attempt will be made to *correct injustices of the past* (the underlying principle). From this principle a certain rule may be formed that could be taught to learners or with which they might be familiar. Such a rule can be *Say sorry with true regret when you hurt a friend*. This example reinforces the important connection between values, principles and rules (norms). This connection is illustrated theoretically-diagrammatically in the Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1:** Adapted from Du Preez (2005:51)

It is suggested that, in classroom situations, teachers focus more on the rules or norms to which learners adhere and gradually refer to the connection between these rules or norms, their underlying principles and corresponding values (Du Preez 2005:52). This is indicated in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2:** Adapted from Du Preez (2005:53)

One can assume that if a group of diverse people promote the principles underlying human rights, certain values might be derived from those human rights principles. The values derived from human rights principles would therefore be called HRV. The argument regarding the term HRV should be viewed in the light of Beckmann and Nieuwenhuis's (2004) argument about the connection between values, principles and rules as illustrated in Figure 1.

The facilitation of HRV might be considered a means by which to rethink and redefine values education in South Africa. The theoretical underpinning of this part was aimed at determining how human rights values were addressed in the context of two education models in South Africa, and how educators facilitated these values in various circumstances. In exploring the philosophies, theories and practices of these education models against the background of paradigmatic and post-paradigmatic philosophies in support of the socially constructive curriculum theory, important notions were highlighted that have preceded, and might follow, the facilitation of human rights values. The epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies of the emancipatory paradigm and post-paradigmatic framework appeared to provide appropriate philosophical departure points regarding the facilitation of human rights values. The study of Du Preez (2005) gave a theoretical clarification of the concept *human rights values* and included a discussion on the importance of these values in various school contexts. The empirical research explored how human rights values could propose *good practice* scenarios in order to provide insight into the questions posed regarding the facilitation of human rights values. This was an important aspect for the implementation of the second phase (2006).

Recommendations and related examples were provided in the study (Du Preez 2005) that included, among others, the notions of dialogically facilitating human rights values to promote learners' understanding of their rights, and the rights of others; to transform incidental facilitation of human rights values into worthwhile teaching-learning experiences; to use human resources – including learners – to convey human rights values; and to focus educators' training (both in-service and pre-service) toward the inclusion of human rights values and promoting an understanding of socially constructing a curriculum.

The study and theoretical underpinning were concluded with the remark that human rights values might be an appropriate means by which to redefine values education, provided that the facilitation of human rights values are based on suitable theoretical and philosophical premises; and that those held responsible to facilitate such values are assisted in this task.

***Empirical research questions and reflective journals (Ferguson & Roux 2006; Roux 2008)***

The purpose of the questionnaire in 2005 was to detect the participants' knowledge of policies and theories regarding human rights and diversity. They had to describe their perceptions of their own ability to translate this entire focus area into the pedagogical arena and to identify their attitudes towards religious and cultural diversities. Student responses indicate that they were well informed about human rights in general and could cite examples of human rights violations. However, there

were also certain shortfalls in terms of seeing concepts in relation to one another (viz. human rights and values) and seeing teaching and learning about diversity in cultures and religions in a framework of human rights values.

Given the centrality of these knowledge domains in curriculum and policy documents in contemporary South Africa, formal intervention in teacher education is essential in the form of the theoretical clarification of HRV and related pedagogical principles. These insights contributed to the *action* research process of the project. Subsequent programmes were formulated and learning material was designed at the three universities taking into consideration the general responses of students as well as the specific attitudes expressed in terms of the personal and social contexts of students in relation to human rights and religious diversity.

In the second phase of the project (2006) student participants were observed during school practice. This was an essential component of the research process. Teaching practice and reflection formed the second part of the first phase of the research process.

Reflective journals were introduced as a research tool to allow students to document their reflections on their activities in the classroom and thereby to participate actively as researchers themselves. This phase provided additional scope for the development of a theory of HRV in relation to understanding and coping with diverse religions, beliefs and values in the classroom and to determine whether HRV are infused across the curriculum. An important factor that was identified was the complexities of interreligious and intercultural dialogue in educational praxis. The team believed that reflection and reflexivity could contribute to the development and understanding of dialogue in educational praxis. In this project it was important that participants were allowed to convey their views shaped by their own understanding, emotions and perceptions of the circumstances that emerged in relation to a given assignment or task. Wellington (2000:42) states that being reflective "involves thinking critically about the research process; how it is done and why, and how it could have been improved". Reflexivity as a subset of reflection also reflects the process of reflecting on the *self*, the "researcher, the person who did it, the me and the I", (Wellington 2000:42; Adkins 2002; Coffey 2002; Skeggs 2002). The indispensable voices of the student participants at this stage of the research created the opportunity to reveal their understanding and perspectives on HRV in Religion Education (RE) in classroom settings, identifying dialogue opportunities, and to reinforce the notion that reflection could create theory capable of leading to action (Francis 1995:230).

The research team knew from experiences with teaching and learning diversity and inclusivity that research on the diversity of religions, beliefs and values, cultures and human rights can be an emotional research terrain. However, research also indicated that students should be in a position to construct knowledge and give meaning to the actions they observe or they should be applied with tools to develop their own theory on their praxis (Schön 1987; Roux & Du Preez 2005). Francis (1995:229) states that an essential part of the personal growth of students is "to confront 'practical theory', to make it explicit; to clarify and extend it by articulating it and by subjecting it to the challenge of others".

The research team argue that through reflective journals and reflective praxis, student participants reinterpreted and reframed their observations and their own experiences during teaching practice. Reflection is not only an important part of teacher education, but the personal growth and development it creates is also important (Schön 1987; Zeichner 1999). Therefore one could argue that in order to understand religious and cultural diversity teachers should also be reflective practitioners. Du Preez (2005:40) states that reflective practice should include "a social and cultural process during which knowledge is constructed, action is taken accordingly and reflection takes place recurrently to improve on previous actions". The reflective journals thus become an extension of the students' own cultural preferences and have the potential to hold the attention of a moment in their praxis. It gives students the opportunity to develop their own practical theory of understanding HRV in the complexity of diverse religions, beliefs, values and cultures in the schools (Schön 1987; Du Preez 2005; Roux & Du Preez 2006). Students themselves need to become researchers and inquirers into the practices employed by the teachers they observe, as well as inquirers into their own practices and creativity applied in relation to their newly developed content for classroom practice (Schön 1987; Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1993).

### ***The voices of in-service teachers on the human right of religious freedom (Jarvis 2007)***

At the end of the second phase (2006) it became clear that students (pre-service teachers) adapted easily to innovative strategies and ideas regarding the infusion of human rights across the curriculum. Students also used dialogue as facilitation strategies more often and learners' involvement reflected a learning curve and not a lesson on for example respect or tolerance after the occurrence of an unacceptable incident in class. However, during observations in classes during their school practice and in the case of newcomers into the teaching profession (first year as teachers), it appeared that in-service teachers' understanding of diversity and human rights were a new area for investigation. It was clear that many teachers regarded religious diversity in multireligious school environments as a threat and feared that it might impede human rights issues in interreligious dialogue. This aspect was investigated and a master's student started her research in this domain in June 2006. The implementation of the 'new' religion and education policy (Policy on Religion in Education 2003) could counteract the negative perceptions of in-service teachers who still had a mind-set of previous policies regarding religion in schools. Although many reasons might be given, the study tried particularly to shed light on the in-service teachers' social identity and understanding of religious freedom.

Inclusivity in South African school contexts of religious diversity underpins the Policy on Religion in Education ('the Policy') which is in turn is informed by and supportive of the South African Constitution (1996). To date, the Policy (2003) has not been substantially implemented, as indicated above. In classroom praxis there has been little or no substantial cascading to teachers (and therefore also to learners), of the intention and substance of the Policy (2003). A possible cause of this is that many teachers do not necessarily understand the meaning of the human right to 'religious freedom'. As a result, they have resisted a multireligion approach or even an interreligious dialogue which is at the source of the project regarding human rights values in education.

The aim of the study was to investigate how teachers construct their understanding of the human right to 'religious freedom' and how they voice this understanding in a context of religious diversity in schools. Integral to the investigation was an interrogation of the influence of their biographical context in shaping their personal religious identity. The study also considered the impact of the school context in which teachers taught.

This study anticipated the theoretical clarification of how teachers construct their social identities and in particular their religious identities. The theoretical framework informed what had emerged from the empirical research.

From the research it emerged that teachers' biographical context and school context do indeed influence the construction of their understanding of the human right to 'religious freedom'. The way in which they give voice to this understanding varied. It became apparent that many teachers did not understand the notion of diversity and inclusivity of religions other than one's own. One important aspect that became apparent from this study was that in-service teachers needed to be educated in all the different understandings of human rights values in order to sustain a process of teaching and learning human rights across the curriculum.

This theoretical underpinning of the understanding of religion from a human rights' perspective gave the research team new ideas to apply in future projects.

***The theoretical underpinning for a community of practice (Ferguson 2006; Du Preez 2007)***

As stated before, during the annual workshop at the end of 2006, both the reference group and the international collaborator urged the team to involve in-service teachers in order to disseminate theory into practice. In the discussions at the workshop it became clear that the dissemination process planned for 2007, i.e. the involvement of NGOs as the *community of practice*, should be changed to the *community of educators*, namely the *in-service teachers* in schools.

Since teachers are responsible for creating their own learning programmes in relation to the National Curriculum Statements in the South African context, teacher development in various aspects of the curriculum must be high on the agenda of in-service teacher training. The project's ACE programme (conducted by one of the universities involved in the project), did not feed into the notion of community of practice.

Two separate research studies of Ferguson (enrolled PhD student, 2006) and Du Preez (completed PhD, 2007) focused on supporting teachers in the mastery of knowledge and skills associated with diversity in religion education (Ferguson 2006), and dialogue in facilitating human rights (Du Preez 2007). The design and implementation of teaching and learning programmes were also explored. It was clear that these initiatives could contribute to the knowledge and understanding of religion and human rights as spheres of human activity, thought and action (Kodelja & Bassler 2004:10).

The aim of these studies was to investigate how teachers construct knowledge and skills in relation to their socio-cultural contexts. The diverse South African contexts

differ tremendously and therefore the option to empower teachers to recognise and use the resources available to them in their own 'local' contexts, seemed to be appropriate.

Ferguson's study (2006), which is still continuing, explores the 'situatedness' (social context) of the participants and how this 'situatedness' impacts on the process of knowledge acquisition and skills development (Smith 2003:2). It will be a e process of social participation or social engagement amongst members of a community of practice (participating teachers) and how this potentially influences the proficiency of the teachers in their own school environments. According to Lave and Wenger (2002:57) learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice. Learning is not seen merely as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals, or as the activities of an individual mind (cognitive processes), but rather as a process of social participation or situations of co-participation in communities of practice. Wenger (retrieved. 2006:1-2) points out three characteristics crucial to the formation of communities of practice. These three elements must be developed in combination to cultivate a community of practice:

- (1) A community of practice is not merely a network of people around an area of common interest. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Members value their collective competence and learn from each other. Learning in a community of practice encourages participants to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need (Wenger retrieved 2006:4).
- (11) Members must interact and learn together, engage in joint activities and discussions, assist each other, and share information. Thus they build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. Learning is not seen as belonging to individual persons, but to the various "conversations" of which they are a part (Smith 2003:8).
- (111) Members of a community of practice develop a shared repertoire of resources, which may include personal experiences, stories and artefacts (Wenger retrieved 2006:2).

The last point is significant with regard to the resources that are potentially available amongst the members of a community of practice. Personal histories, experiences, beliefs, particular ways of performing rituals, customs, traditions and knowledge of the 'other' (even if inaccurate) provide starting points for participation in a community of practice. Participation in a community of practice provides a context in which teachers can construct meaning in relation to the social conditions and realities that influence their identity, worldview and probably their ability to construct teaching and learning suitable for their teaching environment and praxis.

Du Preez's study has been finalised and will be reported in the separate paper on PhD studies.

***The philosophy and theory for understanding dialogue as a facilitation strategy for teacher education and teachers' professional development (Du Preez 2007)***

The last important aspect of the three-year project was to determine the philosophy and theory for understanding dialogue as a facilitation strategy for teacher education and teachers' professional development. The main conceptual argument revolved around the premise that dialogue as a facilitation strategy has the potential to

unleash the ethical nature of a learner, which in return has the propensity to augment the moral movement towards the infusion of a culture of human rights. The infusion of a culture of human rights was explored based on several meta-theoretical positions to illuminate the meaning of the notion. It was concluded that dialogue could be viewed as a constituent of the infusion of a culture of human rights, and vice versa, which leads to the symbiotic fortification between dialogue as a facilitation strategy and the ideal of infusing a culture of human rights in classrooms.

To perceive the extent of the impact of this normative account of dialogue as constitutive to the infusion of a culture of human rights, and to determine whether these conceptions could further be developed as a professional development programme for in-service educators, a qualitative intervention research study was undertaken from January to March 2007. This entailed developing the conceptual work described above into a pilot professional development programme for three diverse cases of in-service educators in the Mafikeng/Mmabatho area in South Africa.

The work presented in the dissertation (Du Preez 2007) contributed firstly to a refined understanding of dialogue as a facilitation strategy in the South African context and secondly to an understanding of the frequently used notion of infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights in terms of its moral significance. It also focuses on and addresses the challenge of educator development and the organisation of facilitation strategies that are required to prevent human rights from being assimilated in ineffectual educational paradigms. For a full explanation of this study see Du Preez (2007).

## **THE DISSEMINATION PROCESSES AND FUTURE PROPOSITIONS (2008)**

From the start of the project, the dissemination of the project was focused on academic outputs and postgraduate research studies. Two reasons can be given: firstly, the funding organisation sponsored the bursaries (two PhD and five master's studies) within the time frame and secondly, all the universities involved expected academic outputs from the project. The funding organisation also insisted on inviting independent referees and on receiving yearly reports of the international collaborator and the project leader.

The selected independent referees of the project were two outstanding academics in South Africa, who are well known in their field of studies. The inputs of the selected independent referees (a professor in Children's' Law [human rights issues] and a lecturer in Religion Studies) urged the research team to broaden the knowledge base, both from a judicial point of view and for the inclusion of more specific dysfunctional schools in poor economic environments. There should also be an opportunity to widen the dissemination processes of this research in future. The referees as well as the collaborator recommended a bigger involvement with in-service teachers on the results of this project for at least another two to three years in order to establish a wider spectrum of human rights with regard to children and teachers in the education system in South Africa, especially at this point in time. After receiving this feedback, the funding organisation decided to continue funding the project for another year (2008). This is an exceptional achievement on the part of the researchers and all the collaborators.



The focus in 2008 will be workshops with in-service teachers disseminating and providing teachers with tools and materials to empower them in teaching and learning human rights values in a sustainable manner. In the extended part of the research, participative intervention research will be used as a framework for the refinement and further dissemination of the pilot professional development programme developed in the first part of this research endeavour (Du Preez 2007). The participative intervention research process will entail conducting qualitative pre-questionnaires, introducing the professional development programme to selected in-service teachers (who did not take part in the previous phase of the research), and conducting post-questionnaires, unstructured group interviews and classroom observations. The programme to be distributed will be a revised attempt from the first pilot programme.

The research objectives for 2008 will be:

- To determine in-service teachers' perceptions about human rights, dialogue as a facilitation strategy, and working in interreligious and intercultural education settings;
- To determine how these in-service teachers assimilate the professional development programme in their practice through researching its impact by using a process-orientated participative intervention research methodology;
- To identify communities of practice, consisting of in-service teachers, which could assist in identifying new challenges and processes for further research;
- To further develop and enable capacity-building initiatives for postgraduate students;
- To provide more academic outputs and simultaneously to augment community interaction which is much needed to round off this research project and to set the scene for further research.

### ***Research outputs for 2005-2007***

The research outputs and the data gathered during the past three years in this project, underpinned the aim and objectives of this project through:

- a theoretical underpinning for collaboration in a multicultural project;
- exploring pre-service teachers' (students) ability to facilitate human rights;
- investigating the meaning and definition of human rights values in education models and selected school communities in various regions in South Africa;
- defining in-service teachers as communities of practice for the dissemination of new ideas;
- dealing with the social identities and voices of teachers in their understanding of religious freedom; and
- scrutinising the theories and philosophies for dialogue as a facilitation strategy in interreligious and intercultural school environments.

### **Outputs of this research 2005 - 2006**

Outputs are provided chronologically and not in alphabetical order of the participants of the research team.

### **Conferences attended and papers and posters presented 2005**

- Roux CD *Interreligious learning: Teachers abilities and didactic challenges*. International Interdisciplinary Academic Seminar Interreligious Learning,. Catholic University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium. (on invitation) **January**.
- Roux CD & Du Preez P *Clarifying students' perceptions on religion, belief systems and values as prerequisite for effective educational praxis*. EASA Conference (Educational Association of South Africa). University of the North West (Potchefstroom-campus), South Africa.– Output from pilot study in 2004 for SANPAD-proposal and application. **January**.
- Smith J & Small R *From intent to reality to reflection: lessons learnt from the ACE Human Rights and Values course*. DoE Pretoria. **February**.
- Roux CD *Africanisation of the curriculum: an inclusive approach*. South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education (SAARDHE). University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. **June**.
- Du Preez P *Redefining values education via human rights values*. 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Regional Student Seminar, University of Stellenbosch. **October**.
- Roux CD & Du Preez P *Religion, belief and value systems: an emotive research domain*. 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Regional Student Seminar. University of Stellenbosch. **October**.

## **2006**

- Du Preez P *Research in Educational Ethnography: The Indispensable Voices of Team Researchers*. EASA (Educational Association of South Africa), Bloemfontein. **January**.
- Jarvis J *The voice of the South African educator in a context of religious diversity*. EASA (Educational Association of South Africa), Bloemfontein. **January**.
- Du Preez P *Teachers – From Orators to Interlocutors: How Should Teacher-Educators Respond?* ISTE (International Society for Teacher Education), Stellenbosch. **April**.
- Roux C *Capacity building in teacher education through research in multicultural education*. ISTE (International Society for Teacher Education), Stellenbosch. **April**.
- Roux C *Outline of the cultural and religious context of contemporary developments in the African world*. 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial symposium on Interreligious and Intercultural Education. Leeuwarden, Netherlands. (Keynote) **July**.
- Ferguson R *Thinking about how student teachers think about religion, religious diversity, knowledge and meaning*. 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial symposium on Interreligious and Intercultural Education. Leeuwarden, Netherlands. **July**.
- Du Preez P *Participation in community structures and interreligious dialogue in South African education settings: a construction space for social cohesion(?)* 8<sup>th</sup> International Biennial symposium on Interreligious and Intercultural Education. Leeuwarden, Netherlands. **July**.
- Du Preez P *Dialoguing human rights values as a means to understand religious diversity: a conceptual clarification*. ISREV (International Society for Religious Education and Values) Driebergen, Netherlands. **July – August**.
- Ferguson R *Student perceptions of human rights and their understanding of interreligious and intercultural dialogue*. ISREV (International Society for Religious Education and Values) Driebergen, Netherlands. **July – August**.
- Roux C *Reflective journaling in understanding religious diversity and human rights values*. ISREV (International Society for Religious Education and Values) Driebergen, Netherlands. **July – August**.

Du Preez P *Dialogue as facilitation strategy: infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights*. 6<sup>th</sup> annual regional student seminar. University of the Western Cape, Cape Town. **October**.

Smith J & Small R *From intent to reality to reflection: Teacher educators' voices within a human rights project*. EASA/Kenton, Wilderness. **November – December**.

Roux CD; Smith J; Ferguson R, Small R, Du Preez P; Jarvis J *Understanding human rights values in diverse educational settings: Exploring pre-service students' perceptions and reflections* EASA and Kenton, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Wilderness, South Africa, **November – December**.

## **2007**

Du Preez P. *Dialogue as facilitation strategy: a disruptive education praxis towards disclosing the enigmatic other*. 7<sup>th</sup> annual regional student seminar in Mowbray (Cape Town), South Africa. **September**.

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(2007) Roux CD. Reflective journaling in understanding religious diversity and human rights values. *Panorama. (International Journal of Comparative Religious Education and Values)* Vol 18.

(2007) Du Preez P. Dialogue, human rights values and understanding diverse religions and belief systems. *Panorama. (International Journal of Comparative Religious Education and Values)* Vol 18.

(2007) Roux CD Hermeneutics and religion teaching and learning in context social construct curriculum theory. *Scriptura (International Journal for Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa)* 96(3).

(2008) Roux CD Collaboration in teacher education through research in multicultural education. *South African Journal for Higher Education (SAJHE)* 21(3).

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## **CONCLUSION**

This three-year project, and the results thus far, have delivered a sound theoretical base for the understanding of human rights values education in South African schools. The facilitation strategy of dialogue for the infusing of human rights in schools has opened new opportunities to work with in-service teachers as *communities of practice*. The challenges of this project will not stop at the end of

2008. Extended funding has been promised by the funding organisation for dissemination purposes. The team is further exploring new initiatives and further investigation for a sustainable unit in Human Rights Education and Values at Stellenbosch University, with the involvement of experts in similar fields. In order to make a difference in South Africa and to combat intolerance and all its inhumanness, we need to explore new strategies in teaching and learning human rights values in schools.

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## DIALOGUE AS A FACILITATION STRATEGY: INFUSING THE CLASSROOM WITH A CULTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

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### INTRODUCTION AND DEMARCATION OF THE PROBLEM

As a result of more than a decade of political, social, economic and educational reform in South Africa<sup>28</sup>, the notions of 'dialogue as a facilitation strategy' and 'the infusion of a human rights culture in the classroom', amongst others, became very prominent. Despite the emphasis placed on these aspects in the *National Curriculum Statements* (2002) and specifically in the document named the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy*<sup>29</sup> (2001) the notions of dialogue as a facilitation strategy and the infusion of a human rights culture does not seem to transpire in many classroom situations. This is not to say that human rights are not addressed in the classroom at all. In many instances the issue is dealt with as subject content, thus on an epistemological level, but the moral significance of human rights is often neglected in classroom situations (cf. Du Preez 2005). It could be argued that this moral inclusion of human rights is required to infuse a culture of human rights, so that it is more than just an epistemological inclusion. Moreover, dialogue rarely occurs in classrooms and it seems that teachers' understandings of dialogue as a facilitation strategy are vastly divergent (Du Preez 2007). In line with this, it was firstly argued that despite the increasing popularity and heightened status given to dialogue in education, it very seldom features in practice. In this regard the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (2001:23) posits that dialogue is simultaneously needed and lacking in education, and that dialogue should be promoted as a value. In a previous study I have posited that this 'dialogue' promoted by the Department of Education should be clarified (Du Preez 2005:161). This is because dialogue is too often confused with basic communication and class discussion and not approached as a concept with very specific schools of thought supporting it. In addition to the first concern, the suspicion was also raised that teachers do not necessarily believe in facilitation strategies such as dialogue. This might be a result of the philosophical paradigm of teaching to which they mostly adhere. A lack of teacher development could be posed as one possible reason why neither dialogue nor human rights transpire in education as envisaged. In accordance with this, Carrim and Keet (2005:107) argue that "[t]eacher development ... and the reconfiguration of pedagogical practices are among some of the challenges that lie ahead. These need

<sup>28</sup> In 1997, the new democratically elected government of 1994 adopted outcomes-based education as a transformative education model. Outcomes-based education entails a process in which learning is organised so that learners reach certain predefined outcomes successfully. Outcomes-based education is learner-centred and promotes lifelong learning for all. Within the context of this model the values and principles of democracy, human rights and social justice are highly valued as a means toward the rectification of general society and negating the cultural and religious separatism and inequality created by the pre-democratic government of South Africa.

<sup>29</sup> The *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (2001) stipulates the human rights values that should receive attention in education in South Africa and provides educational strategies pertaining to, amongst others, the infusion of a culture of human rights in South African classrooms.

to happen to prevent human rights being assimilated, as present tendencies show, into paradigms that are preservationist and that may be profoundly anti-educational.”

The work to be presented will specifically address the challenge of teacher development and the organisation of pedagogical practices (or facilitation strategies) that are required to prevent human rights from being assimilated in profoundly anti-educational paradigms. In doing so, the aim will be to reveal the potential synergetic relationship between dialogue as a facilitation strategy and the ideal of infusing a culture of human rights in the classroom. In arguing for the potential synergetic relationship, it is suggested that dialogue is not *a means to* the infusion of a human rights culture, or vice versa, but that both these aspects epitomise particular characteristics that might lead to a symbiotic fortification between dialogue and the infusion of a human rights culture. In support of the abovementioned background the following research question was posed to guide this enquiry: *What would a theory of dialogue as a profound facilitation strategy as constitutive to the infusion of a culture of human rights look like, and could such theory further be developed in the form of a professional development programme for in-service teachers?*

The research question above consists of two constituencies that facilitated enquiry into the two main aspects of the enquiry. The first part of the question was divergent and mainly concerned the construction of a conception of dialogue as constitutive to the infusion of a culture of human rights. During this conceptual work it was not only considered *how* dialogue is constitutive to the infusion of a culture of human rights, but also *why*. The second part of the question concerned the empirical part of the enquiry. The question of whether such theory could further be developed was convergent in that it could be answered as ‘yes’ or ‘no’, but the motivation for and justification of such an answer were open-ended. In order to determine whether the theory of dialogue as a profound facilitation strategy for the infusion of a culture of human rights could be developed in the form of a professional development programme for in-service teachers, intervention research was conducted. This enquiry also indicated how intervention research could become valuable for piloting professional development programmes for in-service teachers.

In the remainder of this paper, the following aspects will be addressed:

- The research aims and design that best suited the research question.
- The methodology, methods and research processes that were used to meet the suggested research aims
- The conceptual underpinning of the enquiry dealing with the notions of ‘dialogue as a facilitation strategy’ and ‘infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights’
- The main research findings, conclusions and recommendations

## **RESEARCH AIMS AND DESIGN**

### **Research aims**

To facilitate sound enquiry into the proposed research questions and clarifications, the following two aims were set for guidance: (i) to conceptually construct a theory of dialogue as a facilitation strategy as ethical praxis that complements the moral dimension underpinning the infusion of a culture of human rights; and (ii) to implement the above-mentioned theory by means of intervention research to perceive whether, according to the groups of in-service teachers, it is applicable and useful to their classroom practices in order to determine whether it could further be developed for a professional development programme.

### **Research design**

The research design, which entailed the process of deciding the approaches that would be most effective for exploring the main research questions (LeCompte & Preissle 1993:30), consisted of both non-empirical and empirical components. The non-empirical component featured during the conceptual phase of the research, while the empirical component featured during the qualitative intervention research process that was conducted in three diverse cases.

The research design substantiated the research questions and aims since both emphasised the two main developments of the enquiry, namely the non-empirical component during which a conceptual account of dialogue as constitutive to the infusion of a culture of human rights was provided, and the empirical component that focused on the implementation of the conceptual account. To support the empirical component, qualitative intervention research was drawn on as a means of intercession for the facilitation and infusion of a culture of human rights.

## **METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND RESEARCH PROCESSES**

### **Methodological positions**

A methodology for qualitative research could be defined in terms of the paradigms of post-positive enquiry, that is, either with the aim to understand, emancipate or deconstruct (Le Grange 2000:194). This is also the case for conceptual studies (Kotze 2005:12-25). The methodological position applicable to the non-empirical part of this enquiry was mostly to critique and deconstruct existing literature and theories that concern dialogue and human rights as applicable to the main research question. With regard to the empirical part, the enquiry mostly aimed to bring about an understanding of the implications of the conceptual work, developed as part of this enquiry.

In support of the methodological position adopted for the non-empirical part of this enquiry, several philosophical methods, as postulated by Burbules and Warnick (2004, in Kotze 2005), were used. These methods include the following: analysing and clarifying concepts; critiquing concepts in terms of ideology or deconstruction; exploring hidden assumptions underpinning specific schools of thought; evaluating arguments through critique and/or sympathy; questioning certain practices or policy; presenting normative accounts of how things ought to transpire; considering alternative proposals for particular challenges; analysing imaginary situations through altering elements of situations to perceive how the situation responds; obtaining a



clarified idea of philosophical text or literature rather than criticising it; and assembling practical challenges with other disciplines to seek solutions for predicaments. The largest part of the non-empirical work was completed before the empirical research was started, because the non-empirical work constituted the theoretical underpinning for the intervention research programme (or pilot professional development programme) that featured during the empirical part of the enquiry.

The methodological position chosen to conduct the empirical part of this enquiry was intervention research as postulated by Rothman and Thomas (1994). According to these authors, intervention research is a form of applied research that examines issues of importance to the target group and endeavours to promote an understanding of these issues aiming at improvement (Rothman & Thomas 1994:25). They suggest that intervention research should be understood as consisting of three main facets, namely knowledge development, knowledge utilisation, and design and development (Rothman & Thomas 1994:7). The paramount aim of 'intervention knowledge development' is that it contributes to basic knowledge of human conduct by using the methods of conventional social science research (Rothman & Thomas 1994:14-18). 'Intervention knowledge utilisation' aims at applying knowledge of human conduct by means of transformation and conversion of available knowledge into the application of concepts and theories relevant to the given target groups' practices (Rothman & Thomas 1994:18-19). The aim of 'intervention design and development' is to create new methods, programmes, service systems, or policies by means of a process of problem analysis, intervention design, early development, advanced development and dissemination (Rothman & Thomas 1994:8-14).

For the purpose of this enquiry, intervention research was not dogmatically followed as proposed by Rothman and Thomas (1994), but vigorously critiqued before it was used. Firstly, intervention research was critiqued based on its seemingly rigid nature that does not allow for methodical suppleness in the context of a process-orientated approach<sup>30</sup> to research. Secondly, intervention research was critiqued because of its very technical or mechanical undertone. It was argued that reducing intervention research to a technique that could be used to change individuals or groups through a few intervening steps is not only a perilous generality, but it is also ignorant of possible contextual variables. In arguing in this mode the intention was to draw attention to the strong behavioural lines in intervention research. Thirdly, it was argued that this approach has a pungent, authoritative nature. Herewith it is implied that the researcher, as the sole bearer of authority, decides what intervention is needed and then intervenes accordingly. During this argument it was suggested that intervention research be redefined in terms of 'participative intervention research' that would allow participants to equally determine the area where intervention was needed and assist in determining the nature that the intervention process might adopt. Fourthly, it was argued that intervention research should not only employ empirical methods, but conceptual methods as well to provide depth into the research process. Fifthly, it was argued that intervention research should not be demarcated narrowly as a form of applied research only, but, due to its redefined

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<sup>30</sup> Here a process-orientated approach to research refers to a research process that is not too fixedly predetermined and that allows for the research events and participants at times to redirect and propose methodical modification and adaptation that better account for unanticipated variables in relation to the research question. This approach requires that the researcher adopt a disposition that is receptive to possible change and adaptation.

participative nature, should also allow for summative and formative evaluation research. Allowing for summative and formative evaluation research provides a space for participants to become more actively involved in the research process, instead of only being passive receivers. Finally, the arguments presented above were put forward to develop an understanding of participative intervention research as a methodology that could be used in the process of piloting professional development programmes for in-service teachers.

### Research methods and processes

The research methods and processes, to be presented below, were selected in accordance with the abovementioned methodology and approaches. In this enquiry **purposive sampling** was used when the target group was identified. This sampling strategy allowed the selection of a target group that was satisfactory for the specific aim of the enquiry (Cohen & Manion 1994:89). In order to explore the aims of this enquiry, a diverse target group was needed so that the intervention research programme was exposed to and assessed by diverse in-service teachers. The target group consisted of teachers employed at three socio-economically diverse, multicultural and multireligious schools in the Mafikeng/Mmabatho area in the North West province of South Africa. This area and three school cases were specifically chosen not only because of the diversity in the schools and the community, but because of the very different constructs of the three schools in this close range. The selection of a diverse target group at each school case was negotiated with the different school principals a few months before the commencement of the research process. One school offered four participants, the second three participants and the third school two. These participants were all responsible for one or more of the following learning areas for the intermediate and senior phase<sup>31</sup> in the General Education and Training band: Life Orientation<sup>32</sup>, Social Sciences<sup>33</sup>, Economic and Management Sciences<sup>34</sup>, and Arts and Culture<sup>35</sup>.

Before the research officially commenced, a meeting was set up to meet each group of participants separately. During this meeting a **qualitative pre-questionnaire** and a Consent to Participate in Research form was given to each participant. The Consent to Participate in Research form served as the ethical code that protected both the researcher and the participants during the official research process. The

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<sup>31</sup> Learners in the Intermediate and Senior Phases are usually between the ages of 10 and 15 years old.

<sup>32</sup> The National Curriculum Statement for Life Orientation (NCS 2002a:4) stipulates that this learning area should guide and prepare learners "for meaningful and successful living in a rapidly changing and transforming society". It aims to orientate learners to make informed decisions about their own health, social development, personal development, physical development and the world of work (NCS 2002a:4). Within the subsection of social development, the notions of democracy, citizenship, human rights, social relationships and diverse cultures and religions, amongst others, are dealt with (NCS 2002a:7).

<sup>33</sup> Social Sciences concerns relationships between people and their values and beliefs within the context of social, political, economical and environmental influences (NCS 2002b:4). It includes history as well as socio-geographic contents (NCS 2002b:5). Within this learning area much emphasis is placed on human rights development and it aims to encourage human rights values at school and in the broader community.

<sup>34</sup> The learning area Arts and Culture encapsulates a wide spectrum of art and cultural practices of South Africa (NCS 2002c:4). One of its purposes is to assist learners in developing into creative and innovative individuals who are responsible citizens who respect democracy and human rights values (NCS 2002c:4, 7).

<sup>35</sup> Economic and Management Sciences 'deals with the efficient and effective use of different types of private, public or collective resources in satisfying people's needs and wants, while reflecting critically on the impact of resource exploitation on the environment and on people' (NCS 2002d:4). It aims to promote respect amongst learners for the environment as well as for human rights, and to sensitise them to their responsibilities (NCS 2002d:5).

aim of the qualitative open-ended pre-questionnaire was to reveal the teachers' understandings and practices regarding the notions of a culture of human rights and dialogue as a facilitation strategy. Furthermore, the pre-questionnaires also provided information pertaining to the teachers' current and preferred practices. During this first meeting appropriate dates and times were also set aside for the actual research process. The research required two hours on two days, after school hours, for the discussion of the intervention research programme at each of the three school cases.

After the completion of the first session that consisted of the introduction and discussion of the intervention research programme (which consisted of two hours per school), each of the participants was given a **qualitative reflective post-questionnaire**. It contained open spaces for free reflection on matters addressed throughout the first session of the research process. By providing open spaces the researcher "...enables the ... educator to conceptualize the nature of their own professional development, understanding their prior educational experiences in relation to their current re-evaluation of these experiences" (Calderhead & James 1992, cited in Moon 2000:188).

The **second-round reflective post-questionnaires**, which were completed after the second session, consisted of two parts, the one with open spaces for free reflection and the second containing structured, open-ended questions addressing notions of assessment of the intervention research programme. These questionnaires aimed at elucidating issues related to the intervention research programme and the topics addressed that were of importance to the target group. An effort was made to promote an understanding of these issues to eventually inform recommendations regarding the intervention research programme. The participants were required to complete the first part (the open spaces for free reflection) before the unstructured focus group interviews (to be discussed next) took place to ensure that they provided their own, authentic opinions that had not been influenced by those of other participants during group interviews. The structured, open-ended questions were completed by the respondents in their own time after the interviews.

The aims of the **unstructured focus group interviews** were to serve as debriefing sessions for the intervention research programme, to allow interviewees the opportunity to give their opinions on the intervention research programme and its topic in general, and to assist the researcher in perceiving whether the intervention research programme had influenced the teachers' initial understandings of a culture of human rights and dialogue in the classroom. Furthermore, these unstructured focus group interviews contributed to determining whether this research and intervention research programme could be further developed in the form of a professional development programme.

Throughout the introduction and discussion of the intervention research programme at each of the three school cases, the **researcher recorded reflections**. This was done in a reflective journal with predefined questions and open spaces for reflection. This assisted in documenting moments during the research process, reflecting on the process afterwards, and reflecting by means of anticipating moments that could transpire in the research process (cf. Fallon & Brown 2002).

Much consideration was given to whether **lesson observations** in classrooms should be included as one of the methods to be used in this enquiry. The aim was not primarily to see how the teachers applied their newly gained knowledge, based on the intervention research programme, in practice, because it could be argued that such an approach might lean more toward action research, which was not my qualitative focus in this enquiry. The aim was rather to resort to the knowledge and experiences of teachers as experts to assess the maintainability and viability of such a programme for its possible extension. However, due to the process-orientated approach adopted for this enquiry, the need arose and opportunity was given to see how the teachers dealt with the knowledge they had gained through participating in the research process. This provided a first-hand glimpse into what actually happens in practice (Denscombe 2003:192). One teacher who took part in the research and one who did not take part, but who taught at one of the schools where the research was conducted, presented lessons that were observed. The researcher also presented a lesson while two of the research participants observed it. It had not been anticipated that the researcher would present a lesson, but the lesson was presented on request of two of the participants. It was also accounted for in the research process.

Since much emphasis were placed on the social construct of the environment in which the research occurred and its influence on the research process and understanding of the research events, various stakeholders were included to contribute to the assessment of the intervention research programme and to assist the researcher in becoming acquainted with the environment in which the research was conducted (cf. Patton 2002:97-98). For this reason an **unstructured individual interview** was conducted with a government official in the North West Province, who had previously been a principal at one of the schools covered in this research. The aim was to learn more about the social context of education in this province. Additionally, **external programme assessors** – consisting of an academic, a school principal, two government officials and one teacher (not a participant in the research) from the Mmabatho/Mafikeng area – were also included to share their different perceptions on the intervention research programme and to assess it. Guidelines for the assessment of the intervention research programme and a background of the enquiry were provided to the assessors.

### **Analysis and interpretation**

All information that was collected was analysed and used to explore the various phases teacher-participants had gone through regarding their understanding of dialogue as a facilitation strategy and to establish how they interpreted and anticipated the infusion of a culture of human rights in their classrooms (cf. Denscombe 2003:267). The information assisted in determining whether the intervention research programme had sensitised those who had been exposed to it. This required interpretative engagement with the information provided. The interpreted information also provided support in the process of determining whether the conceptual work, presented through the intervention research programme, was viable and maintainable for future use.

**Discourse analysis**, which is described as “[t]he analysis of communication ... with special attention given to the speaker’s intent and how the communication is structured” (Babbie & Mouton 2001:641), was used as a means of interpretative

information analysis. Attention was given to the underlying meanings of the way the participants understood the topics of concern, as well as to the patterns that emerged from the analysis of information (Denscombe 2003:267).

After all information had been organised, it was coded and categorised (Denscombe 2003:271), i.e. clustered, for analysis and interpretation. The clusters corresponded and varied for the different stages of presenting, analysing and interpreting the information. Themes and relationships were identified and thick explorative descriptions of phenomena were provided to illuminate the research question. This was mainly accomplished through a process of comparing, contrasting, aggregating and ordering the collected information (LeCompte & Preissle 1993:242). Below the conceptual underpinning – consisting of the notions dialogue as a facilitation strategy and infusing a culture of human rights in the classroom – that constituted the keystone for the intervention research programme and ensuing research process, will be provided.

## CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNING

### Dialogue as a facilitation strategy

In current education discourses, both abroad and in South Africa, the notion of dialogue has become all the more prominent. This is especially true for discourses related to ethics, values, human rights, democracy, citizenship, multiculturalism and multireligiousism in education. Nationally and internationally theoretical conceptions of dialogue, each with its own *telos* (or at least arguments against any *telos*), are furthermore increasing. Examples of these theoretical conceptions have been developed by Robin Alexander, David Bohm, Catherine Cornille, Ariella Friedman, Julia Ipgrave, Heid Leganger-Krogstad, Cornelia Roux, Thorsten Knauth and Wolfram Weiße.

After an elaborate critique of the theoretical conceptions of several of the academics listed above (Du Preez 2007:32-47) and subsequent to exploring the notion of dialogue in the contexts of selected works of Gadamer, Habermas and Derrida (Du Preez 2007:47-62), an alternative proposal of what a conception of dialogue ought to be like in order to support the infusion of a culture of human rights was developed. This proposal was also developed in line with the work of Levinas, with specific focus on his ethical conception of the face-to-face relationship between people (Du Preez 2007:68-71).

In the remainder of this section, this alternative conception of dialogue as a facilitation strategy will be elaborated. This proposal should, however, not be seen as a procedure for dialogue in any way. To commence this discussion, the following question will be raised and responded to: *Could the notion 'facilitation strategy', which might encapsulate the technisist idea of teachers acting upon learners strategically, reconcile with the idea of dialogue as a moral demand made by individual others?* My answer to this question is yes, dialogue and facilitation could be reconciled, provided that facilitation is understood as a profound activity rather than as a catalyst to bring about learning.

Facilitation strategies are the approaches which teachers could utilise in order to ease the process of teaching and bring about progress in learning. In this sense the

concept 'facilitation strategy' is understood as a collective name that includes a variety of methods, such as group work, whole-class discussion, project work, and dialogue. As mentioned earlier, facilitation could be understood as either profound facilitation or catalytic facilitation. Catalytic facilitation – a position that often crystallises when people agree to new terminology as a result of change, but do not change their actions accordingly – denotes a more authoritarian and teacher-centred approach. Here an emphasis on skills to be practised by teachers and acquired by learners receives precedence. In contrast to this, it is argued for an understanding of facilitation that is profound and that provides a space for the reconciliation between dialogue and facilitation, since a narrow, catalytic conception of facilitation is viewed as potentially detrimental to dialogue.

Profound facilitation refers to a multi-layered undertaking in which the facilitator has the responsibility of constructing learning situations in which learners are 'disrupted' and obliged to make moral demands on their peers. Put differently, the teachers should sporadically set deviant scenes and stimuli to get learners to think and reason in different ways so that learners could interactively explore issues on dissimilar grounds. Profound facilitation also assumes praxis as foundation, thus embracing the notion that the facilitator and learners should act with one another, rather than only upon one another (Grundy 1987:104-105). In the light of this, dialogue should ideally begin when a facilitator and/or the learner(s) present a **dialogic stimulus**. A stimulus or theme of dialogue might vary based on the learning area in which it will occur. Examples might include spiritual and religious, cultural, social and environmental, human rights, philosophical, and psychological *themes*. Each of these themes includes matters that could be related to human rights. During dialogue on such matters it is envisaged that learners gain knowledge of learning area contents and learn about co-interlocutors' lifeworlds<sup>36</sup>. It also provides a space for the facilitator and interlocutors to pursue and cherish habits, values, actions and/or thoughts that are based on human rights.

Profound facilitation also complements the post-modern perspective of the child as relative, inaccessible impenetrable; someone whose context is incommensurable with that of the adult world (cf. Smeyers & Wringe 2005:323). Profound facilitation with its suggestions toward disruptive situations might begin to constitute an environment in which children could learn through contending with the inaccessibility, impenetrability and incommensurability of others and of themselves. However, one might argue that dialogue and placing moral demands upon the other becomes crucial when contending with the inaccessibility, impenetrability and incommensurability of others. Within this argument lies the assumption that people do wish to contend with the inaccessibility, impenetrability and incommensurability of others. One could make use of one of Levinas's concepts to refer to those who desire to contend with the otherness of people, i.e. infinitisers.

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<sup>36</sup> A lifeworld refers to an individual's world or sphere of existence and comprises of that individual's lived experiences. A world of experience, i.e. *Erlebniswelt*, is composed through experienced reality, i.e. *Wirklichkeit*, and not through some reality 'out there', i.e. *Realität* (Terhart 2003:28). Lived experiences, that add up to a lifeworld, include and are shaped by people's knowledge, understandings, aptitudes, values, virtues, morals, beliefs and opinions as well as through their interaction with others. Lifeworlds are not static but are subject to change. A lifeworld does not function in a void; it is influenced by the social construct in which it is located. In line with this, Scharp (2003:53) states that for Habermas: '... the lifeworld has an inferential network of meanings and tacit knowledge that is intersubjectively constituted by its interactions with the members of a community (and their participation in processes of reaching understanding).'

Infinitisers embrace the disposition of incessantly seeking to get closer to the other and who endeavour to transcend the self; whilst totalisers would be those who do not wish to grasp the alterity embedded in others and in themselves (Cook & Young 2004). This incessant process of seeking to get closer to the other could be described by Levinas's ideas of 'the saying' and 'the said', which try to capture the idea that what is uttered between interlocutors is not pure presence, but representations of such presence (Bernasconi 1988:26-27). The representation of what the other reveals during an utterance signifies 'the said' (Cook & Young 2004:344). 'The saying' refers to the act of attempting to represent what was said through writing or speech (Cook & Young 2004:344). The saying act cannot be relived – it can be represented, but will never again take the initial form of the saying. Our 'sais', those attempts to capture the saying, are never adequate or finite (Cook & Young 2004:344). This implies that during dialogue, for instance, the saying will disrupt the said, and a new said will be given in response (as clarification, elaboration or challenge), which will further disrupt the saying, and so forth *ad infinitum*. Where there is disruption, there is a possibility for change (Cook & Young 2004:344). Dealing with such disruption necessitates a deconstructive disposition.

A **deconstructive** disposition in the context of dialogue as facilitation strategy entails the recurrent moments in which interlocutors strive toward facing the inaccessible character of their peers to learn more about their lifeworlds. In addition, it suggests the process in which interlocutors become acquainted with the learning area contents and opinions that others might hold on these contents. In this context, dialogue, as an act of language that concerns lifeworlds and knowledge constructs, and which should be scrutinised to expose the ostensible messages (Derrida 1998) and elements of the otherness of co-interlocutors (Levinas 2006), becomes the focal point. It is also during these moments in which interlocutors face the otherness of their peers that the moral demands placed on the other come into play.

Whereas deconstruction serves as a process of partial unmasking, **critique** serves as a process of acting upon and with what was unmasked. Critique entails a situated activity constitutive to understanding during which 'acting agents' respond to disguised resistances, limitations and aspects of the otherness (Hansen 2005:75). In the light of this one can postulate that the role of interlocutors during dialogue is that of active participants who demonstrate intellectual sobriety<sup>37</sup> in a particular social context and who aspire to respond to messages revealed in order to emancipate themselves. The act of 'responding to' requires interlocutors to bestow judgements, but also to assess critically the judgements of others.

**Reconstruction** could be described as the natural upshot of deconstruction and criticism. Reconstruction as a process could be described as the formation, supplementation and shifting of elements within the values, experiences and knowledge of interlocutors during dialogue regarding the current topic. This process is derived from the exposure interlocutors have had to diverse lifeworlds. Reconstruction constantly takes shape and changes as the dialogue progresses. It is therefore not something which is completed at a specific point in time. Reconstruction also occurs from one dialogue session to the next and in so doing it

<sup>37</sup> The concept of 'intellectual sobriety' was used by Professor Shirley Pendlebury in a keynote address at the fifth regional student seminar held in Stellenbosch on 30 September 2005 to refer to the character of a researcher who is meticulous and thoughtful. I find the concept helpful in defining the character of interlocutors who are vigorously critical in their thinking and actions.

has a positive influence on the collective identity of the dialogue group as an ethical community<sup>38</sup>. Moments of reconstruction, that could occur very intuitively, might be partially captured through **reflection**. 'Reflection' refers to the process where the interlocutors should reflect holistically upon the dialogic process (cf. Wellington 2000:42; Du Preez 2005:106). With this summary of dialogue as a facilitation strategy in mind, a discussion on how it could be accommodating for the infusion of a culture of human rights will be pursued next.

### **Infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights**

Following an exploration of the discourses that gave rise to the notion of human rights in education, both internationally and in South Africa in particular, the main metatheoretical discourses concerning human rights – the liberal natural rights discourse, traditional communitarianism, communitarian pragmatism, and cosmopolitan pragmatism (Dunne & Wheeler 1999) – were also explored. These discourses assisted in demarcating an understanding of the notion 'infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights' as well as in critiquing the South African Department of Education's interpretation of this notion. The arguments to follow are directly derived from these conceptual explorations, findings and conclusions.

In this enquiry it was argued for a cosmopolitan pragmatist understanding of a culture of human rights, because it assisted in reasoning beyond the often bifurcated discourse concerning human rights as either universal constructs or as subjected to the particularist nature of certain cultures (Wilson & Mitchell 2003). This metatheoretical position is epistemologically grounded in anti-foundationalism (Dunne & Wheeler 1999), which rejects the view that knowledge about human rights is secure and certain, and maintains that knowledge is relative. Cosmopolitanism also assists in redefining static conceptions of culture which might not be consistent with global migration, and it promotes human rights and democracy within and between countries. In terms of human rights as relative and normative moral constructs, this metatheoretical position accentuates the importance of humans' varied expressions of moral life, and simultaneously underscores the approach that despite varied expressions, humans should still be able to justify their morality on a universal level (Parekh 1999:130-131). With regard to the latter, Osler (2005:9) clearly states that human rights are normative values within a democracy and that

[i]t does not legitimate all practices on the grounds that they form part of a particular culture but recognises that all cultures are subject to change and to evaluation, against an agreed set of democratic and human rights norms.

In terms of this understanding, a culture of human rights is a local as well as a global ideal that unites ethical communities open to dialogue about human rights.

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<sup>38</sup> An ethical community is any group of individuals or a social network that enters into dialogue to talk about good, right, duty, obligation, virtue, freedom, rationality and choice. Such a group could manifest at various levels of society, for instance at governmental level (national, provincial and local governments, and political parties), business or organisational level (non-governmental organisations, and social movements), and at the level of civil society (religious institutions, families, schools, and community forums). For the purpose of this enquiry I was specifically interested in the ethical community at the level of civil society that, amongst others, includes classrooms. An ethical community, as a non-static entity, represents an assemblage of individuals with diverse lifeworlds, who strive to comply with the moral demands placed upon them to regulate their dialogic activities. Such a group should demonstrate vivacity, intellectual sobriety and an infinitising disposition.



Cosmopolitan pragmatism thus provides a keystone for striving toward the ideal of a culture of human rights without promoting extreme universalism or particularism.

It was firstly argued that a culture of human rights as a moral ideal is barren unless fertilised by the activities of an ethical community. Secondly, it was argued that an ethical community, as a determinant of the development of a culture of human rights, should provide a secure and compassionate, but also a disruptive space to advance toward the ideal of a culture of human rights. Thirdly, it was maintained that advancing toward such an ideal requires a reconsideration of time and actions of an ethical community in terms of infinite (time) dialogue (action). Fourthly, it was postulated that the notion of a culture of human rights evolves constantly due to social, political and economic changes; therefore ethical communities should be adaptable entities. Below, I will draw more parallels between dialogue as a profound facilitation strategy and the ideal of infusing a culture of human rights in classrooms to demonstrate how these two notions could be constitutive and conducive to one another.

Dialogue, in the context of profound facilitation, suggests that learners be active agents whilst teachers assume the role of setting the scene for learning. This learning scene, which also represents an ethical community, should be one characterised by disruptions to prepare learners for ever-changing situations through transcendence of comfort zones. Infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights is not only an evolving notion, but suggests a learning environment, epistemological base and methodology where transformation could be accommodated. In this sense dialogue as a profound facilitation strategy that supposes a certain learning environment and methodology, has the capacity to host and enhance the moral infusion of a culture of human rights, whilst simultaneously evading stagnation on an epistemological level. The notion of dealing with disruptions supposes that both teachers and learners who engage in dialogue and strive toward infusing a culture of human rights should adopt an infinitising disposition. This disposition will enable interlocutors to transcend themselves and to embrace the constant process of approaching the inaccessible otherness of co-interlocutors and their beliefs about, for example, human rights. In attempting to understand others as well as the meanings others attach to human rights, a collaborative effort is made to create a culture of human rights.

Dialogue that necessitates heedfulness toward values and virtues, rather than solely focusing on knowledge and experience, also suggests intuitive argumentation at times. Intuitive argumentation entails a situation where interlocutors draw on their lifeworlds and related experiences to confront (dis)similar situations. Simultaneously, intuitive argumentation about doing the right thing also underpins an anti-foundational understanding of a culture of human rights, such as promulgated by cosmopolitan pragmatists. In this sense the suppleness of dialogue to include various modes of reasoning, such as intuitive argumentation, fortifies the infusion of a culture of human rights that often demands intuitive argumentation.

As mentioned above, knowledge about human rights is relative and constantly changing. The relativity of human rights is also frequently the outcome of people's varying interpretations and representations thereof. Human rights in education and the infusion of a culture of human rights make it necessary for people to uncover

these varying interpretations and representations in order to arrive at some shared understanding of human rights. Dialogue provides for deconstructive moments that grant interlocutors the opportunity to engage with aspects regarding human rights that might be diluted by representation and multiple meanings. Engaging with the relativity of human rights in this fashion assists in working toward the ideal of infusing a culture of human rights at classroom level. However, infusing a culture of human rights also entails that people's actions should be transformed and their thoughts reconstructed to work toward attaining the ideal of a culture of human rights. Moments of critique provided through dialogue create a space during which this transformation could occur because they serve as a process of acting upon and with the environment.

Emphasis on the infinitising disposition of interlocutors during dialogue is favourable in the anti-foundational context of human rights, because dialogue provides a space for continuous reassessment and the bettering of arguments on behalf of the anti-foundationalist perspective of an ever-evolving culture of human rights.

Dialogue could assist people in being accountable for diverse moral expressions. This is because dialogue is not only context-specific but also provides space for interlocutors to draw on universal principles or reasons to justify themselves. Thus, in the process in which ethical communities strive toward respecting the relativity of their co-interlocutors' personal truths, they are also striving toward the infusion of a culture of human rights based on cosmopolitan pragmatism.

The moral demands that regulate the relations within and between ethical communities during dialogue also provide some guiding principles toward the infusion of a culture of human rights. Willingness, equality, common point of reference, empathy, listening, revealing and expressing lifeworlds, honesty, accountability, humility, respecting the relativity of personal truths, and openness and commitment (Du Preez 2007:71-73) are not only in many instances connected to human rights, but could direct the infusion of a human rights culture. Therefore, dialogues should not exclude the possibility of the expansion of these moral demands as prerequisites for dialogue and the infusion of a culture of human rights.

In conclusion, infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights could be understood as a joint endeavour toward developing the classroom as a vigorous ethical community that gives meaning to the cross-curricular integration or infusion of the ideal of a human rights culture. In this light, infusing a culture of human rights is a matter of moral consideration more than a legal matter. Stripping human rights from their moral significance and detaching them from their sole provider, the ethical community, might have detrimental implications for the ideal of infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The conceptual work presented above was reworked into a programme (the intervention research programme) that was introduced to and discussed with the selected in-service teachers. As explained above, this process was accompanied with a series of peripheral research methods and processes. In this section I will report on the main findings, draw some conclusions and provide some

recommendations that emanated from this enquiry. I will commence with findings, conclusions and recommendations that concerned the programme and the intervention research process in particular, whereafter I will address the findings, conclusions and recommendations that concerned dialogue and infusing a culture of human rights.

### **The participative intervention research process and programme in general**

Through this empirical research it became obvious that participative intervention research is useful in preparing for professional development programmes. Firstly, participative intervention research provides a space for designers and distributors of professional development programmes to obtain a preview of the social constructs of the target groups at whom they aim the programmes. This is essential to sensitise designers and distributors to the context of the participants so that the final programme is designed in such a way that the participants can more easily relate to its knowledge constructs and applications.

Secondly, participative intervention research presents designers and distributors of professional development programmes with an opportunity to perceive what the knowledge and experiences of a small group of participants are. When participants are given an opportunity to voice and articulate their knowledge and experiences in relation to a programme it might enhance the credibility of the programme for them. This might in return also ease and inform its further development and distribution. It could also assist participants in assimilating the programme more comfortably and for working toward the ideal of adjustment of practices in line with the programme.

Thirdly, through this participative intervention research it became evident that the teachers who were involved assimilated the programme comfortably because the scope of aspects covered was inclusive of curriculum contents, matters related to values education, facilitation and assessment strategies. It could be argued that designers and distributors of professional development programmes should design programmes to be as inclusive as possible. This might once again add to the credibility of a programme and at the same time make it easier for teachers to contend with it.

Fourthly, this research endeavour also emphasised how important it is that professional development programmes, especially those concerning the area of curriculum, should not be prescriptive. Such programmes should mostly deal with generic ideas but allow for space so that teachers can interpret these ideas in relation to their specific social contexts. Furthermore, it could be argued that examples should be selected carefully so that professional development does not ultimately prescribe what should be done in practice or mould participants' thinking. From this enquiry it became evident that participants tend to have divergent ways of understanding what the notion 'practical' might entail. The suggestion is that designers and distributors of professional development programmes should discuss what 'practical' might entail in co-operation with participants. This might prevent undue expectations on the part of the participants about theory and practice that are beyond the scope of a programme.

Lastly, from the analysis and interpretation of responses pertaining to this intervention research programme, it is suggested that school principals also attend

this programme since this might assist in conveying the idea that infusing a culture of human rights is something that should be covered in all aspects of school organisation. A section that deals with rewriting mission and vision statements to be in line with the ideal of infusing a culture of human rights could also be included in this programme. Hereby it is not suggested that rewriting mission and vision statements will fully attend to the ideal of infusing a culture of human rights, but it is argued that if organisational aspects of the school are not in line with classroom ideals, mixed messages might be sent out to learners. This might in return lower the credibility and importance teachers and learners attach to such an ideal.

### **Dialogue as a facilitation strategy**

The findings, based on the analysis and interpretations of the information gathered from the participants, mostly indicated how the programme as such should be amended. Some of the aspects could only be discussed during the presentation of such a programme. These aspects are mostly practical arrangements for dialogue. In some instances they suggest minor modifications to the theory of dialogue as a facilitation strategy to be presented in a possible professional development programme.

From the discussions with participants of this intervention research programme it became clear that teachers should not only be prepared for dialogue in multicultural and multireligious environments, but also for more monocultural and monoreligious environments. Group dynamics during dialogic encounters depend greatly on the social disposition of a group. From the observations specifically it became evident that monocultural and monoreligious environments propose challenges for dialogue that need attention in the same way that attention is given to dialogue in the context of multicultural and multireligious environments.

More emphasis should also be given to teachers' understandings and paradigms pertaining to education. Throughout this enquiry the importance of teachers' paradigms regarding facilitation and the influence of these paradigms on the way they understand dialogue became evident. This matter could, arguably, be more consciously addressed as part of the programme and discussions.

Another very important aspect is that the programme itself should promote dialogue as an autonomous facilitation strategy and not as something additional to other facilitation strategies. Should this aspect not be emphasised, teachers might continue to feel that dialogue is time-consuming. Regarding this issue one might work with teachers during the professional development process to manage their learning programmes and time frames more efficiently.

### **Infusing a culture of human rights**

In many instances during the presentation and discussion of this intervention research programme the teachers indicated that they lacked knowledge of human rights. They were generally more concerned about knowing their rights than the moral significance of this matter for education. Although this aspect clearly requires attention, the weight this part of the programme ought to occupy is debatable. The point is that when a programme deals with human rights, it cannot be assumed that teachers would have knowledge of human rights. It could also be argued, based on

the results from this empirical enquiry, that in order to comprehend the moral significance of human rights, knowledge of human rights needs more attention.

It also became evident that the notion of diverse interpretations of human rights principles and values needs attention; especially through discussions about the programme. Attention should also be given to how and why dialogue could assist in negotiating varied interpretations of human rights principles and values. The notion of diverse interpretations of human rights might be one of the possible reasons why teachers experience disciplinary problems. Therefore it is suggested that the relationship between discipline and the value of infusing a culture of human rights should be reinforced in the context of the programme and surrounding discussions.

### **General**

When teachers are given an opportunity to voice their feelings regarding new proposals, they seem to be more willing to adapt to such proposals. This participative intervention research process created a space for them to voice their concerns and to posit their knowledge and experiences in refining this intervention research programme. It could therefore be argued that because intervention research provides this space for stakeholders to contribute proactively to proposals directly pertaining to their practice, it could serve as a valuable methodology for preparing professional development programmes.

Professional development should ideally be based on a development and process-orientated methodology such as participative intervention research that allows for the inputs of diverse education stakeholders. This might not only lead to more credibility where professional development is concerned, but it also has the propensity to decentralise professional development, thus contributing to the empowerment of teachers. Moreover, it should be emphasised that no one methodology for empirical research should be adopted uncritically, whether it is intervention research, action research or programme evaluation. This is because each methodology has limitations that need to be highlighted and addressed through using complementary methodologies (cf. Patton 2002:247).

One of the foremost recommendations aimed at the DoE was that they put more energy and thought into the application of the policies they have designed pertaining to the use of dialogue as a facilitation strategy and infusing a culture of human rights (such as the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* 2001). In this regard it was suggested that professional development, where teachers and other education stakeholders are actively involved, should become a focal priority. In addition, it was argued that such professional development programmes aspire not only to inform teachers, but to give them an opportunity to voice their concerns, experiences and knowledge. Such an approach might even heighten their status and morale as teachers.

In conclusion, it is recommended that this intervention research programme be further refined based on the empirical findings of this enquiry, as a short professional, accredited course<sup>39</sup> for in-service teachers in South Africa. It might also be

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<sup>39</sup> In South Africa teachers can now follow short courses that are accredited, meaning that they can accumulate credits from these courses to contribute to their own professional development. These credits are similar to credits allocated when following university subjects.

distributed to pre-service teachers to prepare them for the challenges involved in infusing a culture of human rights and using dialogue as facilitation strategy. The learning areas Life Orientation, Multireligious and Multicultural Education, and Curriculum Studies are examples of where infusing a culture of human rights and dialogue as a facilitation strategy could be integrated into the context of university subjects aimed at pre-service teachers.

## CONCLUSION

The work presented in this paper aimed firstly to contribute to a refined understanding of dialogue as a facilitation strategy in the South African education context and secondly, to contribute to an understanding of the notion of infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights in terms of its moral significance. In this regard, it was demonstrated how there could be a symbiotic fortification between profound dialogue and the moral infusion of a culture of human rights in the classroom as an ethical community. The enquiry, which aimed at exposing teachers from a particular environment to this symbiotic fortification, also assisted in arguing for participative intervention research as one possible methodology for the development of professional development programmes for in-service teachers. The value of the use of this methodology specifically lies in the possibility it creates for the decentralisation of professional development. Finally, the focus was on the challenge of teacher development and the organisation of pedagogical practices or facilitation strategies that are required to avoid that human rights are assimilated in “profoundly anti-educational” paradigms (Carrim & Keet 2005:107). In doing so, the potential synergetic relationship between the proposal for dialogue as a facilitation strategy and the ideal of infusing a culture of human rights in the classroom was revealed and introduced to teachers who are probably the most important agents in education transformation.

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# **EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES – THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ERADICATING CHILD POVERTY**

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## **PREFACE**

This review is based on an earlier review undertaken for the Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre (CHIP) based at Manchester University, UK. CHIP is a collaborative research and policy initiative undertaken in collaboration with Save the Children UK, and funded by DfID (Department for International Development, UK).

This review has been used to inform the joint research project being submitted by Professor Carol Aubrey and Dr Sarah Dahl at University of Warwick, UK, Professor Helen Penn, University of East London, UK and Dr Hasina Ebrahim, University of Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa to the Earli Advanced colloquium, Stellenbosch 2008.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Childcare and Early Childhood Development (ECD)<sup>40</sup> programmes are generally assumed to be beneficial. ECD is an umbrella term for a variety of interventions with young children and their carers/families, including health and nutrition, childcare, education and parent support. As a result of strong lobbying by a consortium of international agencies, the first goal of the Education for All (EFA) international agreement on education, reaffirmed in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 is to promote Early Childhood Development for vulnerable children. The World Bank, the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and UNESCO have all stressed the importance of ECD in improving physical and psycho-social wellbeing and in promoting cognitive gains in young children; and in directly or indirectly combating poverty.

This paper explores the paradigms, arguments and evidence on which international agencies draw in discussing ECD. These include assumptions about poverty and the role of ECD in reducing poverty; assumptions about the robustness of the evidence on ECD; and the contexts in which ECD interventions take place.

It provides an overview of the range of initiatives under the umbrella of ECD in the South, including their funding arrangements. These initiatives are extremely varied and the evidence about their efficacy tends to be weak. Many leading donors have emphasised the importance of interventions when children are very young in the form of parenting support. These interventions are frequently justified by citing brain research. However, not only is the link between neurological development and parenting styles unproven, but the parenting styles advocated draw almost exclusively on ideas of child-rearing from the North.

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<sup>40</sup> These programmes are variously referred to as ECD (Early Childhood Development); ECCD (Early Childhood Care and Development) and ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care).

The paper concludes that almost all the evidence about the effectiveness of ECD in determining cognitive, social and economic outcomes for children is drawn either directly from the North, particularly from the USA, or else relies on the assumptions of work carried out in the North as a basis for programming and recommendations in the South. A substantial body of anthropological and psychological research and theory, as well as development literature, suggests that such extrapolation from North to South is likely to be simplistic, inaccurate or ineffective. It is therefore important to be wary about the adoption of ECD as it is currently being promoted by agencies such as the World Bank, as a measure to achieve long-term economic prosperity. It is also important to insist on more rigorous, systematic and context-sensitive evaluation of current ECD initiatives. Moreover, it should be noted that the ECD programmes most widely cited in the North all stress the importance of adequate resourcing to achieve quality education. Yet this caveat has been ignored by many donors in the South.

The paper suggests that ECD may be a useful form of practical relief to directly mitigate childhood poverty in particular circumstances: providing childcare for time-poor working mothers with subsistence earnings; providing childcare for orphans and other vulnerable children, especially those affected by HIV/AIDS; providing childcare and support for children experiencing war and conflict. It stresses that whatever initiatives are being promoted, they should be carefully evaluated.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The first goal of the Education for All (EFA) international agreement on education, reaffirmed in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 is to promote Early Childhood Development (ECD) for vulnerable children. This theme of ECD was reiterated and developed in the most recent EFA monitoring report (UNESCO 2007). The World Bank (1996; 1998<sup>41</sup>), the World Health Organisation (1999; 2004), UNICEF (2002) and UNESCO (1999; 2000) have all stressed the importance of ECD in improving physical and psycho-social wellbeing and in promoting cognitive gains in young children, as well as directly or indirectly combating poverty. This paper questions the types of evidence that are used to support these claims, arguing that they are inextricably tied to North American understandings of early childhood. Extrapolating evidence from the North to the South may distort, rather than strengthen, efforts to provide ECD. The paper considers how and under what circumstances ECD might ameliorate poverty experienced in childhood.

The sources for the review are a wide-ranging literature search; an extensive collection of locally published booklets and documents collected by or sent to the author in the course of visits and consultancies in the South; and interviews and e-mail discussions with a number of key stakeholders in donor agencies.

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<sup>41</sup> These references are listed in the reference section as Young 1998.

## WHAT IS ECD?

The literature refers to 'early childhood development' or 'early childhood interventions' in a blanket way. These definitions overlap and it is not always clear what the intervention involves. Very broadly, ECD may mean one or any combination of:

- School-based nursery education, usually for children aged three to six, delivered by trained teachers in school premises, with an agreed curriculum or programme, either on a part-time or full-time basis. Nursery education is most likely to be publicly funded, with parents only paying peripheral costs such as uniforms (if any) or stationery. This provision meets agreed national standards and is regulated through an inspectorial system.
- Community-based pre-school or playgroups, usually part-time, often provided in a multi-purpose church hall or other community facilities. Staff, who tend to be local women, often serve on a voluntary rota basis, and provide relatively low-key play activities. It may or may not be regulated. Fees are likely to be minimal, but there is some cost-recovery.
- Centre-based childcare, usually for children aged between two and three or two and six, delivered by a variety of personnel, many of whom are likely to be untrained, in a variety of regulated or unregulated premises, to cover the working hours of mothers. Centre-based childcare is usually delivered on a cost-recovery basis, usually by profit or non-profit organisations, but may attract some state subsidies. It may or may not be regulated.
- Home-based childcare, usually for children aged between two and three or two and six, delivered mostly by untrained or minimally trained women working from their own homes, to cover the working hours of mothers. Home-based childcare is usually delivered on a cost-recovery basis by the private operator offering the care, but may attract some state subsidies.
- Supplementary feeding programmes usually administered by paramedics, but often delivered in one of the above.
- Home-visiting, parent education/support – usually delivered by para-professionals whose expenses are met by the state or a non-profit agency.
- Health programmes including health monitoring, vaccinations and treatment against illness and disease, also provided by paramedics, sometimes delivered as a stand-alone health service, sometimes as part of other ECD services.

Advocates for ECD argue that ECD programmes will achieve one or more of several goals:

- They will prepare children for school, and enable children to get better results at school.
- They will provide childcare for working mothers.
- They will enhance children's nutritional status by improving mothers' feeding and health and childcare practices and through the distribution of nutritional supplements.
- They will be a focus for community development and community cohesion.
- They will enable mothers and other care-givers to provide better childrearing than they would without such assistance.

- They enable children to socialise with their peers (a more pressing goal in the North where children are more likely to be brought up in small isolated family units, but less so for the South where household arrangements are more flexible).

It is increasingly argued that these programmes and goals will in the long run lead to a reduction in poverty. This general claim, as well as the more specific goals, is considered in detail in this paper.

ECD programmes draw mainly on ideas and theories of child development. 'Child Development' or 'child psychology' is said to offer a scientifically-based underpinning of early childhood programmes. Prout and James (1990) argue that there are three common themes within this discipline: '*rationality*', '*naturalness*' and '*universality*'.

*Rationality* is the universal mark of adulthood, and childhood represents a period of apprenticeship for its development. Children's ages and stages, and the activities that are said to characterise each stage, are seen as markers of developmental progress towards rationality. Child development ceases at some point in late adolescence when the child has become a fully rational adult. Children are essentially irrational and have to learn to think logically and rationally, whereas adults have acquired logical thinking skills. This underlying theme of child development has been criticised strongly by child's rights advocates such as Alderson (2000) who argues that even very young children are capable of making rational and considered decisions, within the limits of their knowledge, whereas the notion of ages and stages of development implies that children are always inferior to adults in their understanding of issues. The relatively new discipline of the sociology of childhood also puts forward an alternative view – that children's behaviour and attitudes are better explained in a generational framework. Childhood is the other side of the coin to adulthood; and the nature of childhood in a given society can only be fully understood in relation to adult assumptions about, and behaviour towards, children (Mayall 2002).

*Naturalness* refers to the biological underpinnings of behaviour inherited through the genes. The sociobiologist Hrdy (2000) has pointed out that biological behaviour is very diverse. For instance, parenting behaviours across species vary widely. Biological mothers do not always care for their offspring; offspring do not always attach themselves to their mothers. The evidence from primate studies suggests that claims for a biological basis to human behaviour are very complex. For instance, attachment behaviour, the very close bond a very young child shows for its mother, is commonly interpreted as an example of the biological roots of infant behaviour.<sup>42</sup> Yet Gottlieb (2004), in a landmark study of childrearing in Cote d'Ivoire, convincingly argues that the attachment of young children to their mothers (or other carer) and fear of strangers is neither biological nor universal.

*Universality* refers to behaviour that occurs independently of culture, behaviour that is common to all children wherever in the world they live. Many anthropologists and cultural psychologists would question whether universal traits and behaviours are possible independently of context, and instead argue that all behaviour is 'culturally embedded' and cannot be comprehended outside of the context in which it has

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<sup>42</sup> The most recent WHO report (2004) nevertheless insists that attachment behaviour is biologically based and universal.

emerged (Rabain 1979; Shweder & LeVine 1984; Ochs & Schieffelin 1984; Jahoda & Lewis 1987; Reynolds 1989; Stigler, *et al.* 1990; Cole 1990; Serpell 1993; LeVine, *et al.* 1994; Harkness & Super 1996; LeVine 2003).

What is taken as 'scientific evidence' about child development is mostly drawn from the results of observations and experiments with White middle-class children in North America and Europe, and assumed to be applicable to all children in all circumstances. If indeed there are universal underpinnings for child development, then at the very least the evidence base needs to be considerably widened. Where detailed evidence has been obtained from the South, some of the conventional understandings of child development have been profoundly challenged. Ochs and Schieffelin (1984:283) for example explored verbal interactions between mothers, other care-givers, and children in a number of communities and concluded:

'To most middle class Western readers the description of verbal and non-verbal behaviour of middle-class caregivers and their children seem familiar, desirable and even natural...the characteristics of caregiver speech (babytalk) and comportment that have been specified are highly valued by members of white middle-class society, including researchers, readers and subjects of study. (But) the general patterns of white middle-class caregiving that have been described in the literature are characteristic neither of all societies nor of all social groups'.

LeVine and the group of anthropologists working with him, have systematically compared early childhood experiences across the North and South (LeVine, *et al.* 1994). They argue that focusing attention on individual children, encouraging them to be loquacious, enabling them to express their individuality through the articulation of their opinions and preferences, is an especially Euro-American concept. He contrasts upbringing in many parts of the South where there is little or no explicit care-giver focus on the development of word games or language (although there may well be bilingualism or multi-lingualism), with that of a typical North American child. He concludes that:

'The constant presence of young children in family life whilst rarely being the focus of attention, and their participation in the productive and other activities of the household from an early age appear to offer emotional security without the verbal expressiveness by the mother and others...making sense of this will require changes in our notions of emotional and communicative development' (*ibid*:272).

LeVine argues that a typical middle-class child from the USA (implied to be the 'ideal child' of so many manuals and programming instructions issued by donors) is encouraged to initiate and expect a response to everything around him.

'From infancy onwards, the child is encouraged to characterize himself in terms of his favourite toys and foods and those he dislikes; his tastes, aversions and consumer preferences are viewed not only as legitimate but essential aspects of his growing individuality – and a prized quality of an independent person' (LeVine, 2003:95).

However, mainstream child development continues to make claims to be an empirically-based, scientifically-sound discipline and forms the basis for most programming. In the USA, the standard guide based on these 'scientific principles' is *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programmes* (DAP), and is issued by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This guide spells out what behaviour is appropriate for each age-group, and what kinds of activities can best meet their needs, and how teachers should deliver them. It claims to draw on research evidence (almost exclusively from the USA) and presents the guide as 'state of the art knowledge' about young children. This guide is widely referred to and used by multilateral and bilateral agencies as a basis for ECD programming in the South. (See the discussion below). It has, however, been criticised on the grounds that it assumes that knowledge and practice are, or can be, more or less context-free, and that it ignores controversies and debates in the field – for example, over the emphasis on individualism or commercialism in North American childcare, and the relative lack of emphasis on helpfulness and co-operation as a mark of maturity and development (Kessen 1979; Shweder & LeVine 1984; Serpell 1993; Burman 2007; Woodrow & Press 2007).

The editors of DAP acknowledge these criticisms to a limited extent. The 1997 revised edition of the guide points to the complexities of many of the issues involved, although it still leans heavily on USA research and is informed by implicit Euro-American assumptions. For instance, DAP takes for granted the material basis and assumptions of choice and consumption that underlie so much of ECD programming. Viruru (2001:19), writing from an Indian perspective, argues that 'so much of early childhood education and care is written in the language of affluence and privilege and is far removed from the realities of so many children.' Play-based pedagogies, in her view, are predicated on a level of material resourcing which is simply not available for many children. She also argues that the very notion of play as a separate fantasy world for children, requiring its own special play equipment, is a denial of the experiences of children 'who grow up with the world rather than protected from it' (*ibid*:19).

Child development is therefore is a contested area of study, and its paradigms have been critiqued from within by psychologists, and from without, chiefly by anthropologists and sociologists. These controversies have not, on the whole, been reflected in ECD provision and programming.<sup>43</sup>

## **RATIONALES FOR PROVISION OF ECD IN THE NORTH**

In some countries, there are standard and predictable publicly-subsidised systems offering near-universal centre-based integrated education and care facilities, and some nutrition, at least for children aged three to six. This was true for most former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and is still true for many Western European countries. These countries provide universal

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<sup>43</sup> The main challenge to the status quo in the USA has come from the 'reconceptualizers' group of early childhood educators, mostly post-modernists (eg Tobin 1996). This group of early childhood academics and practitioners argue that it is no longer possible to have a unified view on any aspect of practice or of what constitutes quality in early childhood; that values and opinions are inescapably relative. Their critique however applies almost entirely to early childhood practices in the North.

or near-universal services, and are therefore less likely to offer home-based care, home-visiting or parent education, or to target provision in any way. They provide coherent universal systems at all levels of administration as a public entitlement. Conversely, in neo-liberal English-speaking countries, in particular the USA, UK, Canada and Australia, where provision is much less systematic and mainly commercial, and where parents bear a large part of the cost of any services, targeted interventions, home-based care, home-visiting and parent support are common strategies for 'multi-problem' families who cannot otherwise access services, and who might otherwise bring up their children 'badly'. These countries all experience an administrative split between (nursery) education and (welfare) care systems, and administration and regulation of the system tends to be *ad hoc* and often inefficient (OECD 2006). It is this targeted, *ad hoc* model of English-speaking countries that has by and large been exported to the South.

There is a considerable tranche of evidence, mainly from the USA, that demonstrates that early childhood education and care produces cognitive and social gains, at least in the short-term. Most of this evidence comes from targeted programmes for low-income families. 'Low-income' in this literature is used synonymously with 'multi-problem' and 'low IQ'. 'Multi-problem' in turn usually refers to families who have been referred to social welfare agencies because of concerns about children – for instance chaotic lifestyles, early pregnancy, drug or alcohol abuse and so on.

The two most rigorous, longitudinal and best known projects, the Perry High Scope and the Abecedarian, selected participants on the basis of low IQ ratings: children's IQs of between 75-85 for the Perry project, and mothers' IQs of 85 for the Abecedarian. The Abecedarian mothers were also referred by welfare agencies. In addition, 98 per cent of participants of both studies came from African-American families, also a problematic issue in the context of the USA. This conflation of low-income with low IQ and welfare referrals, and the targeting of ethnic minority groups, raises questions about the generalisability and relevance of the results.

These two key studies also both assume high quality interventions, with good programmes and good adult-child ratios of between 1-4 or 1-10 depending on the age of the child. The Perry High Scope had a particular and well-developed (although part-time) educational programme for four-year-olds plus home-visiting. The Abecedarian offered full-time care and a well-structured educational programme and took children from infancy through to age 8. However, even with high quality provision there are caveats.

'Reviews of the evidence suggest that impact is linked with the type and quality of the provision. The low-income children who attended these programmes may do better than other children from their poor neighbourhoods, but most still lag behind middle class children. For example, even in the Perry High/Scope Pre-school Project, which is known for its remarkably positive outcomes, nearly one third of the program children were later arrested, and one third dropped out of high school...realistic expectations are in order' (The Future of Children, 1995:14).

These two studies were conducted as randomised, controlled trials, that is, using standards of evidence used in medical investigations, and generally regarded as robust. Attrition rates over time were low. However, the samples were small. The Perry High Scope had 68 participants, half of whom attended the trial programme; the Abecedarian had 112 participants, half of whom attended the trial programme.

Despite these considerable limitations of context and scale, these two programmes are very widely-cited in the literature on early childhood as evidence of the importance of ECD interventions. Attempts have also been made to quantify their impact in terms of cost-benefits. Trying to quantify these benefits over time, assess their duration, assign monetary values, and link them to specific programme interventions is problematic. The Perry Project suggests a cost-benefit ratio of 1:7, that is, 7 dollars saved in the long-term for every dollar spent (Schweinhart 2003). The report on the Abecedarian project is more cautious but nevertheless states that 'the Abecedarian program results in healthy returns for the investment of public resources targeted at a disadvantaged group' (Masse & Barnett 2003:34).<sup>44</sup> A recent systematic review of these cost-benefit studies concluded that the results were essentially parochial, and that longitudinal studies are in themselves problematic because of rapid changes in socio-economic contexts in most countries (Penn & Lloyd 2007).

Interventions that focus on home-visiting and parent education, without offering childcare, have produced more contradictory results and are regarded as less effective for targeted populations (Barnett, 1995).

In contrast to these highly specific USA studies directed at targeted 'low-income' populations, one of the most recent comprehensive and context-sensitive comparative studies in the North is the thematic study of early education and care being carried out by the OECD (2006). Based on a peer review system, the ECD policies and practices of participating countries are investigated using the criteria of quality, access and equity. 20 countries have participated in the review, including USA, UK, Australia, Korea, Mexico, the Czech Republic, Hungary and many other European countries.

The OECD review states, very broadly, that ECD is a necessary public good – like education or health services. It enables women's equitable participation in the workforce and it enables children to learn and socialise. The debate is not about these justifications for provision, which are taken as read for a developed society, but about implementation. The OECD review argues that children are likely to benefit most from high quality services with trained and remunerated staff, that emphasise play and learning, and that all children, especially vulnerable children, should be able to access such services – Limited public investment leads to a shortage of good quality programmes, unequal access and segregation of children according to income' (OECD 2006). Quality services that meet conditions of equitable access and ensure an entitlement for vulnerable children are invariably publicly funded (although

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<sup>44</sup> A recent international systematic review by the author (Penn, *et al.* 2004) of the impact of integrated out-of-home care and education on children aged nought to six, revealed the difficulty of categorising different kinds of provision across countries, and therefore in comparing and assessing their impact.



parents may make some contribution). Overall, within OECD countries, 82 per cent of provision is publicly funded.

In the absence of state policies or any kind of state intervention or funding, it is left up to individual providers to provide education and care on an *ad hoc* basis, and under these conditions, the quality of provision is highly variable and access is inequitable. This is the case, for example, in the USA (OECD 2000) which rates poorly by comparison with other OECD countries. In the USA, the state only provides targeted services for the poor, and then grudgingly; otherwise, ECD programmes are mostly private and available only to those who can pay. Other neo-liberal English speaking countries are similarly reliant on commercial ECD (Penn 2007).

At the most basic level, definitions of quality are tied up with notions of childhood and beliefs about how and under what circumstances children learn. There is no international consensus on what constitutes an appropriate curriculum or daily regime of activities for young children or who should deliver it and how they should be trained. There are considerable variations between countries within the North, let alone between the North and South. For example, one of the most highly praised ECD programmes internationally is in Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy.<sup>45</sup> In this programme, which offers full-time care and education for children 1-6, great emphasis is put on supporting children in developing and carrying through their own interests and ideas with minimum adult interference. This programme is run collectively, by staff with relatively low levels of initial training, but also with minimum hierarchy, and weekly in-service training for all staff. The standard of work produced by the children is so outstanding that some of their drawings and writing have been compiled into a travelling exhibition, which is much in demand (Edwards, *et al.* 1993).

By contrast, in the UK formal education cannot begin too soon. Most children aged 4 years are already in primary school and under pressure to begin formally reading and writing, for fear they may 'fall behind'. The school starting age is an indication of the value – or lack of it – put on ECD. In Nordic countries, children remain in ECD provision and do not start school – or learning to read and write – until 6-7 years of age. Before that, the aim is to provide a creative, playful indoor and outdoor environment, free from the pressure to learn to read and write (Alexander 2003). Local authorities in Nordic countries have an obligation to provide ECD for *all children* whose parents require it; it is an entitlement for all families.

There is also considerable variation in the role of 'teacher' in ECD programmes. In Eastern Europe and other countries within the Soviet ambit, the teacher has been an important person, and teaching has traditionally been more didactic and dialogic. Children's learning is assumed to be incremental and cumulative, and is carefully planned by the teacher, an approach which reflects the influence of Russian psychologists, especially Lev Vygotsky. Literacy rates in these countries were very high and education performance has been comparable to, or exceeded that of, other developed countries, although teasing out the reasons for good educational performance is extremely difficult and inevitably reflects wider economic and cultural factors (Alexander 2001).

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<sup>45</sup> A small town in the wealthy province of Emilia Romagna in Northern Italy. Reggio Emilia has a group of 22 nurseries which have been collectively experimenting with and documenting their programmes over a 30-year period, led by the charismatic psychologist Loris Malaguzzi.

In the North, then, there is a wide variety of approaches, from the much praised critical self-reflective practices of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy, to an emphasis on accelerated individual development or what is sometimes called 'hot-housing' that characterises much private provision in countries like the USA (Sutton-Smith 1999).

## CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF POVERTY AND ECD

The evidence on poverty from the North shows that it is possible to achieve very low child poverty rates – below 5 per cent – through redistributive taxation (Diderichsen 1995; Bradbury & Jantii 1999). In general, the richer the country is, the lower the rates of child poverty. However, this is not the case for English-speaking countries, especially for the USA and the UK. The USA has child poverty rates of around 25 per cent. The UK has the next highest at 21 per cent (Bradbury & Jantii 1999). Although these poverty measures can be presented according to different criteria (as a relative or absolute measure) and vary slightly over time, put another way, tolerance of poverty experienced in childhood in the UK and USA is greater than other countries in the North.

Phipps, a Canadian economist, has tried to link values, policies and child outcomes in measuring poverty. Using data from a comparative study of the USA, Canada and Norway, Phipps (2001) suggests that in the USA, and to a lesser extent in Canada, there is a public view that poverty is associated with laziness, and that income inequality is therefore not a major concern. This view maintains that poor people do not try hard enough, while high earners deserve their income. In Norway, only a minority hold such views. As a result of these views and values, she argues, the USA and Canada are reluctant to introduce redistributive income transfers (tax and benefits that recompense the poor).

'Policy discussion (in the USA and Canada) is extremely concerned that "too generous" transfers will lead people, naturally lazy, to take advantage of programmes by working less for pay and 'enjoying' more time jobless. Such thinking goes back a many years (eg to the British Poor Laws of the 17th century) but still characterizes policy discussion today' (*ibid*:82).

Overall, she concludes that the evidence is 'consistent with the idea that both higher levels of spending and programmes with a more universal flavour are associated with better outcomes for children' (*ibid*:87).

The consequence of this anti-redistributive stance in the USA and UK is that there is emphasis instead on targeted early intervention measures to combat child poverty. A very strong assumption running through most USA ECD programmes is that, while state intervention for ECD is unnecessary and too costly for the public purse, interventions targeted at poor young children may be cost-effective enough to justify expenditure. There are many claims in the USA literature that children who have participated in some kind of ECD programme perform better in the long-term, keep out of jail, are less likely to have teenage pregnancy, or even, improbably, are more likely to own their own home. It is argued that such programmes are thus likely to save the state money at a later date by keeping children out of trouble and avoiding

the need for – and costs of – subsequent corrective measures. Most of these claims can be traced back to the two key studies, the Perry High Scope and the Abecedarian.

Despite the lack of generalisability of the evidence, improving children's cognitive capacities through educational and childcare programmes, and also (or instead) addressing mothers' parenting styles, is therefore seen as a way of combating child poverty. Poor educational performance, low aspirations and inequality can thus be addressed in a society where, theoretically, success is open to all, but where there is deep-rooted poverty.

By contrast, the experience of Northern European countries in particular, is that child poverty can be powerfully reduced by a judicious combination of tax, benefits and childcare. As pointed out above, in such countries, ECD is seen as a necessary and affordable public service, and one of a number of redistributive measures that contribute to child poverty reduction. Targeted ECD in these countries is regarded as an ineffective strategy for poverty reduction (OECD 2006). Whereas in the OECD as a whole, 82 per cent of ECD provision is publically-funded, in North America, the UK and Australia a majority of provision is private. In the UK for example, 85 per cent of childcare provision is private-for-profit care (National Audit Office 2004).

Assumptions about the unaffordability of ECD as a public service, and the role of targeted ECD interventions in the USA in combating child poverty, are implicit and widespread. However, there is also some criticism of this approach within the USA and UK. Critics suggest that the aims of targeted early childhood interventions – to break the cycle of poverty – are, in general, hugely optimistic. The gains, if any, are marginal, refer only to high-quality programmes, and overlook, or divert attention from, the wider socio-economic contexts of inequality and lack of social mobility (Kagan 1998; Bickel & Spatig 1999; Toroyan, *et al.* 2003). The Sure Start programme in the UK is another much trumpeted targeted approach to addressing child poverty. Sure Start is evaluated on implementation (the rate at which programmes are set up); its outcomes (the effect on young children of having attended the programmes); and its cost-effectiveness (its costings compared with alternative forms of funding). On each of these evaluations, the results so far are not encouraging. The programmes are low-key and have been slow to get off the ground; there are no significant outcomes for children; and the programme has been very expensive to set up compared with other forms of provision (National Evaluation of Sure Start 2003/4). These results also suggest that redistribution may be a more effective strategy in addressing poverty.

### ***Robust Evidence on ECD***

In the ECD literature drawn on by the World Bank and other bilateral and multilateral agencies, there is little acknowledgement of any research conclusions from outside the USA. Indeed, some authors claim that the only *valid* evidence and experience is from the USA because no other studies have tested the effects of early childhood programmes with the same degree of rigour (Young 1998).

The 'gold standard' for medical evidence is a randomised controlled trial (RCT). Subjects are randomly allocated to an intervention group or a control group, and the progress of the two groups is systematically compared. One reason for the frequent

citing of studies from the USA (including the Perry High Scope and Abecedarian) to inform ECD projects in the South is that they were conducted as RCTs, and the evidence they provide is therefore seen as especially robust, despite their limited contexts. To the extent that ECD is seen as a technological intervention analogous to drug interventions, the key to successful intervention is seen to lie in the scientific application of scientifically proven facts. Failure is judged as a failure of application rather than as a failure of conception or a narrowness of understanding.

However, for social interventions, the process is inevitably more complicated, especially when, as indicated above, the early childhood intervention programmes may in themselves be problematic, and open to debates about their underlying values. RCTs are undoubtedly a rigorous methodology, but their validity also depends on the scope of what they investigate and the context in which they do so. They are expensive to set up, especially if they are longitudinal. They may also raise considerable ethical issues about who receives the intervention and who is excluded in a resource-poor environment. They also tend to privilege quantitative over qualitative data so that the views and feelings of the participants mostly do not figure in the evaluation.

There is also a lively debate about the measurements used to evaluate children's cognitive, psycho-social and motor progress and whether these can be used outside their country of origin. Pollit and Triana (1999) claim that any measures used for children under 18 months are unreliable, but that measures used for older children, with slight adaptations, can be used in the South and have predictive value. They used a standard measure, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary test, and adapted it for use in Java and Guatemala. However, these and other tests, although moderately predictive, were not as reliable as when they were used in the USA.

Anthropological evidence is much more rarely cited by multilateral organisations, but it offers useful alternative insights. As well as the more specific childrearing studies of Levine and his colleagues described above, there are some well-known ethnographic studies of what it means to live in a poor community. For example, Scheper-Hughes (1993) carried out a long-term ethnographic study of families in the *favelas* of a town in North East Brazil. She describes the neglect shown by mothers to their infants, and the very high child mortality rates. She concludes, not that these are poor parenting practices (as many aid agencies have described the childrearing practices of the poor), but that being regarded as worthless themselves, the mothers could not believe that their ailing babies were worth saving. Only if their babies showed a strong will to live and seemed to have a good chance of survival did they begin to invest in their care. Even if they had tried to do more, they lacked the essential resources – access to clean water, sanitation, food and medicine. Resignation was, for them, a more realistic coping strategy than struggling endlessly against their fate. Bourgois (1998) working in the *barrios* in New York with Puerto Rican families makes similar observations. The chaotic violence of daily life on the margins in a rich country like the USA, led women to devalue themselves and lower their expectations to the point that their own survival, and that of their children, was a matter of relative indifference. Brice Heath (1990), an anthropologist, who has made a long-term study of poor black children in the USA, described how a poor, but vibrant and self-contained community, was damaged first by schooling that failed to acknowledge their cultural traditions, and then by re-housing projects that ignored

community links. This disempowerment and progressive isolation of mothers resulted in impoverished parenting. (Brice Heath 1990)

Ideas about how children develop and learn, who should look after them and in what circumstances, goals of conduct, and what constitutes a family or a community, vary greatly. These ideas are not fixed but adapted, sometimes reluctantly, to changing circumstances. As Rosaldo (1993) and Stephens (1995) and point out, the overwhelming and pressing reality faced by almost every group of people, whether in their traditional homeland, as migrants within their own country, or immigrants in the North from South, is how to maintain their identity and integrity – and indeed their livelihoods – in the face of the globalising norms of the economic marketplace. With some exceptions (eg Arnold, *et al.* 2000) these debates about cultural identity and economic pressure are largely absent from the ECD literature.

## **KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER ON ECD AND CHILD POVERTY FROM NORTH TO SOUTH**

Poverty in the South is more endemic, widespread and severe than in the North. Nonetheless, the assumptions and expectations of policy-makers in the North – that targeted early childhood interventions are an appropriate and effective way to address poverty – inevitably spill over into the South. It is often implicitly or explicitly suggested that ‘developing countries’ are merely at an earlier stage of development than the USA, and that the difference is only one of degree.

‘...factors commonplace in industrialized countries are inherited by developing countries as they advance. Thus the developmental outcomes of poor children in the United States may be predictive of outcomes of children in developing nations’ (Scott, *et al.* 1999:unpaginated web report).

A recent influential series of articles by McGregor *et al.* in *the Lancet* (2007) also adopt a universalistic and mono-linear approach to addressing poverty in early childhood. They argue that a conventional package of nutrition, stimulation and parenting programmes could radically address poverty.

The World Bank Institute, which was established in 1955 ‘*to train officials concerned with development planning, policy making, investment analysis and project implementation in member developing countries*’ has published a ‘definitive’ handbook for early childhood programming (Evans, *et al.* 2000). It contains many practical suggestions, but the over-riding assumption is that of ‘developmentally appropriate practice’, that is of an individual child passing through ages and stages of development, at each stage assisted by a knowledgeable adult using the appropriate resources. It is generally assumed that precepts of understanding and practice – such as the NAEYC manual on Developmentally Appropriate Practice – developed for children in the USA are perfectly legitimate for the South. UNICEF has similarly absorbed the tenets of DAP. In an especially commissioned review of the scientific evidence on ECD programming, the authors conclude that:

‘Interventions with parental and non-parental caregivers are needed to help them use developmental materials appropriately, to provide

challenging activities at the appropriate level of difficulty in which the child can be successful, to become increasingly involved with their children, to respond verbally to the child's vocalizations, to be responsive to the child's emotional needs, and to avoid physical punishment as a standard child-rearing practice. Parents or caregivers should be taught how to integrate child development activities into activities of daily living as much as possible. Involving other family members in these activities has the potential to increase their impact' (Grantham-McGregor, *et al.* 1999:4).

The World Bank has been persuaded to support the financing of ECD because of the claims that it reduces poverty, and thereby contributes to economic wellbeing and progress. It commissioned a wide-ranging review of the (mainly North American) evidence that early childhood programmes carry economic benefits. It concludes that:

'ECD programs are most likely to be beneficial for children who grow up in the poorest households...well-targeted public programs can maximize society's benefits of ECD interventions while remaining affordable...ECD programs are a sound investment in the well-being of children and in the future of societies' (Van der Gaag & Tan 1998:33).

The Inter-American Development Bank conference '*Breaking the Poverty Cycle: Investing in Early Childhood*' (1999) also reiterated the claims that targeted early childhood interventions

'can foster a lifetime of improved health, mental and physical performance, and productivity. Moreover ECCD can help minimize or prevent many other problems including illiteracy, juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy, crime, drug use and domestic and social violence. And it can help break the tragic cycle of poverty...which is often passed on from one generation to the next...much can be increased with only modest increases in the share of national income devoted to certain early childhood development interventions. Moreover relatively small interventions can go a long way' (*ibid*:3).

Seen in perspective, these interventions are in fact miniscule. In 1999 alone, the World Bank spent approximately \$3 billion on its education and social programmes. In contrast, at a generous estimate, the Bank has loaned a \$1000 million *over a 10 year period* for ECD programmes (Myers 2000), that is 0.0000333 per cent of its annual education and social budget. If such ECD programmes did indeed succeed in combating poverty to the extent envisaged, they would be a terrific investment!

In addition to the relatively small investments envisaged to bring about profound change, notions of quality have also been abandoned in the translation of ECD programmes from the North to the South. The early intervention programmes in the USA on which much of the evidence is based, unequivocally stressed the importance of high-quality centre-based education and care programming to effect any long-term change in children's outcomes. In the scaled down versions of early childhood programming in the South, it is commonly assumed that interventions can be

low-cost and home-based rather than centre-based, and that they are still likely to have the same or similar outcomes.

Additional evidence commonly cited by multilateral organisations to justify interventions in the South are neurological studies of brain functioning; World Bank literature, for example, frequently refers to such studies (Young 1998). The brain is at its most malleable in the first years of life, and the synaptic connections formed at this stage in response to stimulation are critical in determining later cognitive abilities. This argument has a basis in nutritional studies. Certain nutrients are essential for foetal and neonatal growth, and malnutrition carries the risk of deformity and retarded growth. However, extrapolation from nutrition studies to neurological growth is very dubious. Bruer (1999) has shown how the results of a few obscure, and not very relevant, studies have been exaggerated. He asserts that the popular claims for early intervention, based on brain studies, have very little, if any, foundation. Rose (1998) has comprehensively reviewed the evidence on brain functioning, and concluded that neuro-scientific knowledge is too fragmented and technology still too basic, to justify the claims about how the brain works – indeed, they question the possibility of the endeavour. There is *no* direct neurological evidence about the relationship between parenting styles and neurological development and indeed, given the current state of technology, it is hard to see how it could be obtained. However, arguments about brain development can be –and are – used to justify low-key interventions. The following quote is from a UNICEF manual advocating parenting programmes in Central Asia.

‘From birth the brain is rapidly creating (synaptic) connections. By the time a child is three he/she has formed about 1,000 trillion connections...when a connection is used repeatedly in the early years, it becomes permanent. When synapses are fired, such as when a child plays peek-a-boo over and over, they get stronger. When connections are repeatedly fired together, they are wired together. In contrast a connection that is not used at all, or not often enough, is unlikely to survive. In this way, brain development is truly a ‘use it or lose it’ process. For example, a child who is rarely spoken to, read to, or encouraged in self expression in the early years, may have difficulty mastering language skills later on’ (UNICEF 2002:29).

This extract implies that a child who is brought up without early verbal stimulation will have an atrophied brain. Leaving aside the extravagance of this claim - and questions of literacy rates, maternal/care-giver time, and general availability and affordability of books and printed materials in poor countries - the implicit model of child-rearing contained is again drawn from DAP.

One set of arguments then refers to parenting and care-giver styles of childrearing. The notion of ‘Developmentally Appropriate Practice’ underwrites the work of many international organisations promoting early interventions. These interventions are primarily targeted at reducing poverty through improving parenting and care-giving.

But there is another related and powerful discourse concerning nursery education which asserts that, for young children, schooling is an abrupt and difficult break from everyday domestic life. Put crudely, if children are to master the difficult task of

becoming literate and numerate – often in the South in a language that is not their mother tongue – they have to learn to adapt to school. They have to learn how to listen, interpret and obey instructions from their teachers. Children need a gradual induction to schooling otherwise they might find it too difficult and off-putting. Children who are not inducted into schooling are more likely to repeat years and drop out. This rationale, for example, has informed recent large-scale EU education sector wide development programmes in sub-saharan Africa. (Penn 2008)

There is substantial evidence from the North that nursery education, that is a year or two of experience of some pre-school intervention by a trained teacher before starting the formal curriculum, makes a difference to subsequent school performance (OECD 2006). A study in the UK (Sylva, *et al.* 2003) suggested that nursery education delivered by trained teachers in school settings is likely to have more of an impact on school performance than any other type of pre-school arrangement. Most countries in the North offer some kind of state-funded nursery education. However, as mentioned above, patterns of nursery schooling are very different, ranging from two or two and one half hours a day for four-year-olds during the school term (as in the UK), to the comprehensive kindergarten systems offering all-day all-year care and education for two- to six-year-olds, as in the Nordic and former Soviet countries. Comparing results across these very different systems is therefore problematic.

Apart from the former communist countries, most ECD provision in the South is private, geared explicitly to promote school readiness, and available only to those who can pay. Viruru (2001) describes in detail the work of a private nursery in South India, and traces how the staff relies on rote learning exercises and copying to develop literacy. However, Viruru argues that such an approach fits in better with ideas about child-rearing and expectations of schooling in the community where she was based, whereas a more child-centred approach, apart from being more costly in resources, would be inappropriate.

She raises questions about the nature and purpose of schooling. Should pre-school education prepare children for a rigid school system? Gupta (2004) argues that schooling in India is colonial in origin and outlook, and far from opening up new opportunities, serves to deter and undermine already marginalised communities. Serpell (1999), drawing on his experiences of schooling in Zambia, describes the 'extractive model' of education, which gradually weeds out the less able and the poor. Street (1999) investigated the relationship between literacy and schooling, and concluded that formal schooling is often a crude –and cruel- way of teaching literacy. He subsequently edited a series of ethnographic studies carried out in Eritrea, India, China, Namibia, Pakistan and Iran, each "using fieldwork methods and sensitized to ways of discovering and observing the uses and meanings of literacy practices to local people themselves" (Street 2001:3). He argues that there is often a poor fit between what is taught in school and how people manage literacy in their everyday lives, particularly in those countries where the language used in school is different from the languages used at home (the case for many ex-colonial countries). Schooling may be a painful process of failure in many poor communities. Education, in the most general sense, is an asset and a right for children; being able to read and write enables people to participate more effectively in society. But many education systems leave a lot to be desired. If that is the case, the educational advantages of pre-school education may be very marginal.



Jaramillo and Mingat (2003) building on the work of Van den Gaag and Tan (1998) claim to have reviewed the evidence on the impact of ECD on schooling for the World Bank. They do not distinguish between different kinds of ECD, except to differentiate between provision for children under three and those over three. They analyse data on repetition and completion rates in schools in sub-Saharan Africa and compare these with other regions: Middle East and Northern Africa; Eastern Europe and Central Asia; South and East Asia and the Pacific; and Latin America and the Caribbean. They then link this to data on pre-school. They argue that 'the results provide support to the point that there exists indeed some structural relationship between preschool and primary education' (Jaramillo & Mingat 2003:18). They also acknowledge that their data are unreliable and extremely variable, but nevertheless consider them sufficient to produce economic models on which to base a case for the expansion of ECD. They calculate that in a 'hypothetical country' where pre-schooling was increased to a 40 per cent level, repetition rates would decline from 20 per cent to 15 per cent, and school completion to grade 5 would be enhanced by 13 per cent (*ibid*:21). However, they then go on to argue that there are other greater claims on educational resources than to increase pre-school education – for example, putting more money into improving primary or vocational education, which might bring greater returns or, crucially, have a higher political value. They argue, finally, that community-based interventions, relying on parents and community leaders, are likely to be most cost-effective, since they are cheaper than formal pre-schooling, but may provide similar or better educational returns.

This analysis has been presented in a variety of meetings, including the bi-annual meeting of the prestigious Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) in Mauritius in 2003. It is being discussed as a basis for future funding loans for ECD in Africa. The authors claim that this kind of economic modelling for calculating the impact of ECD on schooling is, at the very least, better than guesswork. However, it relies on very questionable statistics, aggregates data over an unacceptably wide range of contexts and is silent about the schooling that is provided. It also fails to mention the impact of HIV/AIDS on the children themselves and on the supply of teachers – an extraordinary omission for a study of education in sub-Saharan Africa.

There are then problems about the way in which knowledge from the North is taken from and applied to the South. Myers (2000) has undertaken a review of the status and impact of ECD programmes worldwide for the EFA assessment. He notes that:

'Frameworks and knowledge – the basis for lobbying and constructing ECCD programmes – continue to originate, for the most part, in the Minority World. Accordingly a tension often arises between "received truth" linked to the Minority World knowledge base and values guiding an agency, and local knowledge linked to another set of values rooted in some part of the Majority World. These may overlap, but are different. (*ibid*:25).

The ECD literature from the South (much of it written by consultants from the North) generally tends to stress supporting, educating and involving parents and other family members. As Myers also comments: 'perhaps the greatest and most lasting

effects on a child's learning and development can come from improvements in the capacity of parents to provide a supportive environment for learning and development' (*ibid*:24). There is an implication that parents may be ignorant of essential tenets of child development, from feeding practices to talking and reading to their children, and that donors should attempt to provide such knowledge and education. UNICEF in particular has focused on parental education and has issued many local manuals and guides. What is rarely considered in these guides and manuals, is the extent to which extreme poverty distorts parents' ability to support their children in all but the most basic ways, or leads to parents being absent, either because of migration or death. It also presumes a nuclear family, or dyadic rather than communal approach to childrearing.

One attempt to reconcile practices across the North and South has been addressed in a comparative study commissioned by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and undertaken by Woodhead (1997). He compared the 'quality' of ECD programmes across France, India, Colombia and Kenya. He produced a model for 'contextually appropriate practice' and argued that quality should be judged by the best of what is available locally, using criteria of staffing ratios, curriculum, premises, etc. This relativist approach has been criticised on the grounds that it legitimises a poor service for poor communities. In many middle-income or even poor countries, the elite have services that match the best in Europe; should much lower standards be acceptable for the children of the townships or *favelas*? (Rosemberg 2003). In South Africa, for example, despite very great inequalities, the Government has accepted the responsibility for providing equitably for all children, although many activists claim that the reality currently falls far short of this.

## **THE RANGE OF ECD INITIATIVES IN THE SOUTH**

It has so far been suggested that key multilateral and bilateral agencies who promote ECD in the South draw on paradigms and evidence almost exclusively from the USA, but that ECD in the USA is itself an anomaly and does not reflect the standards of the developed world. There are also unresolved methodological issues in investigating the impact of ECD on child poverty. here are many accounts of ECD projects in the South. Myers (2000), who undertook an ECD review for the EFA Dakar Summit, points to the difficulties of obtaining a reliable database. Problems include defining age-groups, establishing baselines for comparing enrolment, agreeing definitions of ECD programmes, the amount of time the programme is available, and regulation, or the lack of it. These problems of comparability are more acute if, as is mostly the case, the ECD programmes are not part of the formal education sector. He emphasises the general unreliability of data and the weakness of evaluation, but suggests that it is possible to make some tentative conclusions.

- Enrolment appears to be increasing worldwide,
- These enrolment increases are generally small and marginal,
- The variation is huge,
- ECD mostly refers to enrolment from four years upwards as a preparation for schooling,
- Urban children are more likely to be enrolled than rural children,
- Enrolment mostly suggests parity between boys and girls except in Nepal, India, Pakistan and in some Middle Eastern and North African countries,

- The role of the state and private sector institutions vary widely from region to region and country to country.

A review of ECD in sub-Saharan Africa, commissioned by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), lists many programmes of differing kinds, including teaching mothers when to seek medical aid for their infants, nutritional interventions, parenting education, community-based home care, training and resourcing, and formal preschool classes. The review also points to the difficulty of cataloguing interventions.

'The availability of data relating to ECD is poor in virtually all Sub-Saharan Africa; even poorer than data for the primary and secondary levels. The paucity of data makes monitoring and quality control extremely difficult' (Hyde & Kabiru 2003:50).

Many ECD programmes are supported by multilateral donors. The most well-known of these are the Bernard van Leer Foundation, based in the Netherlands, and the Aga Khan Foundation based in Geneva. UNICEF has also made ECD a priority, especially ECD programmes for very young children and parent education. There are many other organisations which include ECD as part of their work, such as members of the International Save the Children Alliance. The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (CG) is an inter-agency group that aims to foster communication between international donor agencies and their national counterparts, and among decision-makers, researchers, and programme providers. It publishes a journal, the Co-ordinators Notebook, that provides a thematic overview of ECD initiatives, eg on international attempts to develop early childhood indicators (Co-ordinators Notebook 2001).

Much of the evaluation and monitoring of donor initiatives is based on external evaluations by consultants, rather than on programmes set up as measured experiments. While consultancy reports may highlight useful aspects of programme functioning, they do not provide the levels of evidence that can be used to support particular positions unequivocally (if indeed that were possible). Donors mainly rely on advocacy and lobbying to advance support for their programmes. Programme reports tend to have the dual function of reporting on the activities that took place, but also justifying them for future funding. As Myers (2000:25) points out, INGOs are sometimes dominated by a need to prove themselves 'where promotion and success is equated with the numbers of children and families services, with the ability to promote the particular doctrine of the agency, and/or with the ability to move money'.

Gupta (2001) highlights how evaluations of the well-known Integrated Child Development programme (ICDS) in India simply miss or ignore the oppressive nature of the scheme and the subversive attempts of poor women to divert it. The ICDS is a much cited showpiece scheme attracting significant international donor funding, and aims to provide childcare with nutritional support in poor communities. (Muralidharan & Kaul 1999) Gupta describes a myriad of procedures and rules about day to day functioning "which made little sense when viewed from a 'bottom-line' perspective of gains in health and nutrition". He suggests that an inspection and monitoring scheme, based on surprise inspections, and sometimes harshly applied attempted to enforce these procedures and rules,

Similarly, an India-wide workshop on ECD, convened by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in 1999, '*Taking Stock: Developing Indicators for Analysing Costs and benefits of Early Childhood Care and Development Programmes*', attempted to categorise ECD programmes and provide evaluation grids. The discussion explored methods for calculating the costs of individual programmes and relating these to outputs. The overall grid lists target groups, benefits, indicators, sources of information and methodologies. However, the sheer diversity of programmes means that such evaluative efforts are limited, especially if their intention is to show that one kind of intervention is more cost-effective than another.

## **ECD INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT MITIGATING CHILD POVERTY**

There appears to be little 'hard' evidence on the extent to which ECD interventions in the South, despite the rhetoric about vulnerability, are actually aimed at children experiencing poverty in childhood. There is also not much evidence about their efficacy in mitigating poverty in the long-term. The economic rhetoric of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, that investing in early childhood is a good investment, is unproven not least because their investment, relative to other investment based on the principle of 'human capital' has been so very miniscule that there is little to show for it. Such investment in ECD also has to be set against the devastating contexts of global inequality, war and epidemics; in these contexts, any small gains are likely to be eroded. The impact of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, and the civil war in Colombia are two examples where much-vaunted donor-funded ECD programmes – and other education and social programmes – have been overtaken by events, and the situation for many children has become worse despite interventions.

It is common sense to assume that children in difficult circumstances, who are offered a safe place to play with caring adult support and good nutrition, will be better off in the here and now. However, the long-term effects of such interventions are unclear. It is also uncertain how they can mitigate subsequent adverse conditions, or indeed whether they need to be justified in such terms. The circumstances of some young children's lives are exceptionally harsh, and they need protection simply in order to survive. Resource-limited programmes have attempted to target the poorest of the poor and ask people within their community to identify children most in need of support (Lusk & O'Gara 2002). However, it is difficult to choose anyone for targeting when life itself is so precarious.

There are roughly three groups of young children who are particularly vulnerable: young children whose parents are time-poor and absolutely poor, and do not have the resources to care for them; young children affected by HIV/AIDs; and young children in situations of war and conflict.

### ***Time-poor mothers***

The UNICEF Innocenti series of studies on 'The Urban Child in Difficult Circumstances' focuses on the lives of street children in countries as diverse as Brazil, India, the Philippines and Kenya. They illustrate (as Scheper-Hughes has done) the difficulty of maintaining family life in the townships or *favelas*. Many women living in such circumstances are migrants with few resources, either material or social. The Kenyan study, '*Child newcomers in the urban jungle*', illustrates the

vulnerability of such families, particularly mothers, struggling to cope. Their position is compounded by a legal framework that favours men's rights over women's, the breakdown of traditional rural ways of life, and appalling physical conditions in the townships. The only work available is likely to be domestic work or hawking, both of which require women to work long hours, typically leaving home before dawn and returning after dark – 14-hour days for an income which cannot sustain a family. Older children have to care for younger siblings, and live under such pressure that they may take to the streets rather than continue living at home (Munyakho 1992).

Munyakho also lists some of the efforts that have been made by donors and NGOs to ameliorate the situation. These include the development of women's co-operatives, campaigning for better services such as water and sanitation to the townships, and informal schooling. In such circumstances, providing some kind of crèche or other collective facility for the youngest children, is a useful contribution to a wider package of efforts to address poverty.

Similarly, there are ECD programmes for the children of women who work as labourers on commercial farms, for example in Southern Africa and in South East Asia. Farmworkers and estate workers are among the most marginalised and vulnerable of all workers. Farmworkers on commercial farms may also be migrants with few material or social resources (1992; Wilks 1996). Efforts to work with farm-owners and managers to support childcare *in situ*, by offering safe play spaces and some basic care and nutrition, may mitigate the environmental conditions which are made hazardous for children by the extensive use of fertilisers and chemical sprays, as well as relieve pressures on women (Booker 1995; Penn 2001).

Even where there is some degree of inward investment in the South - eg by the out-sourcing of work by international corporations - the work available tends to be inflexible, low-paid, and for long hours. This also raises questions about the availability of childcare provision. One of the most well-known organisations dedicated to providing childcare for working mothers in the South is SEWA (Self-employed Women's Association), which was developed by women trades unionists in the textile industries in India. It has since become an independent organisation campaigning for women working in both the formal and the informal sectors and operates mainly as a federation of co-operatives. In Gujarat, for example, SEWA supports 70 co-operatives, totalling 22,313 members. But any self-employed woman in India can join SEWA for an annual fee of five Rupees. SEWA argues that women must work and lobby together to improve their conditions in an integrated way. SEWA argues that centre-based ECD provision is important as a small but essential part of a widespread campaign to improve the circumstances of working women, especially where, as in the salt-mines or tobacco farms, the physical environment is dangerous to children. For example, *Sangini*, is a co-operative of childcare workers who provide a service to SEWA members. *Sangini* has taken over the government's ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) in areas of Ahmedabad, so that the children coming to the crèches get both nutrition and childcare.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there are a number of well-known initiatives favouring home-based provision, using low-paid, unskilled women as childminders (Reimers 1992; Williams 1997; World Bank 2001). These home-based initiatives,

mainly donor and government funded, have been praised as cost-effective (Ruel, *et al.* 2000). However, they have also been criticised for perpetuating the low status of women and confirming them in traditional mothering occupations, while failing to question the harsh and discriminatory working conditions of employed mothers (Rosemberg 2003). Reconciliation of work and family life is a central argument in OECD rationalisation for providing ECD, but is not on the agenda of most governments or donors in the South, perhaps because of the great difficulty in addressing it, given that in many countries, the informal sector is the biggest of the economy, and in poor areas the jobs open to women are mainly as domestic workers or hawkers.

A key issue then is the extent to which any attempt to provide for the children of working mothers locates itself in a wider context of campaigning and lobbying for better conditions, including reconciliation of work and family life. With some notable exceptions, the ECD lobby in the South has not focused on the needs of working women and has not addressed time-poverty. The ungendered word 'parent' obscures the fact that it is almost always women who are responsible for children. Women face gender discrimination in many countries. In difficult circumstances, women are more likely to be bringing up children on their own without a regular partner – because of migration, conscription and the disintegration of traditional societal structures – and the pressures on their time are likely to be acute. In such circumstances, the requirement for women to attend sessions on how to become better parents and to learn about child development, as so many ECD interventions aim to do, is bizarre.

### ***Young children affected by HIV/AIDS***

Barnett and Whiteside (2002) argue that, like other epidemics, the incidence and spread of HIV/AIDS is not accidental. It is harder to diagnose, prevent, mitigate or treat under certain social conditions. The epidemic is invariably worse in unequal, unstable societies where migration is common, poverty rife, levels of education low, and health services too fragmentary to offer adequate diagnosis or treatment.

The effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic are cumulative and skew populations. Children and the elderly, rather than adult income-earners, predominate. As De Waal (2003:13) comments:

'According to traditional patterns of life expectancy, a child who reaches adulthood might be expected to live for a further four or five decades. This forty or fifty years of adult life is the unexamined foundation of much of our economic and social life, and of our economics. On it is based the further expectation of handing on assets and skills to one's children and living to be a grandparent...it sustains the complex world of institutions which require people with prolonged personal experience to staff them. We are only just beginning to understand what happens to a society in which these assumptions no longer hold good'.

There have been increasingly frantic efforts to identify and address the needs of children who are affected by HIV/AIDS. For young children below school age, the situation is sometimes very severe. A UNESCO workshop, held in April 2002 in Paris, brought together people working in the field of HIV/AIDS and attempted to identify the needs of very young children affected by HIV/AIDS. These included:

- the amount of adult time that very young children need for survival and the consequent reluctance within affected communities for women to foster the youngest children.
- the particular dependence of young children on adult and community support, and the psycho-social and physical damage that may be experienced without it.
- the stigma that often attaches to young children whose mothers have died of HIV/AIDS.
- the need to preserve records and ensure the legal rights of young children.

Foster (1997) has documented attempts to mobilise community support for children affected by HIV/AIDS, including orphans, but notes the pressures on such communities to cope. His group in Manicaland in Zimbabwe has been offering support to destitute families through a home visiting scheme and income-generating activities, but he suggests that the communities may be at the limits of their ability to cope. He also points out that orphan or grandparent-headed households are likely to be chronically poor, and some practical aid in the form of clothing, help with school fees, etc. has to supplement self-help community initiatives. Biersteker (2003) makes similar observations in South Africa, but in addition, notes the paucity of initiatives that focus explicitly on the particular needs of young children. A recent study by Muthukrishna and Ebrahim (2006) documents the difficulty of schools in South Africa in coping with HIV/AIDs.

Finding the means of offering ECD support to children affected by HIV/AIDS, including orphans, is likely to assist communities in coping; for example, part-time crèche provision for relief care for those fostering young children, especially older women or grandparents, or crèche or other provision attached to schools, to enable child-headed households to cope with the youngest children.

### ***Young children in situations of war and conflict***

Refugee children may have witnessed terrible events and the deaths of close relations; they are likely to be impoverished and to be experiencing poor living conditions including poor nutritional status. The majority of the people in refugee camps are women and children, and many, if not most of them have lost whatever social support networks they may have had. Mothers who generally act as a buffer to their children, protecting them from the worst events, are themselves likely to be highly distressed and to feel helpless and powerless.

Machel undertook a review of the impact of war on children. Partly polemical, this review stressed the importance of respecting children's rights. It emphasized that "the effectiveness of psycho-social recovery programmes depends also to a large extent on an understanding and respect for local cultures, knowledge and traditions." (2001:81). The question about the value of psycho-social counselling, based on Euro-American definitions and understandings of post traumatic stress disorders (PTSDs) is frequently addressed in the literature about refugee children.

A systematic review on outcomes of interventions with young children who have directly experienced war and conflict by Lloyd, *et al.* (2004) pointed out the difficulties in the fluid and highly stressful conditions of refugee camps of obtaining unambiguous evidence on "what works". In addition many of the tests or evaluation

measures of children's behaviour are translated and adapted from standard North American tests. Most of the evidence is based on case studies or project self-evaluations with no control groups, but even when the evaluation of the intervention is carefully set up, allowances have to be made for extreme situations, and rapid and unexpected movements of refugees. The Lloyd et al review identified 18 recent studies of interventions with young refugee children, of which three were outcome studies with control groups, study of refugee children in Sudan; a study by Dybdahl (2001) of young Muslim children and their mothers in Bosnia; and a series of studies by Wolff, *et al.* (1995; 1999) on an orphanage for refugee children in Eritrea. Paardekooper's (2002) study for example suggested that given the uncertainties of refugee life, and the poor conditions in many camps, improving living circumstances and offering a supportive and stable group environment would be more likely to enable children to build up social support networks than any kind of PTSC. The review suggested that providing opportunities for children to play together, to establish friendships and social networks, and to develop their autonomy in a safe setting therefore seems likely to enhance their chances of coping with the traumas they have experienced as refugees.

## CONCLUSIONS

- **Childcare and Early Childhood Development initiatives in the South are varied, making them difficult to catalogue or compare.**

Initiatives vary considerably in their target groups, range of interventions, processes and outcomes, and costs. They vary, above all, in their context; what is a common and widespread understanding of ECD programmes and what it should provide or achieve in one country may be unrecognisable and inappropriate in another. Local context profoundly determines expectations of childhood, upbringing and learning, and the values that underpin them, eg the emphasis on play versus repetition as a means of learning, the place of instruction, the levels of resourcing, the emphasis on the individual rather than the group, expectations of obedience of children towards adults. Because of the crucial importance of local context, it is almost impossible to provide programming guides that address very different realities, although many donors do provide such guides.

- **ECD programmes are frequently promoted as part of a wider spectrum of activity for women**, eg as part of women's informal education (Biersteker 1996); income-generation projects, as part of women's employment; as an aspect of community development. UNDP has highlighted the importance of promoting gender equality in all aspects of governance and daily life, and to the extent that ECD programmes recognise the special problems women face in difficult circumstances, such as time-poverty or fluctuating household composition, they are likely to be more effective. The use of the word 'parent' obscures understanding of gender.



- **There is a considerable current emphasis in major donor initiatives on working with the parents of young children, encouraging them to ‘stimulate’ their children, which is partly inspired by (mis)readings of the research on brain development.**

Exaggerated and simplistic claims for ECD, based on misreadings of the evidence and their inappropriate importation to the South, may lead to inappropriate interventions and may perpetuate inequalities. Over-reliance on parental education projects and home-based care as ‘low-cost’ initiatives may be ineffective.

- **Most of the evidence commonly cited about the efficacy of ECD, is drawn from a very limited number of studies carried out in the USA, although the USA is itself untypical of OECD countries and ranks poorly among them.**

The basis of many ECD initiatives in the South is drawn from ‘Developmentally Appropriate Practice’, the manual devised in the USA by the National Association of Education for Young Children (Bredekamp & Copple 1997). While making some concessions to cultural diversity, this manual presupposes a universal scientific basis to child development activities, a position that has been trenchantly criticised from the South as a kind of colonialism (Viruru 2001).

- **In the North, most OECD countries (but not the USA) accept that equitable access to state-supported, centre-based early childhood education and care is integral to education and social welfare systems and to women’s participation in the workforce.** Ultimately, the question of effectiveness relates to levels of resources and equitable access to those resources. While more resources *per se* do not necessarily result in better services, what almost always happens when access is inequitable is that poor children get inferior services. Many countries in the South are simply too poor to contemplate the goal of equitable access in the short-term. But the failure to even consider the possibility in long-term planning is to perpetuate inequalities.

Multilateral organisations have tended to encourage early childhood interventions in developing countries which are generally low-cost, low quality and targeted, and arguably contribute to inequality (Rosemberg 2003).

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# **LOCAL EXPERIENCES OF CHILDHOODS IN THE VOICES OF SOUTH AFRICAN CHILDREN AFFECTED BY HIV/AIDS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Drawing on a small scale qualitative study of twenty children between the ages of eight and nine years from low-income families in KwaZulu-Natal, this paper explores the knowledge and experiences of children doing local childhoods within the realities of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Through the voices of young children, this paper aims to contest scientific discourses that emanate from the North in programming targeting young children in vulnerable circumstances. Social constructionist thinking is used to pay attention to children as knowable subjects of childhood and dominant discourses used for programming. Data for this study was produced through literature, focus group interviews, drawings, story telling, conversations and projection techniques. The analysis of the discourses suggests that within the situated context of HIV/AIDS, young children actively interpret the social realities as members of society living in vulnerable circumstances. Their realities contest conventional discourses in programming aimed at intervention in vulnerable circumstances. The paper concludes with a call for thinking from multiple realities of children's lives in the South in order to broaden the evidence base that informs intervention programmes.

## **INTRODUCTION**

At present the South African government is struggling to contain the spread of HIV/AIDS. As a facilitative state, the fight against the pandemic is approached in partnership with a consortium of international agencies. These agencies provide a variety of interventions aimed at young children, their families and communities.

Whilst initiatives related to improving the quality of life of young children and their families do have an impact, these gains are small (Penn 2007). Hardon (2005) notes that many of the AIDS interventions fail because they do not appropriately consider local realities. There is a lack of understanding of the way local people (including very young children) know and experience life within the context of HIV/AIDS, poverty, poor education and health.

There are several reasons why the local realities of people are ignored by international donor agencies. Monaheng (2000) notes how development work in the South, works from the assumption that developing countries are at a less advanced stage than the North. They adopt the view that the history and experience of North is sufficient for mapping intervention programmes for the South. In other words, countries in the South must follow the footsteps of the North to make a success of their future. Hence, a universal approach which is independent of context is favoured.

In intervention programmes for early childhood, defined as birth to nine years in the South African context, the universal approach favours ideas and theories from child

development and child psychology. Within these frameworks childhood is seen as the binary to adulthood. Attention is paid to the ages and stages in child development and milestones of progress towards rationality (Prout and James 1997). In the idea of children becoming adults they are viewed in deficient terms and their experiences as people in society is ignored. Adults assumptions about children emanating from evidence of White middle class children in the North, drives conventional understanding of children and childhood (Penn 2007).

The universal ideas from the field of child development are translated into Developmentally Appropriate Practice. This approach, developed in the United States, is favoured by international donor agencies as a basis for programming in the South (Penn 2007). The guide outlines behaviour appropriate for different age groups, kinds of activities that meet the needs of children and how teachers should deliver programmes. After criticisms related to culture and context, the guide was revised. In the revised version, however, local contexts are viewed as a variation to a universal theme of child development that still portrays western childhoods as the standard marker for early experiences.

Bearing the above in mind, this paper pays attention to HIV/AIDS as local reality that is a defining feature of the South. The voices of young children, in early schooling, are used to show the inadequacy of the discourses from the North that traditionally drives programming for young children in vulnerable circumstances in the South.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The social constructionist paradigm is useful in understanding childhood and children. Working from this frame of reference, the sociology of childhood emphasises the social constructionist nature of childhood (Prout and James 1997). The crucial space of childhood is not just an idea about a state of being. Rather, as Hacking (1999) notes, it is about how children in present societies are constructed. Sociologists of childhood argue that what a society expects of children, the way they are viewed, what is perceived as right and wrong for them and what they are competent and incompetent at, is highly dependent on the concept of childhood that a society has constructed.

Whilst every society will have children and adults there are no universal definitive account of what childhood is or what children should be like (James, Jenks and Prout 1998). Knowing about childhoods, means listening to the people (children) that are living the concept. Whilst criticised for being too relative, the socially constructed view of childhood and children is relevant to pay attention to the local realities of people's lives.

A further contribution of the sociology of childhood is the acceptance of children as having agency. In examining the adult/child binary and linking it to agency and structure, sociologists of childhood have drawn attention to childhoods as adult-made structures to predetermine the lives of children and children as authentic social actor whose understandings must form the basis to contribute to building a social world (James et al 1998). Whilst accepting that the raising of children's status to competent beings is not enough in changing practice with/for them, the notion of agency, in this paper, is viewed as an activist tool to critique taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin intervention work with young children.

Another helpful set of ideas proposed by social constructionist thinking emanates from the work of Foucault. Specifically, his ideas on discourse help to frame children's voices within power relations. Foucault (1974) explains discourse as something that works according to clearly definable rules. Weedon (1997) elaborates further. She notes that discourses are ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations that encompass such knowledge. The discourses consume the minds and bodies of individuals. They are always part of a wider network of power relations that have an institutional base which produces experts. These are important ideas to consider with regard to programming that uses standard markers from the North as evidence to shape interventions in the South.

## **RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY**

The study reported in this paper focused on the knowledge and lived experiences of children in early schooling in the context of HIV/AIDS. The voices of children were privileged. The research context was a primary school situated just outside Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. The school caters for both African and Indian children. The surrounding area is inhabited by people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Poverty, crime, violence and unemployment intersect with disease and illness to create vulnerable circumstances for growing up.

The paper draws on data from twenty children in Grade Three. All children were between the ages eight and nine years. These children were selected from the class register using the categories race and gender. The selected children lived in contexts that had a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

Data for the study was produced by creating a listening framework that respected children as competent and active beings. Clark (2005) notes that listening which respects children as social actors, allows researchers to design techniques that pay attention to hearing, interpreting and co-construction of meaning. Bearing this in mind, numerous participatory techniques were undertaken as methodologies for listening. At the outset, structured interviews were used to gain background information from learners. Three focus group interviews were held with the learners. This technique is considered to be an ideal way of generating data on sensitive issues (Wilkinson and Birmingham 2003). Furthermore, it is accepted as a good way to improve inter-subjective and dialogical relationships among participants and the researcher and the researched (Pattman and Chege 2003). The children were provided with opportunities to make comments, give responses and reflect on an exchange of ideas. Drawings, of the effect of HIV/AIDS on families, were useful in helping the children express their ideas. Persona dolls were used to create opportunities for the children to act out their responses. A doll called Karabo was used to stimulate discussion on children infected by HIV/AIDS. Story telling and conversations helped generate data on personal experiences and responses to Lindiwe, a character affected by HIV/AIDS.

Informed consent was obtained from the Department of Education and the school principal. Letters of consent were sent to the parents. They were informed about the nature and aims of the study. Issues of voluntary participation, confidentiality and



child-friendly techniques were also outlined. Letters of consent were both in English and IsiZulu.

In order to mobilise ethics in practice, the children were provided with information at the beginning of the study, at the beginning of each research activity and as the need arose. In order to invite children's assent to research activities, all information was presented in ways that took into account the children's ability to engage with information. All learners were comfortable with the use of English.

Although the children were familiar with the researcher, there were moments in which the researcher had to work through the power relations. In order to do this, multiple roles were used to create a non-threatening environment for the children. In research on experiences related to HIV/AIDS, Francis (2003) argues that researchers do become intertwined with the emotional experiences of the participants. The positioning of the researcher as a caregiver of support and a sensitive learner to children's experiences assisted in working with the power relations and emotionally charged responses that sometimes emerged. All child participation was voluntary and children were reminded that they were free to withdraw from activities without experiencing disadvantage.

The data was audiotaped and transcribed. It was analysed through examining how children's talk contradicted the discourses traditionally used in programming. A thematic storyline was developed through tracing the different ways in which children's talk deepened insight into the inadequacies of particular discourses.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The discourses of children situated outside society, children as innocent and the family as a network of support are presented as dominant frameworks that are contradicted through the voices of the children.

### **Children are situated outside society**

Thinking that emanates from western notions of childhood in the North tend to position young children as external to the adult world. The discourse of children situated outside society arises from the middle class concept of child-centredness. Rogoff (1990) notes that this concept creates the idea of an age segregated community where infants and young children are not seen as central to everyday life. She notes that in families in the US, young children are put into segregated spaces and given artefacts that do not relate to the real world. The creation of child-centred programmes in institutions for young children, as substitutes for home care, also create an artificial world based on isolationist practices which revolve around children's needs, interests and their perspectives. Furthermore, the child-centred philosophy removes the child from its history, relationships and context.

The context of HIV/AIDS and the intersecting influence of poverty, contests the western notion of how young children are relating to their world. Young children are integrated into the family and community life. Hence, the concept of child-centredness has very little relevance to children who are included in the day to day

adult life and community experiences. In situations such as these, Fler (2006) argues that we should be thinking in terms of “child embeddedness” where children’s socialisation takes place in the real world. This concept is appropriate for children living in vulnerable circumstances in South Africa where the boundaries between childhood and adulthood become blurred. Phiri and Webb (2002) note that this recognition helps to shape child-focused responses to HIV/AIDS based on experiences.

Naicker, Muthukrishna and Rule (2006), in examining the experiences of children affected by HIV/AIDS, note that when children take on adult responsibilities they become powerless. The authors argue that the tasks of household chores, caring for the sick are forced upon them. It is circumstances rather than their own volition that affects decisions in their lives. Conversely, taking on adult roles in real life, instead of simulated situations in play, helps children build resilience to the hardships they face. Children encounter alternate ways of doing childhoods, namely, through the problem solving in a variety of contexts. Bhana, Brixen, MacNaughton and Zimmerman (2006) note that in dealing with HIV/AIDS in families and communities, young children show a remarkable sense of humanity in a context of despair. In the study, the embeddedness of children within the care environment of HIV/AIDS was one of the obvious ways in which the reversal of adult/child role became evident. Children’s meaning making suggested the construction of an ethic of care by taking on adult responsibilities.

*Maria: Lindiwe didn’t come to school last week because ... she needs to take **care** for his mother and his baby brother and she needs to wash the dishes and love them and take **care** of them, hug them and bring them food. Wash their clothes and iron them.*

*Danny: He didn’t come to school because he was taking **care** of his family that they have... dying of HIV.*

*Blessing: She didn’t come to school because she must wipe all the floors and help his mother. If she wants to get to the toilet she must carry him up... and put him back on his bed.*

In the North death and bereavement are associated with difficult emotions that young children need to be protected from. Children undergoing stress and depression are identified as being at risk. They are carefully monitored and supported. When children’s lives are embedded inside the adult world in the vulnerable context of HIV/AIDS they see loved ones dying, attend funerals and participate in funeral rituals. They show signs of emotional stress but are left to find their own coping mechanisms. In the overwhelming context of HIV/AIDS, poverty and funding constraints, state mechanisms of support are largely absent. Where there are sick adults, limited support is aimed at adults and children are left to their own devices (Ebershon and Eloff 2002). The children spoke about the fear of dying.

*Maria: I am worried... I’m scared because the AIDS could get me and I could die.*

*Blessing: I’ m scared of when I got HIV I can die... I can die at anytime.*

*Justin: I am worried because I might get AIDS and I could die.*

Some children spoke about the fear of members of their family passing on in their absence.

*Blessing: When you leave them with no one and when you come back to school, you see the ambulance parking by his house and... he died.*

*Usher: I am scared if I went to school... no ones at home and if I come back to school I'm going to tell he (my father) died.*

They described support mechanisms to help them cope with the trauma experienced by HIV/AIDS.

*Maria: The family members are very helpful when you have HIV/AIDS.*

*Jenny: The neighbours can keep you safe.*

*Justin: The neighbour will phone Childline... Childline will keep you there for a month so that you can get better.*

Where children are situated inside the adult world in vulnerable circumstances, they have more opportunities to become worldwise about the concerns of their society at a particular time. The period of early schooling is part of the formative years. Young children's identities are still malleable and fluid (Davies 2003). Within the context of HIV/AIDS, adults set up cultural resources to socialise children into desirable patterns of conduct that will curb risk for the future. The children spoke about various mechanisms that they had access to in order to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS.

The children reported hearing about HIV/AIDS from significant others.

*Fiona: My mum and dad told me.*

*Ranger: In school, ma'am told us.*

Public icons, in the forefront of the battle against the pandemic, were also mentioned. *Nelson Mandela* was mentioned as a kind man who helped and cared for sick children. There was also reference to *Nkosi Johnson*, a child activist, who raised awareness of HIV/AIDS.

The media, as a mechanism aimed at magnifying danger, also featured strongly as a means through which the children accessed regulatory information.

*Justin: I heard many things in the newspapers, magazines, radios and news that people are saying AIDS is a very bad disease that is spreading through all the whole country and they are saying that we must not take needles and... touch anyone's blood.*

*Maria: I have heard of HIV in the newspaper that says... we must not take needles and put in someone's hand.*

*Tina: I heard the newspapers that tells that HIV is a bad sickness. It will kill everybody and it will bugger our blood cells.*

In this section it is suggested that the discourse of children situated outside the adult world is inadequate to intervene in the lives of young children living in vulnerable circumstances. The concept of "child embeddedness" as opposed to child-centeredness is more appropriate to pay attention to the child-society relationship in vulnerable circumstances.

### **Children are innocent**

Innocence is a defining feature of childhood. In mapping programmes for children it is natural to think of innocence as a universal state that differentiates children from adults (Cannella 1997, Keihily and Montgomery 2003). When young children are seen as innocent we see them as lacking in certain types of knowledge about their life world. This view creates the idea that children should be protected from certain experiences that pose a danger to their bodies and minds.

In order to protect children's innocence from dangerous actions and corrupting influences it is common to associate the activity of play as a space for regulation of safe knowledge. Play environments are constructed for children in order for them to get a sense of what is appropriate for them in a seal from the real world (Cannella 1997). Children are increasingly becoming world-wise and use spaces like the playground to contest the romanticised notion of play as social activity that is pressure free. Thorne (1993), for example, noted how play in a gendered context became a contested arena for boys and girls to construct their identities. The children in study spoke about how play became a risky space that required them to be serious about their choice of playmates because of the threat of becoming infected. The conceptions and misconceptions of HIV/AIDS in the context of play to construct rules for social behaviour, shows the pressure the children undergo to position themselves as knowing subjects.

*Usher: HIV can get you if you are **playing** with somebody. You can get hurt and you can touch his blood.*

*Beyonce: If Karabo has AIDS we cannot **play** with her or eat her lunch... If I eat and her lunch it will spread HIV will spread to me in my mouth.*

*Fiona: It will spread when I hold her hand and **play** with her.*

The idea of children as innocent was further contested by the way in the children were picking up on the discriminatory messages of HIV/AIDS. Moletsane (2003) contends that children living in realities of HIV/AIDS are often subjected to humiliation and taunts due to ignorance and fear. This is especially stark when children witness negative reactions to HIV/AIDS and receive distorted messages to avoid stigma. In interacting with these realities of life, young children actively construct their own

social orders through drawing upon existing adult-formulated rules (Cobb, Danby, Farrell 2005). Within the schooling context, children act out their fears through overt discrimination by isolating suspect playmates from activities. In their reaction to Karabo, as life-size doll, portrayed as having HIV/AIDS, the children spoke about how the space of play is used to mobilise exclusion and rejection.

*Donita: They won't **play** with him.*

*Ranger: They will throw stones and all.*

*Malaika: They'll hit him.*

*Brenda: They will not like Karabo to **play** because she have HIV/AIDS and then they will leave him alone.*

The connection between children and sexuality disrupts and challenges the conceptualisation of childhood as a period of innocence. In common sense terms we think of sex as the domain of adults and children as asexual. As a traditional taboo children and sex must be kept apart. When young children show sexual awareness then they are viewed as abnormal, unnatural children with unnatural knowledge (Robinson 2002). Those that advocate sex education for young children for empowerment against abuse, face the criticism that they are encroaching on childhood – telling children things that they do not need to know yet and do not have the experience or understanding to cope with (Keihily and Montgomery 2003).

In contexts where HIV/AIDS is a familiar presence, its effects are substantial among young children. Bhana et al (2006), for example, note that in South Africa children between the ages six to eight are actively constructing meanings of sexuality within the context of race, class and HIV/AIDS. The authors note that in Grades One and Two girls show fear of boys, older men and rape. Explicit messages related to safe sex using artefacts associated with children are used to curb risk. For example, the letters A,B,C are associated with sexual behaviour. AIDS ribbons are used as symbols in a variety of ways including sexualised meanings. The lack of infrastructure also allows young children to become aware of sexual meanings. Muthukrishna (2006) notes how in the Richmond area of KwaZulu-Natal the lack of proper housing forces adults and children to stay in cramped spaces. Children witness adult sexual activities.

It was evident that the children in the study were aware of sex as a means of transmission of the HIV/AIDS virus but were reluctant to articulate it. When it was verbalised by some children, others nudged each other and smiled. This suggests that the children internalised the view of sexual awareness as a “no go area” for children. The excerpt reveals some responses to the question “How do people get AIDS?”

*Usher: You have sex with somebody.*

*Blessing: When you sleep with somebody who are HIV positive and when you touch him, when you kiss him and when you make sex with him you can get the disease?*

*Maria: When you are sharing food, you cannot get HIV/AIDS and kissing... you kiss her, you can't get HIV and sex you get in... you get HIV/AIDS.*

This section suggests that the discourse of children as innocent together with the idea that children are situated outside the adult world has little relevance for doing childhoods in vulnerable circumstances. The context of HIV/AIDS and related circumstances form a catalyst for the children to make meaning of play and sexual awareness in ways that respond to their local realities.

### **The family as a network of support**

In the context of western childhoods it is natural to think of the family as the nurturer of early experiences (Cannella 1997). The nuclear family structure is considered the ideal arrangement where children are provided with both male and female role models in small isolated units. It is also argued that dual income influences the quality of childhood experiences. Child rearing experiences include consistency in caregivers, altering the home for child exploration, spending time with children on specific activities, equipping them with play material and creating a number of appropriate language experiences. These are valued as best family practices.

In South Africa there are many diverse family models besides the nuclear family. Meintjies (2006) in her analysis of the General Household Survey in South Africa, found that 35% of children live with both parents, 39% live with their mothers, 3 % live only with their fathers, 23% live with neither parents and mostly live with the extended families and relatives, 0.7% live with no adults. In the context of HIV/AIDS parents, especially mothers, are under pressure to deal with their own trauma of illness and poverty. The continuation of the migrant labour system contributes towards the absence of fathers in children's lives. Many mothers also take on employment in the urban areas. Young children are left in the care of grandmothers who are ill and survive on a pension (Kvalsig, Chhagan and Taylor 2007). Within the context of poverty, disease and survival it is difficult to think of sensitive parenting which is characteristic of middle class child rearing. Caregivers use differing competencies in flexible ways. Childrearing is also approached from cultural experiences and on a trial and error basis especially in the case of teenage mothers.

In the study the children spoke about variety of structures that functioned as a network of support for children living with HIV/AIDS. The family was viewed as a structure that provided contradictory experiences. The children supported the idea of the family as a primary unit for care.

*Harry: Families take care of them and when they want things the family buys for them the things like clothes, food, money to spend at school.*

*Ranger: The family helps them when they have to go to school. They pay school fees and they buy clothes for them.*

The children also spoke about the family as a dysfunctional unit that causes trauma in children's lives.

*Malaika: I didn't come to school last year because my dad was drunk... He hit me because I didn't go to school.*

*Usher: Everyday he (the father) drinks alcohol and they don't take care of the children.*

The role of the extended family in caregiving is typical of some communities in South Africa. In a study on caregivers of children on antiretroviral treatment in three communities in South Africa, it was found despite having health problems, children showed integration into the extended family network. Children spent most of their time with grandmothers (43%), mothers (40%), cousins (31%) and aunts (7%) (see Kvalsig, Chhagan and Taylor 2007 for more details). The children in the study spoke about grandmothers, aunts and uncles as people that help those that are ill with the HIV virus.

Neighbours were seen as complementing/replacing the role of the family. The children spoke about how neighbours were key in providing food, shelter as well as assistance with domestic chores.

*Beyounce: Neighbours can bath the babies and they can cook and they can wash the dishes and go to the shop.*

*Fiona: Neighbours give the children something to eat and then they make them sleep.*

*Phindile: (pointing to a drawing) This is her two sisters... They are crying because their mother died. This next door. The people next door are asking why are you crying. Then they told them. They said don't cry and don't worry. I will take care of you.*

The children were also knowledgeable that neighbours can become overburdened in their caregiving role.

*Ranger: They can't only help you. They have to see for themselves too. They don't have much money to help you.*

Faith-based organisations play an integral part in family and community experiences. In the context of HIV/AIDS, Foster (2003) notes that faith-based organisations care for more than 140 000 children in six Southern African countries. Volunteers from these organisations provide children with spiritual, material, educational and psychosocial support. Children recognised the importance of the church in supporting children.

*Maria: The church is very helpful because when you are poor, the church can give you money to buy some food, some water, something to drink and clothing.*

*Alicia: The church is very helpful because if you got HIV and you got no money to go to hospital, they will give you money.*

As part of an institutional family in vulnerable circumstances, teachers are regarded as key people responsible for care giving. Muthkrishna (2006) notes how teachers were able to show instances of authentic care outside the demands of the formal

curriculum in the context of HIV/AIDS. She notes that this was especially evident when care was immediate and non-demanding. Most children in the study viewed teachers as people rendering assistance to children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS. They saw the role of teachers as home visitors and providers of resources.

*Harry: They go to Lindiwe's house and they give food and money to buy thing.*

*Maria: Teachers help to make Lindiwe feel good. They give him lunch so that his brains can open.*

This section provided insight into a network of structures that operate to shape young children's childhoods in the context of HIV/AIDS. A broader network than the family is viewed as key in providing care and nurturing.

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

This paper has shed light on the inadequacy of discourses from the North that traditionally characterises programming for young children in vulnerable circumstances in the South. The voices of young children, as experts in childhoods and active members of society whose lives are embedded in the realities of HIV/AIDS, challenge dominant discourses. The circumstances of HIV/AIDS makes the children adopt ways of knowing and living that is relevant for life in a vulnerable context. They take the concerns from the adult world and actively interpret it to make meaning. They show the need to have multiple sources of support besides the family to shape their childhoods.

The evidence from this small-scale study draws attention to the need to think from the multiple realities of children's lives in the South. The borrowing of evidence from the North, especially the US, in the name of scientific universal knowledge for intervening in vulnerable childhoods must be subjected to critical scrutiny. In order to broaden the evidence base that takes into account the local realities, with the voices of young children, it is necessary to undertake a decentring exercise.

Sanders (2004) elaborates. He notes that it is important to ensure that a dominant experience on the receiving end of child rearing does not become the yardstick against which other methods of childrearing are compared. There will be differences. These differences are not to be interpreted as deficits. Rather he argues, that we should acknowledge the value of difference as how people (children) in their context do things and how this information can be used to invite their local participation on how they can be assisted. This idea has the potential to map more context-sensitive programming in vulnerable circumstances.

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# **MAPPING KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This project addresses barriers to socio-economic development and quality of life in less-developed countries, with the potential for impact on policy and practice for poverty-reduction. The focus is on poverty in early childhood, and the nature of home-, centre- and community-based early experiences and other ameliorating factors attempting to address such poverty, that is, early childhood care and education (ECCE). The intention is to illuminate the tensions between 'official' Western childrearing practices, indigenous beliefs and local realities through knowledge exchange and transfer. This will help to achieve a better accommodation, co-operation and co-ordination among diverse ECCE stakeholders and increase effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of their existing strategies. The locus is KwaZulu Natal, South Africa (SA). It represents a collaboration between University of KwaZulu-Natal, SA, University of Warwick and University of East London, UK. Child poverty in SA is exceedingly high. In 2005, two-thirds (11.9 million) of children lived in households that had an income of R1.200 per month or less and KwaZulu-Natal has higher rates of child poverty than the national average (Monson, Hall, Smith, & Shung-King, 2006).

## **DEFINITIONS**

Definitions of ECCE vary and this project adopts the holistic approach of UNESCO (2007:3):

ECCE supports children's survival, growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, and cognitive, social, physical and emotional development - from birth to entry into primary school in formal, informal and non-formal settings.

ECCE programmes in SA cover diverse arrangements, from parenting programmes to community-based childcare, centre-based provision and formal pre-primary education often in schools. This is typically for two age groups: children under three and those from three years to primary school entry, usually by six years. Most OECD countries however have at least two years of free pre-primary education. In SA, many children live in under-developed rural areas where there is a lack of access to services, infrastructure and opportunities. Poverty has to be understood as multi-dimensional, encompassing not just lack of money and material resources but other privations such as access to schooling, health care, adequate shelter, water and sanitation, and an environmentally hostile living environment. Poverty is compounded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. A recent study

(Muthukrishna 2006) illustrated the extent to which access to education is severely compromised by the incidence of HIV/AIDS in the community.

## RATIONALE

Six *Education for All* goals (EFAs) of UNESCO 2000 Dakar Forum identified the need to provide learning opportunities at every stage of life, from infancy to adulthood, with a target year for achieving these by 2015. Pursuit of global co-operation is an essential part of fulfilling these goals. With the arrival of technologies that facilitate communication and connections among researchers and policy-makers across the globe, we are now in a better position to value and realise international collaborations that involve reciprocal learning and policy development. Starting with shared goals, backed by regular and rigorous research, we intend to begin a process of sharing ideas, actions and commitments among ECCE professionals, parents, community leaders, academic and non-academic stakeholders, business and NGOs in all parts of society.

The first EFA goal is to expand and improve comprehensive ECCE, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Recent and ongoing studies in Southern Africa (Monson, *et al.* 2006; Penn 2005; 2007; Biersteker [forthcoming]) suggest that this goal is far from being met. Whilst ECCE is expanding, statistics are likely to be unreliable (*EFA Monitoring Report* 2007), especially in their coverage of peri-urban and rural areas. In the absence of coherent national policies and funding, local ECCE projects are necessarily self-funding. In urban areas, ECCE provision can attract paying parents, and attain standards of provision and training that mirror those of the North. In rural areas and in townships and peri-urban areas, ECCE provision is more likely to be small-scale and improvisatory, with high turnover of projects. It is characterized by what Haihambo, Mushaandja & Hengari (2006) describe as “benign neglect” towards the most vulnerable children.

There is a considerable rhetoric about the importance of ECCE, its potential for tackling disadvantage and setting strong foundations for learning. Adherents argue that a “holistic” package of health, nutrition, care and stimulation will have far-reaching consequences in the amelioration of poverty (Grantham-McGregor, Cheung, Cueto, Glenwwe, Richter, Strupp & The International Child Development Steering Group 2007; Heckman 1999). The evidence for health and nutritional interventions is powerful although ideas about health and well-being are invariably locally contextualized and interpreted (Warren, Slikkerveer & Brokensha, 1995; Rosaldo & Xavier 2002). Care, stimulation and learning are even more so essentially cultural concepts. There is a substantial body of anthropological and psychological evidence (Gottlieb 2004; DeLoache & Gottlieb 2000; LeVine 2003; Hewlett & Lamb 2005; Scheper-Hughes 1992; Boydson 2007) suggesting that patterns of care, stimulation and learning are intrinsically contextual. Yet almost all evidence informing the debate about early childhood interventions in the South is drawn from and framed within discussion about a relatively limited range of US studies, in which concepts of care, stimulation, learning and pedagogy are largely taken for granted and unexplored (Penn & Lloyd 2007). The predominant model for ECCE used by development agencies is ‘Developmentally Appropriate Practice’, a model tried and tested in the USA, that ascribes certain behaviours to certain stages of development, warranting particular responses from carers (Evans, Myers & Ifeld, 2000). Burman (1994) and Lubeck (1996; 2000) exposed the problems inherent in the creation of a ‘universal’ practice premised upon a universal theory of development and universal child-rearing practices to foster development by

distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate practice. They maintained that such theories are social constructions and not enduring truths.

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (supported by major donors and with high level political support from Ministers of Education and senior civil servants from most African countries) has a working group on ECCE that has produced a number of papers summarizing ECCE initiatives in Africa (Hyde & Kabiru 2003). Similarly the World Bank has supported the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU). This provides postgraduate training in ECCE, aimed at Africans working in senior ECCE positions, emphasising the cultural and ecological settings of children and drawing on African material. But these programmes tend to rely upon and produce broad advocacy documents, inevitably drawing on global arguments for supporting early childhood. Within a SA context, there has been considerable debate about appropriate 'indigenous' models (SA Ministry of Education 2005), and attempts to develop local standards. Nevertheless, models and understandings from the North tend to predominate, especially at the top end of the childcare market.

The need to intervene in early childhood is also argued from another perspective - that of Children's Rights. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly 1989) ratified by one hundred and ninety-five nations, guarantees the rights of all young children to protection, provision and participation. There has been subsequent work exploring the implications of the convention for young children and how it can be interpreted for the benefit of children living in conditions of chronic poverty (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2007; Gordon, Nandy, Pantazis, Pemberton & Townsend, 2003). The most recent EFA monitoring document argues for a robust approach to children's rights within the EFA framework. This work also raises the question of how cultural contexts are interpreted, what participation might mean in a situation where childhood is viewed as a developmental stage characterized by docility and respectfulness.

## **THEORETICAL FOCUS**

International agencies argue strongly that ECCE interventions lead to substantial change in education and quality of life outcomes for children. Yet the model of ECCE intervention is derived from the North, and is often narrowly conceived and thus ineffective and unsustainable. There are two conceptual frameworks that we have used to address this argument and to inform our work.

The first draws upon ideas about aid interventions and knowledge transfer. There is an increasing body of work, across a range of disciplines which argues that aid interventions to address and alleviate chronic poverty, including educational interventions, can be more comprehensively understood within theories of globalization and knowledge transfer (Bradley & Levinson 2000; Green 2003; Fass 2003; Katz 2004; Kaufman & Rizzini 2002; Mosse & Lewis 2005; Quarles van Ufford & Giri 2003; Rahnema 2002; Rosaldo & Xavier 2002; Suarez-Orozco & Qin Hilliard 2004; Stirrat 2000).

Nuanced studies of knowledge-transfer between North and South are necessary to illustrate the way in which global ideas are articulated, contextualized and reapplied in local circumstances. Local adaptations may be creative, and involve considerable resilience, reworking or resistance, but in no way can recipients be regarded as passive vehicles for change.

Without detailed and grounded understandings, it is argued, the aid process is over-optimistic and explanations of its success, or more predictably failure, are likely to be simplistic. In turn, failed attempts at knowledge transfer, and relief or reversal of chronic poverty can be more demoralising than no intervention. As Ferguson (2002:149) in a much-cited study of Zambian communities, suggests:

If people who have, in good faith, lived out the failed plotline of modernization are not simply to be disconnected and abjected from the new world order, it will be necessary to find new ways of thinking about both progress and responsibility in the aftermath of modernism.

Within this overarching critique of interventions that aim to alleviate chronic poverty lies the second theoretical approach we adopt that refers to the particular field of ECCE. In contradistinction to universalistic approaches to child development, there is a theoretical school of thought, termed 'cultural psychology', at the crossover of anthropology and psychology, that rejects the view that culture can be treated as an independent variable or additional to universal processes of child development and childrearing. Instead it explores how in Bruner's phrase "child-rearing practices and beliefs reflect local conceptions of how the world is and how the child should be readied for living in it." (Bruner 2000: xi). Schweder, Goodnow, Hatano, LeVine, Markus & Miller (1998) have exposed the Western social science ontology of individualism and its focus on an individualised, independent, private and inner self. Kitayama & Markus (2000); Markus & Kitayama (1991; 1994) contrasted the independent self valued in North American and European cultures with the East Asian view of the self as interdependent with others within the social context. Nsamenang (2004) has attempted to provide a critique of the shortcomings of Euro-American developmental psychology, and instead attempted to elaborate an African view of development

Bar-On (2004) argued that Western individualistic assumptions about the meaning and direction of life are derived from Judeo-Christian ethos and capitalist modes of production. Child-rearing practices and, hence, socialisation are geared towards autonomy, self-determination and self-reliance, manifest in the value placed on curiosity and exploration and their pedagogical equivalents. By contrast, in sub-Saharan Africa, social networks, and especially kinship are paramount, calling for a conceptualisation of society based on institutional roles, duties and obligations (Doob 1985). In terms of upbringing, this calls for internalisation of defined norms and beliefs through discipline and control seeking to inculcate obedience and responsibility rather than explanation and negotiation.

Despite lip service to cultural contexts, investments in curriculum design and teacher training have followed the expected socialisation and pedagogical goals of ECCE of developed countries. In the Botswana context, Bar-on observed that private ECCE providers and their parents wanted and sought Western practices, whilst most parents using community-based and NGO facilities wanted to preserve local culture. She concluded that more research was needed to expose and resolve tensions between uncritical acceptance of Western childrearing and the value of preserving indigenous practices and local realities. Penn (2007) detailed the gap between the roll-out of an education and training sector wide improvement programme with an ECCE component and very different local realities, especially amongst the poorest communities.

Our project thus focuses on the knowledge, understandings and skills brought to the contested nature and practice of ECCE and the contextualised way in which young children learn and develop.

## **OBJECTIVES**

In line with research challenges identified, our objectives are to:

- increase understanding of the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which ECCE programmes are delivered by specifying what such programmes might comprise in the SA context, their policies and objectives, their situated practices and target populations;
- expose what competing and possibly contested 'official' frameworks, as well as informal theories, are being brought to bear in the preparation and training for, as well as delivery and evaluation of such programmes;
- respond to methodological challenges posed by large-scale and quantitative international comparative work by the creation of qualitative data-sets at local, district, provincial and national level, that are intended to stimulate participatory learning and action;
- promote transfer and exchange of knowledge between social scientists, ECCE policy-makers, practitioners and local communities, with a view to increasing inter-organisational co-operation and the effectiveness and hence cost-effectiveness of their strategies.

While international co-operation is important, there are challenges that limit the extent to which experiences, programmes and research findings from one social context related to ECCE can be applied to other cultural and linguistic realities facing different policy and resource constraints (Maggi, Irwin, Siddiqui, Poureslami, Hertzman & Hertzman, 2005).

Accordingly the scope of this study is to integrate knowledge about ECCE at different levels from an international perspective, to describe and analyse the implications for ECCE at the global level.

## **CURRENT CONCEPTIONS**

In order to make sense of current conceptions of early childhood, learning, development, health and education in SA, it is necessary to take account of what is understood globally by 'early childhood', 'development', 'learning', 'health' and 'educational success' and how these are influenced and even shaped by wider national and international as well as local policy agendas. Debate and discourse on the nature of early childhood development, health, learning and education needs to be examined in the light of influences originating from international, national and local early childhood policy and how this is re-interpreted by teachers in order to construct local practice.

Whilst it may be possible to gain insight into differing perspectives and constructions of early childhood learning, development, health and education over time, it is also important to understand that such perspectives are constructed at different levels and in varying contexts, as well as constantly changing in time. On a micro level, the way practitioners understand, interpret and reconstruct early childhood learning and development will be intrinsically linked to their beliefs, knowledge and experience of the early childhood

curriculum, learning theories, as well as contextual factors in which they operate. On a macro level different local and national pressure groups, donors and political parties will compete to influence education and development policy in relation to global and national interests. In order to understand the dynamic and complex relationship between discourse, policy and practice in relation to early childhood learning, health, development and education, a policy trajectory model is proposed (Bowe, Ball & Gold 1992). This suggests that competing ideologies and interests struggle to influence policy and practice at three levels. Within the policy *context of influence*, different interest groups compete to influence the definitions and purposes of ECCE. In the *context of policy text production* the production of formal and informal policy texts reflects a compromise of views, struggles and influences of the policy writers, in the same way as arenas of influence represent competing views. Whilst policy texts are written in a language that is understood and acceptable to the public and appeals to common sense, they are not necessarily coherent in practice and for specific contexts, representing as they do a rich amalgam of influences. The consequences of policy text emerge only when it is enacted within the *context of practice*. Policy writers cannot control how their texts will be interpreted and relevant stakeholders will reinterpret and recreate it in relation to the resources they have available. This shifts power from the policy-makers to policy-interpreters.

## **FUTURE PRIORITIES**

Western notions of developmentally appropriate practice cannot be uncritically accepted and need to be juxtaposed with indigenous models, beliefs and practices. Further research is required to explicate African-oriented child development ECCE policies and situated practices for practitioner-training and curriculum development that accompany investments of international donors in order that better accommodations can be achieved. The first stage is to expand ECCE networks - academic and professional, NGO and donor groups - within key SA nations and provide research-informed evidence that will form the basis to develop training and encourage appropriate practices. By such means we hope to enable all parties to develop understanding of interaction between research and development of policy and practice that contributes to the delivery of an appropriate ECCE investment framework and hence reduction of poverty

## **POSTSCRIPT**

To what extent have our original assumptions been challenged? Although western psychology has been a dominant influence across the world, there has been an increasing awareness of the need to develop psychology in ways that meet local needs and contexts (Lunt & Poortinga 1996). Lunt (2005:79), however, identified three features of indigenous psychology: it perpetuates the colonial status of the 'native' mind, imposes on a majority-world country psychologies developed in and relevant to industrialized countries; comprises a psychology used for exploitation of the masses.

Hwang (2005) meanwhile has characterized three large-scale attempts to incorporate non-Western cultural factors into psychological research: 'modernisation' theory, concerned with modernising individuals in order to modernise the state; research on individualism/ collectivism, contrasting societies on the basis of Western individualism; and the indigenisation movement that has emerged in the new power structure of globalization, world politics and economy. Cultural psychology, he argued, reflects power relationships between Western and non-Western countries and modernisation of non-

Western academics. Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen (1992) maintained that a goal of cross-cultural psychology is a universal psychology that incorporates Western *and* indigenous psychologies. With better communication, pursuit of global co-operation involving reciprocal research is a real possibility with potential to create knowledge exchange and transfer of effective indigenous practice to other poor parts of Southern Africa.

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# **MAPPING KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This pilot study explores through participative methods the implicit models, situated understandings and processes of early childhood care and education in South Africa in the context of poverty. The intention is to expose and reconcile potential tensions between 'official' Western and classed child-rearing practices and indigenous beliefs and realities of poor communities in KwaZulu-Natal.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The pilot study to be reported here focuses on barriers to socio-economic development and quality of life in less-developed countries, with the potential for impact on policy and practice for poverty-reduction. The focus is on poverty in early childhood, and the nature of home-, centre- and community-based early experiences and other ameliorating factors that attempt to address such poverty, that is early childhood education and care (ECCE). The hope is to achieve better accommodation, co-operation and co-ordination among diverse ECCE stakeholders and increase the effectiveness and thus cost-effectiveness of their existing strategies. Two theoretical frameworks were used for the accompanying background paper: the first draws upon ideas about aid intervention from theories of globalization and knowledge transfer (eg Katz 2004); the second upon cultural psychology (eg Nsamenang 2004).

## **RATIONALE**

Six *Education for All* goals (EFAs) of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2000) Dakar Forum identified the need to provide learning opportunities at every stage of life, from infancy to adulthood, with a target year for achieving these by 2015. Pursuit of global co-operation is an essential part of fulfilling these goals. With the arrival of technologies that facilitate communication and connections among researchers and policy-makers across the globe, we are now in a better position to value and realise international collaborations that involve reciprocal learning and policy development. Starting with shared goals, backed by regular and rigorous research, we intend to begin a process of sharing ideas, actions and commitments among ECCE professionals, parents, community-leaders, academic and non-academic stakeholders, business and NGOs in all parts of society.

The first EFA goal is to expand and improve comprehensive ECCE, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Recent and ongoing studies in Southern Africa (Monson, Hall, Smith and Shung-King 2006; Penn 2005; 2007; Biersteker [forthcoming]) suggest that this goal is far from being met. Whilst ECCE is expanding, statistics are likely to be unreliable (*EFA Monitoring Report*, UNESCO 2007), especially in their coverage of peri-urban and rural areas. In the absence of coherent national policies and funding, local ECCE projects are necessarily self-funding. In urban areas, ECCE provision can attract paying parents, and attain standards of provision and training that mirror those of the North. In rural areas and in townships and peri-urban areas, ECCE provision is more likely to be small-scale and improvisatory, with high turnover of projects. It is characterized by what Haihambo, Mushaandja and Hengari (2005) describe as “benign neglect” towards the most vulnerable children.

There is considerable rhetoric about the importance of ECCE, its potential for tackling disadvantage and setting strong foundations for learning. Adherents argue that a “holistic” package of health, nutrition, care and stimulation will have far-reaching consequences in the amelioration of poverty (Grantham-McGregor, Cheung, Cueto, Glewwe, Richter, Strupp and The International Child Development Steering Group 2007; Heckman 1999). The evidence for health and nutritional interventions is powerful, although ideas about health and well-being are invariably locally contextualized and interpreted (Rosaldo and Xavier 2002). Care, stimulation and learning are even more so essentially cultural concepts. There is substantial anthropological and psychological evidence (Gottlieb 2004; DeLoache & Gottlieb 2000; LeVine 2003; Hewlett & Lamb 2005; Scheper-Hughes 1993; Boydon 2007) suggesting that patterns of care, stimulation and learning are intrinsically contextual. Yet almost all evidence informing the debate about early childhood interventions in the South is drawn from and framed within discussion about a relatively limited range of US studies, in which concepts of care, stimulation, learning and pedagogy are largely taken for granted and unexplored (Penn & Lloyd 2007). The predominant model for ECCE used by development agencies is ‘Developmentally Appropriate Practice’, a model tried and tested in the USA that ascribes certain behaviours to certain stages of development, warranting particular responses from carers (Evans, Myers and Ifeld, 2000). Burman (1994) and Lubeck (1996; 2000) exposed the problems inherent in the creation of a ‘universal’ practice premised upon a universal theory of development and universal child-rearing practices to foster development, by distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate practice. They maintain that such theories are social constructions and not enduring truths.

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (supported by major donors and with high-level political support from ministers of Education and senior civil servants from most African countries) has a working group on ECCE that has produced a number of papers summarizing ECCE initiatives in Africa (Hyde & Kabiru 2003). Similarly the World Bank has supported the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU). This provides postgraduate training in ECCE, aimed at Africans working in senior ECCE positions, emphasising the cultural and ecological settings of children and drawing on African material. But these programmes tend to rely upon and produce broad advocacy documents, inevitably drawing on global arguments for supporting early childhood. Within a SA context, there has been considerable debate about appropriate ‘indigenous’ models (South Africa Department

of Education 2005), and attempts to develop local standards. Nevertheless, models and understandings from the North tend to predominate, especially at the top end of the childcare market.

The need to intervene in early childhood is also argued from another perspective - that of Children's Rights. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly 1989), ratified by one hundred and ninety-five nations, guarantees the rights of all young children to protection, provision and participation. There has been subsequent work exploring the implications of the convention for young children and how it can be interpreted for the benefit of children living in conditions of chronic poverty (Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN 2005; Gordon, Nandy, Pantazis, Pemberton and Townsend 2003). The most recent EFA monitoring document argues for a robust approach to children's rights within the EFA framework. This work also raises the question of how cultural contexts are interpreted, and what participation might mean in a situation where childhood is viewed as a developmental stage characterized by docility and respectfulness.

## **AIMS**

The study thus sought to:

- (1) increase understanding of socio-economic and cultural contexts in which ECCE programmes are delivered by specifying what such programmes might comprise in the SA context, their policies and objectives, their situated practices and target populations;
- (2) expose what competing and possibly contested 'official' frameworks are being brought to bear as well as informal theories in the preparation, training for, and delivery and evaluation of such programmes;
- (3) respond to methodological challenges posed by large-scale and quantitative international comparative work, by creation of qualitative datasets at local, district, provincial and national level, intended to stimulate participatory learning and action;
- (4) promote transfer and exchange of knowledge between social scientists, ECCE policy-makers, practitioners and local communities with a view to increasing inter-organisational co-operation, the effectiveness and hence cost-effectiveness of their strategies.

It has been argued that to make sense of current conceptions of early childhood learning, development, health and educational success, it is necessary to take account of the way these are influenced and even shaped by wider national and international as well as the local policy agendas.

## **CONTEXT**

A nationwide audit of provision Department of Education, Republic of South Africa (2001) revealed that fewer than one-sixth of children attended Early Child Development (ECD) in South Africa, from birth to four years. At the site concerned in the present study, the initial focus of practitioners had been on raising community awareness concerning children's rights and benefits of ECD, with home-based ECD activities planned for individual children as an alternative to site-based provision.

Such priorities were challenged by initial home visits that showed a community stricken by family breakdown caused by poverty and unemployment, migration in search of work, malnutrition, illness and death through HIV/AIDs.

Practitioners recognised the need for a more holistic approach to enhance the capacity of families and communities to address the more devastating challenges confronting them. Through social action learning, such programmes have expanded and evolved towards integrated community development intervention ...Broader based strategies were needed to create real sustainable and meaningful transformation of capacity of families, community, local leaders and the practitioners. (Lead professional)

The Family and Community Motivator (FCM)<sup>46</sup> approach used works in vulnerable communities. It has its roots in *ubuntu* and a human-rights approach building on local knowledge and resources to promote resilience amongst children and their caregivers. *Ubuntu*, based on traditional African values, is about tolerance, sharing and mutual co-operation. It puts children at the centre of community development and builds circles of support at family, household and community level. In a context of vulnerability, of family- and community-breakdown, these values are severely challenged.

## BACKGROUND

Caregiver involvement has been used broadly to represent several different forms of participation in education and with schools. Epstein (1995) created a typology of six forms of parent involvement that included:

1. parenting, or helping families establish a home environment to support children as learners;
2. communicating, that comprised effective home-to-school and school-to-home exchanges concerning educational programmes and children's progress; volunteering, or recruiting parental help and support; learning at home, or providing help to children with curriculum-related activities; decision-making, or developing parents as leaders and representatives; collaborating with community, or identifying and exploiting strengths and resources in the community to strengthen educational programmes, family practices and children's learning and development.

The typology provides a framework for considering how caregiver practices may be mobilised to meet specific objectives. This drew on Epstein's (1987) school, family and community partnerships model based on a theory of family-school connections, in which overlapping and non-overlapping contexts of influence in which children learn and develop – the family, school and community and the complex social and psychological relations between individuals at home, school and community. Epstein (2001) emphasised the benefits of greater overlap among teachers, parents and children and, hence, increase in co-operative efforts.

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<sup>46</sup> Newman, M. (2006) *Family and Community Motivators. The front line of support for vulnerable young children*. Western Cape.

This model resembles Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1986) ecological model that locates the child at the centre of the model, surrounded by microsystems of family, peer group, classroom and neighbourhood which all influence the child's development. Meanwhile, interactions occur among the microsystems, for instance when caregivers and educators attempt to co-ordinate their efforts to educate the child through the mesosystem, consisting of interactions among the microsystems.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995; 1997) have offered a different model of parent involvement in their children's education, focused on parental role construction and beliefs, and drew upon studies designed to enhance parents' beliefs and self-efficacy (Bandura 1977; 1986; 1993; 1995; 1997). Self-efficacy theory suggests that parents' behaviour is influenced by the outcomes that they anticipate from their actions, thus the stronger the sense of self-efficacy for a task, such as helping with a child's learning and development, the higher will be their goals and the stronger their persistence in reaching those goals. Parent involvement processes that influence their children's learning outcomes include modeling, reinforcement and instruction (Bandura 1977). Moreover, if they feel themselves to have the resources or 'where-with-all' to help with their child's learning, they are more likely to become involved. Hence, personal self-efficacy depends upon the parents' beliefs, attitudes and skills or sense of personal competence. The greater extent to which parents hold positive beliefs about their efficacy to influence their children's learning, the more likely they are to be involved. There is a developing literature that supports the benefits of family involvement and the importance of building caregivers' capacity to support their children's learning and educational progress.

Similar holistic models of intervention to support and develop the health and well-being of young children and their families, underpinned by ecological approaches, can be found. For example, Olds, Eckenrode, Henderson, Junior., Kitzman and Luckey (1998), Olds, Robinson, Pettit, Luckey, Holmberg, Ng, Isacks, Sheff, and Henderson Junior (2004) and Olds (2005) developed a nurse-family visitor model drawing on the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979), attachment theory (Bowlby 1969; 1973; 1979; 1980) and in particular the social learning theory of Bandura (1977). This model underpinned approaches offered to families as a means to increase motivation and generate behavioural change with respect to matters of health and well-being. Slade (2002, 2005), Slade, Grienberger, Bernbach, Levy and Locker (2005) and Slade, Sadler and Mayes (2005) also used such models and approaches in the context of family relationship improvement, as did Fonagy, Redfe and Charman (1997) and Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist and Target (2004a; 2004b) in establishing and enhancing caregiver-child relationship and attachment through the development of maternal reflective function, pre- and post-natally.

These approaches have much in common with the Family and Community Motivator (FCM) programme being used in the community observed, which places the child at the centre of community development (microlevel) but also aims to build circles of support at family, household and community levels (mesolevel). These levels are characterized by unemployment, poverty, illness and death and reflecting broader influences (macrolevel), requiring the establishment of social networks and building resilience so that primary caregivers can access basic services, housing, employment and hence income.

Based on the conceptual frameworks outlined above, there are good grounds to suppose that the earlier families and the community have opportunities to become more involved in their children's social, emotional and intellectual development and learning, the more powerful the support offered to their children may be. Moreover, by building the capacity of the family and community through enhancing their knowledge, skills and beliefs, the greater their confidence, sense of self-efficacy and positive involvement in their children's development will become and the more likely the positive impact on the child.

Accordingly, policies, practices and views of caregivers, professionals and representatives of the Provincial Department of Education were explored through document analysis, audio-taped interviews and video-taped observations, in order to uncover policy-to-practice concerns and possibly competing definitions, purposes, interests, ideologies and discourses.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **i) Data gathering methods included:**

- analysis of relevant policy documents, including *Early Child Development* (South African Qualifications Authority 2007); *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Education* (Department of Education, Republic of South Africa 2001); *Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) Overview* (2005); and *Strategic Plan 2007-2011* (2006);
- initial meeting with the lead EC professional at the site concerned to investigate theories, beliefs and local policies related to ECCE;
- reflection-on-action following video-taping of practitioner-selected episodes in each setting, that sampled a range of activities, to discuss factors that mediated practitioners' intentions, facilitators and barriers;
- sharing of video highlights with educational officials at the Provincial Department of Education (Early Childhood Development section) at Pietermaritzburg to stimulate discussion about policy-to-practice concerns.

### **ii) Sampling**

One week of intensive pilot data-gathering was planned, with visits to an NGO crèche and a FCM intervention in the rural KwaZulu-Natal Midlands region, and in the urban context a charity-based self-help community for destitute children and families in Marianhill on the outskirts of Durban, led by an Austrian nun. Finally, by way of contrast a visit was made to a private day nursery and preschool that also included local orphans.

### **iii) Procedures**

At every visit, it had been explained to the leader that researchers were interested in observing their ECD provision and ethical clearance was obtained to video-tape what we observed and audio-tape what was heard.

### **iv) Materials**

A broad set of exploratory questions was asked in order to elicit the perspectives of practitioners involved – what was it like to work there; how did they come to be engaged in this ECD work; what factors supported or inhibited their professional activities; and what anxieties and apprehensions had they had. For the visit to the Provincial Department of Education, it was felt that the prepared questions were inappropriate and the meeting took the form of an information exchange with the researchers explaining the nature of the research partnership and the Department of Education representatives identifying key emerging issues following a review of the video-highlights.

## **ANALYSIS**

Each leader chose what the researchers observed and when, and discussed the context of their setting as well as the provision made. Conversations were digitally recorded and are currently in the process of being fully transcribed for analysis. Video-recording of every different activity observed on the visits to the four settings provided a sampling of events. On average, this amounted to 20 minutes for each setting. It was downloaded and stored both digitally and on DVDs and a copy of visual data was given to each setting. Through a process of data analysis and reduction a more condensed version of observed events was obtained that stripped out repetition but preserved the full range of observed activities. The video-highlights were presented at the Provincial Department of Education for representatives to observe.

By cumulative analysis from document analysis, initial meetings, individual interviews, observations and final discussions, the design allowed identification and cross-referencing of key themes to emerge in a grounded manner.

Research ethics attempted to go beyond compliance with formal British Psychological Society guidelines and relevant university research ethics, to adopt a situated-ethics approach mediated in socio-political contexts. This was intended to take account of ethics in a context of marginalisation, powerlessness and vulnerability and adopt culturally sensitive ways of working with diverse groups.

In the event, permission to obtain digital images was granted from participants in advance and checked again with participants at the time of data gathering. Images were shown to participants as work proceeded, with both adults and children expressing interest, curiosity and delight in the images of themselves shown, with no-one refusing or showing signs of reluctance. A fuller feedback of text data is planned once analysis has been completed in the appropriate language (English or Zulu).



## RESULTS

At the time of writing, transcription of audio-tapes had not been completed, thus this preliminary analysis focuses on the NGO FCM intervention in the rural Midlands of KwaZulu-Natal. Examination of themes that emerged from document analysis, the audio- and video-recordings and the daily reflections of the research team revealed:

1. ECD and play,
2. community staff selection and training,
3. the challenges of poverty, illness, death and bereavement,
4. unemployment, apathy and domestic violence,
5. lack of food and pure water, and

poor sanitation together with another set of themes associated with:

- community mobilization,
- hope, aspiration and 'enthusiasm of youth',
- promotion of prevention,
- pooled resources and resilience,

in order to address broader structural issues:

As noted on the NGO's website:

If individuals have the self-confidence to define a purpose for themselves, they can rise above these circumstances no matter how impoverished those circumstances may be. (Wimble 2000:3)

Striking, and cutting across this range of themes was the blending and intertwining of:

- official policy frameworks and international perspectives,
- policy texts and situated practices,
- aspirations of the new democratic Republic of South Africa and the provincial history, traditions and beliefs of the Zulu people.

- **Official policy and international perspectives**

*Official Guidelines for Early Development Services* (Department of Social Development 2006:1) recognized that:

that the early childhood phase from birth to nine years is considered the most important phase for every human being ... Giving children the best start in life means ensuring them good health, proper nutrition and early learning. The well-being of children depends on the ability of families to function effectively. Children need to grow up in a nurturing and secure family that can ensure their development, protection, survival and participation in family and social life. The aim of family and child welfare is to preserve and strengthen families so that they can provide a suitable environment for physical, emotional and social development of all their members.

At the same time the *Strategic Plan for 2007 to 2011* (Department of Education 2006) has recognised the need to expand access to quality ECD opportunities by trained ECD practitioners (only 12% in 2004) and Grade R programmes by qualified teachers that precede Grade 1 (59.6% in 2005), especially for poor communities. As noted by the South African Qualifications Authority (2007:1):

ECD is a priority area within the South African context and is supported by legislation, national policies and strategies. The development of babies, toddlers and young children forms the most critical foundation of further development into childhood and adulthood and it is critical that the field should be served by competent practitioners ... able to work in a variety of ECD contexts (National Qualifications Framework Level 4).

Further, international comparability for the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC): Early Childhood Development had been examined not only by finding equivalent national qualifications in Kenya, India, Brazil and Honduras but also by benchmarks from what has been described as 'best practice in the field' in the UK.

- **Policy texts, informal theories and situated practices**

The Midlands area of KwaZulu-Natal was described by the lead professional in the NGO concerned as:

a land of fertile green hills and strong flowing rivers but also a land of barrenness and drought. Life is difficult. Families live in extreme poverty. Unemployment is high and the province has the highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection in South Africa. These conditions create suffering and hardship for all, but especially for young children who are most vulnerable.

There is a Zulu legend associated with the nearby mountain Ntunjabili that stretched back to the reign of King Shaka, in which a cannibal in the mountain took away all the children. As noted by the professional lead, the rural communities were making efforts 'to get on top of a mountain of poverty and tame the cannibal of AIDS'.

When the first trained family motivators visited hundreds of homesteads to facilitate play and early stimulation, they were 'astounded by the harsh conditions facing young children' as they were confronted with 'communities in turmoil and facing destruction'. 'AIDS had taken its toll on almost all families ... usually only one person was contributing financially, a large number were relying on welfare grants, many children were orphaned.' The stress of bereavement, illness and poverty had sapped the energy to care for young children by those older siblings or older relations who had responsibility.

Their work was informed by five key strategies of *The Framework for the Protection, Care and Support of Orphans and Vulnerable Children Living with HIV and AIDS* (UNICEF 2004:14) to:

- Strengthen the capacity of families to protect and care for orphans and vulnerable children, by prolonging the lives of parents and providing economic, psychosocial and other support.
- Mobilize and support community-based responses.
- Ensure access for orphans and vulnerable children, to essential services, including education, health care, birth registration and others.
- Ensure that government protects the most vulnerable children through improved policy and legislation and by channelling resources to families and communities.
- Raise awareness at all levels through advocacy and social mobilization to create a supportive environment for children and families affected by HIV/AIDS.

The community selected family and community motivators for training and these women recorded details, identified likely families to prioritise, helped them to obtain birth certificates and identity documents to obtain grants and pensions, and identified which children should be at school. Elderly caregivers needed help and support. Older siblings needed guidance in their new role. Their training enabled them to help children use play to deal with bereavement and loss. But the community was encouraged to join in and carry on after the motivator had left. The motivator became a 'confidante, friend and adviser, involved in typical early childhood activities'. The focus was still on young children and ECD and this 'dedicated group of women', would select a pack of toys from their kit and set off each day on foot. The lead professional recalled the oft-quoted Zulu proverb – 'touch a woman and you touch bedrock' – and, as she noted, this group of women 'had been touched. They would be the immovable rocks'.

They recognised that real change in children's lives occurred when the environment in which they lived changed too. If nurturing young children was to be achieved through a changed environment, food security and improved sanitation was a priority and the NGO's Integrated Technology Department worked with the community to create food gardens, food co-operatives, school food gardens and food gardens in private homes. Water was scarce. Women and children walked long distances to get water from rivers and communal pumps but 'quality was not assured' and contributed to the poor health of the community. Plans were implemented to improve and protect the quality of water – a vital step in improving the quality of life.

All young children enjoy energetic games with older siblings and the project trained 'buddies to play with younger children, to develop skills as peer counsellors and to relay concerns to a trusted adult'. The buddying scheme provided an additional link in the communication chain in the community that needed to support child-led households. As one young buddy declared:

I was angry ... my mother had died. They made me happy. I was heart-broken and I didn't know what I would do.

Indeed, the translation of the name of the project – 'our children' – is in keeping with the African adage – 'every child is my child' that encourages collective responsibility for all children, 'an aspiration to ensure that all children are protected and cared for that transcends historical and political divides'.

Other activities, not part of the original plan, added considerably to the quality of life of other sectors of the community – motivators for the physically disabled and the deaf children, and home carers for the elderly to ease the burden of the main caregiver. Self-governing self-help groups of 15 to 20 members each agreed to save a set amount that in time could form the basis of a start-up loan for a business.

In the end, of course, the future lies with the community not the professionals, whose role is to develop capacity in the community and phase themselves out. In the meantime, they have helped create a 'nurturing environment where every one is cared for and can look forward to a better future'.

- **Aspirations of the new South African democratic republic and the provincial history, traditions and beliefs of the Zulu people**

From an ECD focus the intervention quickly broadened to include community development with the aim to strengthen families and communities to care for their vulnerable children. Through responsiveness to local needs, the action-learning techniques expanded to incorporate an integrated community development intervention. A partnership was formed between the NGO and the rural community to increase the capacity of families and communities to care for their vulnerable children through ECD. A priority was thus active engagement with the community, its existing structures and traditional leadership and training community-identified volunteers to work with children and their families in home-based ECD to secure sustainability. Selection criteria for families to be identified were also defined by the community and based on these criteria, specific children and families were identified for inclusion in the baseline selection procedure. The baseline survey provided information about particular needs of children and caregivers in the local setting and was useful for planning programme inputs. However, ECD as an educational programme is limited in scope unless it incorporates fully physical, emotional and social as well as intellectual development. Thus comprehensive primary health care/health promotion principles and strategies were also needed to co-create environments that could nurture healthy development (Jager 2006). The *Road to Health* card recorded children's immunization to date and, indeed, the lead professional described parents as being better at keeping up-to-date than at seeking ante-natal advice which they tended to do only in the later stages of pregnancy.

Food garden enterprises contributed to nutritional development and self-help co-operatives to financial choices. Above all, the project provided an opportunity for the participation and contribution of traditional Zulu leadership in the rural community, recognised in the South African Constitution but in practice having little opportunity to contribute to the 'Integrated Development Plans' that have constituted the mandatory planning process for local government.

In terms of aspirations, what do the Zulu participants, children and adults, wish for? A young motivator in site-based ECD, when asked about her role, thought that what was most important for the children to have was love and indeed, before they went to play outside, each child was given a cuddle. Affectionate hugs were an important part of the day. What was most disliked was 'children having no food in their tummies'. Children for their part, described liking 'everything' at site-based ECD and disliking 'nothing'. These sentiments were very much echoed by the facilitator who had gathered together children from nearby homesteads in the village on the following

day, who regarded herself as the most important figure in the lives of children she worked with. Her children agreed that they also liked 'everything' at the ECD group and disliked 'nothing'.

The young motivator wanted to stress that her role was not to teach writing and numbers though parents wanted this. At the same time, there was evidence of counting and alphabet chanting in English at the ECD group, as well as colouring sheets and visual-motor worksheet exercises at another urban setting for those children likely to move before long to 'Grade R'. Puzzles, block play and role play were available inside and swings, slides, balls and hula hoops outside. Perhaps most pervasive at the sites visited, however, was the power and importance of Zulu singing, dancing, clapping and swaying, that brought all ages together in communal activity, including the researchers, and, at the same time, provided an opportunity for children to display their physical prowess. The so-called 'ring' formation brought children together for group discussion, stories and learning letter sounds, as well as the dance or movement ring and the music or 'song ring', such as a vigorous stamping song observed in which children stressed that 'they were going to beat this learning thing, the 'a', 'e', the 'i' ...' and so on. Much emphasis was placed on traditional games, songs and rhythms. Perhaps most poignant was the drum accompaniment to singing, the pattern and rhythm in children's dance and, in particular, the Zulu song 'I do not have a father but I have an uncle who will look after me ... but don't cry for me...'

Indeed, notable was the absence of fathers, and mothers for that matter, with the migration of adults of working age to the towns to seek employment, especially so since the local shoe factory had closed down. Parents might return only periodically at festival times but many found a new partner in the town and created a second family. One little girl, touchingly had a band placed round her neck, wrist and waist, so that her parent could tell if she had grown and been fed in her absence.

## DISCUSSION

The meeting with Department of Education representatives established that the proposed the research project would yield information valuable to ECD policy implementation strategies for children of birth to four years. It was agreed that any ECD provision had to be seen in the context of broader social issues and would have to intersect with poverty alleviation, job creation and other programmes for community and family upliftment. Provision for birth to four years fell under the auspices of the Department of Social Welfare and the research team at some stage would need to meet with representatives from this department. Clearly there were a number of training challenges, a lack of qualified teachers for Grade R and below, lack of equivalence between occupational standards and general education and training, and lack of job status for those working in Grade R and below. The issue of inadequate resources in community-based and rural ECD centres needed to be addressed, along with and accreditation for practitioners working towards local, 'culturally appropriate' and indigenous models.

But what, if anything, does this mean in a context of community fracture under the strain of poverty, HIV/AIDS and crime? Where does this leave the concept of *ubuntu*? Perhaps the findings indicate that 'culturally appropriate' means based on

indigenous realities, values, belief systems and other resources. It may be some time before we attain 'global' models through an indigenous approach. But if different classes, genders or ethnic groups each seek development of culturally appropriate models, in the end it may be economic resources that decide which indigenous models are developed.

In the meantime, to return the original aims, the study set out to increase understanding of socio-economic and cultural contexts in which ECCE programmes are delivered in South Africa, what they comprise, their policies, objectives, situated practices and target populations.

The focus of the study was poverty and it is clear that children's socio-economic rights are affected by the high levels of poverty in South Africa, where 66% children are living in 'income poverty'. But there is great disparity between provinces, with 54% children living in under-developed rural areas with is a lack of access to services, infrastructure and opportunities (Monson *et al*, 2006).

Poverty needs to be understood as multi-dimensional, and encompassing not just lack of money and material resources, but also various other deprivations such as access to schooling, health care and a conducive living environment. (Ndebele 2006)

Poverty impacts on children's rights: insufficient and inadequate diet that impacts on health, growth and development; inadequate and overcrowded houses; lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation for nearly half of the country's children that can cause health problems, lack of access to electricity that leads to safety hazards in the form of paraffin or coal fires for cooking and heating. Where children are in school it can mean a 'long walk to school – often on an empty stomach' (*ibid*). The experience of poverty is compounded by HIV/AIDS which affects the community in different ways. (Highest prevalence rates for birth to five years is KwaZulu-Natal at 3.2%.)

Most young children are either living in KwaZulu-Natal (21%) or the Eastern Cape (17%) provinces. A third of children (33%) are younger than six years. 18.6% children are orphans. Half of the orphans reside in two provinces (23% in KwaZulu-Natal and 25% in the Eastern Cape). The proportion living in child-headed families is small (0.7%), 13% of these live in KwaZulu-Natal. The increase in children receiving the foster child grant in KwaZulu-Natal increased 42% between 2005 and 2006. In terms of proportion of children (aged 7 to 17 years) attending school, nearly one half (44%) out of school at the time of the survey were in the Eastern Cape or KwaZulu-Natal. 34% of children in KwaZulu-Natal walk long distances to reach their schools. In KwaZulu-Natal, 37% in 2005 were living in traditional dwellings, with 24% in crowded households; 53% children live in households with inadequate sanitation; 53% are without drinking water on site, 40% do not have electricity on site (Monson, *et al*. 2006).

The policy target is to move the overall current 12% of children in ECD and 59.6% in Grade R to 100% (Department of Education, South Africa, 2006). In the context of rural poverty, ECD services through FCM have provided:

a strategic and systematic way forward for including local people in the development of a comprehensive ECD programme in a variety of ways – as primary caregivers or parents, as volunteers and elected members of the community-based management committees, as stakeholders, as trained facilitators and as trained family and community motivators. (Newman 2006)

This is a social action model based on prevention with emphasis on empowerment. The structural inequalities of society – poverty, lack of schooling, poor health and living conditions and powerlessness – are recognised and challenged. It aims to mobilise the community as a collective, using indigenous para-professionals to share programme- planning and implementation. Their shared social background with the community enables them to interact with greater trust and effectiveness. The NGO professionals require community involvement, education and training and a proactive role from the community in promoting health and education and in preventing illness and illiteracy. To ensure sustainability, there has to be an exit strategy.

Secondly, the study attempted to expose ‘contested’ official frameworks, as well as informal theories brought to bear in the preparation, training and delivery of such programmes. Official frameworks for ECD are considered in the light of other developing countries – Brazil, Honduras, India and Kenya – and do *not* privilege Western perspectives, instead using them as a benchmark or measure. The community development approach adopted does actively seek to engage traditional leadership, train local people and incorporate indigenous practices in the services provided. The dissemination strategy for the community intervention of the ECD lead incorporates Zulu history, legend and culture. The use of ‘ring’ singing dancing and storying that characterises site-based ECD again blends indigenous ways with prescribed practices.

Thirdly, the study aimed to respond to challenges posed by large-scale quantitative work by the creation of qualitative datasets at local, district, provincial and national level, that are intended to stimulate participatory learning and action. This process has already begun, as this pilot study demonstrates. This has begun to capture the voices of children, professionals and provincial decision-makers and in so doing reflects the various measures that are crucial to planning for ‘our children’ and their future and the role of inter-sectoral collaboration between official government departments and NGOs in contributing to children’s well-being. In terms of situated ethics in a context of marginalisation, powerlessness and vulnerability, it has become clear that adopting sensitive ways of working with diverse groups is only the start of the process. Respect for and value of their perspectives in the long-term can be judged only by the extent to which their individual ‘stories’ reach a wider and more politically powerful audience.

Fourthly, and leading directly from the third aim, the study aimed to promote transfer and exchange of knowledge between social scientists, ECCE professionals and local communities, with a view to increasing co-operation, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of strategies. FCM interventions originated in the Western Cape and the model is spreading to other urban and rural areas and other provinces in which community-based programmes are intended to promote positive child outcomes. This paper represents a first if partial attempt at knowledge transfer and exchange, others

will follow and other dissemination opportunities have been sought. Despite its inequalities, South Africa is on the ascendant in terms of overall social and economic development and in turn provides a powerful model for other less fortunate Southern African nations. FCM provides one such model and a response to childhood poverty.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study started out with a focus on barriers to socio-economic development and quality of life in less-developed countries with a potential for impact on policy and practice for poverty-reduction. The context was ECD in conditions of poverty. Inevitably this spread to the examination of a number of other social and economic factors and solutions that chime well with Sen's (1982) concept of 'capability' which focuses on positive freedom or ability to be or do something in the face of structural challenges. He has argued that governments should be measured against the capabilities of their citizens' rather hypothetical 'rights' that can be judged only in the context of 'functionings' such as the availability of education. Only when barriers to functioning are removed can a citizen be said to act out of personal choice. In order for economic growth to be achieved, he argued, social reforms, such as improvements in education and public health, must precede economic reform.

FCM does build on indigenous knowledge and local resources to promote resilience among children, their caretakers and the community. This increases their personal freedom's or capabilities. It is culturally relevant and pragmatically useful.

So, to what extent were our original assumptions founded in cultural psychology challenged? Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (1992) maintained that a goal of cross-cultural psychology is a universal psychology that incorporates both Western and indigenous psychologies. Cultural psychology, he argued, reflects power relationships between Western and non-Western countries and modernisation of non-Western academics. With better communication, pursuit of global co-operation involving reciprocal research is a real possibility with potential to create knowledge-exchange and transfer of effective indigenous practice to other poor parts of Southern Africa.

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## **A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF STUDENT LEARNING IN E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Teaching and learning “meet” in the teaching and learning environment (Schneider 1995), and are essentially cultural transmission and culture acquisition processes (Wolcott 1991). Previous research indicates that how students learn is affected by their cultural traditions and beliefs (Bourdieu 1977; Kelly 1973; Säljö 1979; Tweed & Lehman 2002; Woodrow 2001). Other studies also state that cultural differences need to be taken into account when designing and implementing learning environments (Lal 2002; Ramburuth 2001; Woodrow 2001; Ziguras 1999).

Education has changed tremendously with the implementation of e-learning technologies. Although the Internet breaks down technological barriers to international exchange of information and communication, it does not eliminate cultural obstacles (Joo 1999). Ignoring cultural factors may lead to frustrating and ultimately ineffective learning experiences (Dunn & Marinetti 2002).

In order to examine student learning in different cultural contexts, parallel e-learning programs were set up in Ghent University and Beijing Normal University, focusing on the impacts of blended e-learning solutions. We set up the research in a way that both the Chinese and Flemish students are freshmen from Instructional Sciences, the same professor giving the face-to-face lecture sessions, the same teaching material and the same e-learning environment with asynchronous online discussion groups are applied to both groups of students.

Students’ characteristics such as epistemological beliefs, conceptions of learning, approaches to study, motivation and learning strategies have been studied and compared cross-culturally. Our study also focused on student perceptions of learning environment and the relationships between mediating variables and student learning outcomes in e-learning.

The results show that significant differences were found between Chinese and Flemish students with regard to their epistemological beliefs, conceptions of learning, motivation and learning strategies. Student perceptions of the e-learning environment were significantly different. Chinese students’ perceptions of the e-learning environment were less positive than Flemish students.

This might indicate that the new e-learning environment did not fully meet the Chinese students’ expectations, as the e-learning environment was based on the design for Flemish students. It also indicates that the Chinese students were not fully prepared for the requirements of the e-learning environment. For a long time, they

were used to the more conventional learning modes. It is possible that the student learning styles were not completely in line with the characteristics of the e-learning environment.

The study provides useful practical implications not only about the effectiveness of e-learning environments, but also about its differential effectiveness for students in different cultural contexts. The findings suggest that the tasks ahead will be to improve the e-learning environment to provide more structure and guidance to students in learning from asynchronous interaction and group activities, especially concerning the Chinese students in our study.

Our research results indicate that students from different cultural contexts perceive the learning environment differently, and possible adaptations should be considered when an e-learning environment is to be implemented cross-culturally. The study demonstrates that culture should feature an important consideration in the design of e-learning environments.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching and learning “meet” in the teaching and learning environment (Schneider 1995), and are essentially cultural transmission and culture acquisition processes (Wolcott, 1991). Previous research indicates that how students learn is affected by their cultural traditions and beliefs (Bourdieu 1977; Kelly 1973; Säljö 1979; Tweed & Lehman 2002; Woodrow 2001). Others state that cultural differences need to be taken into account when designing and implementing learning environments (Lal 2002; Ramburuth 2001; Woodrow 2001; Ziguras 1999). Furthermore, the way in which learners approach learning situations is contingent to how they perceive learning (Marton & Booth 1997). Research suggests that there seems to be systematic cultural differences in how learning is conceptualized (Säljö 1979). Cultural traditions and beliefs are not only related to social behaviors and interests but do also affect assumptions about the way to learn, and the conception of learning (Woodrow 2001).

Education has changed tremendously with the implementation of e-learning technologies. The past decade has witnessed an accelerating adoption of e-learning technologies to assist, or in many cases, supplant traditional modes of instruction. Educators recognize the need to offer e-learning to meet the demands of the students of the 21st century, and as a result, many higher education institutions are shifting from purely a campus-centered model to a learner-centred model (Howell, Williams & Lindsay 2003; Twigg & Oblinger 1996). E-learning encloses a variety of learning modes. In our paper e-learning is used to refer to computer and Internet delivered learning, and especially to the online collaboration (Tsai & Machado 2002). Next to complete e-learning solutions, many institutes adopt a blended learning approach, thus combining traditional face-to-face education with e-learning.

The cultural comparative study was set up as part of a research collaboration between Flanders and China, focusing on the impact of blended e-learning solutions. A Flemish e-learning course for university freshman, studying Educational Sciences, was implemented in parallel to first-year Chinese students majoring in Educational Studies at Beijing Normal University. The innovative features of the course design

reflect social constructivist learning principles, such as active learning, self-reflection, authentic learning, problem solving orientation, multiple representations and collaborative learning.

E-learning offers many advantages, such as allowing learners to learn at their own pace, and being independent of time and place. However, since e-learning is different from the conventional classroom, many students who have been successful in a conventional classroom learning environment (CLE) are not equally successful in the e-learning format (Cheung & Kan 2002; Phipps & Mertisotis 1999; Tucker 2001).

Although there is research available that studies the relationship between student characteristics and academic performance in an e-learning environment, there is currently not a comprehensive model to describe or explain what determines an effective e-learning experience (Blass & Davis 2003; Steeples, *et al.* 1996). Minasian-Batmanian (2002) points at the critical role of computer expertise, access to technology and motivation levels. More recent research points at student perceptions of the learning environment to explain the impact on student outcomes (Fraser & Fisher 1982; Prosser & Trigwell 1999; Talton & Simpson 1987).

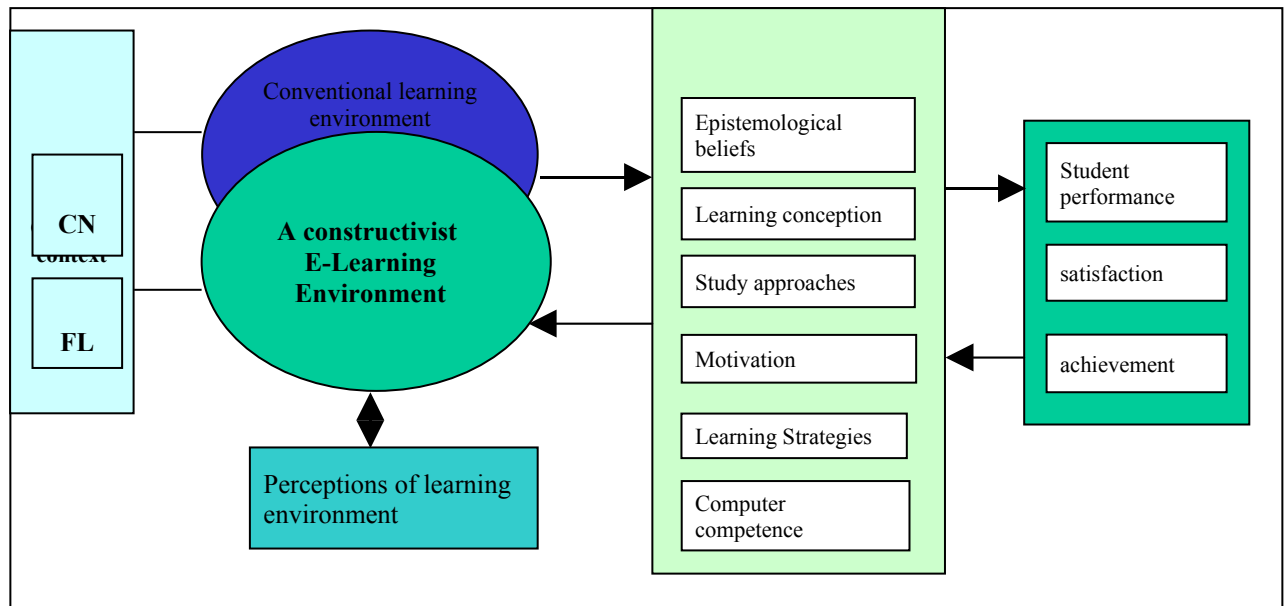
In China, e-learning has especially been adopted to foster distance education for both degree and non-degree training courses. However, e-learning or blended learning is yet hardly implemented in Chinese universities. Therefore, there is a clear need to evaluate current implementations of e-learning and blended learning in these particular settings. The need for evaluative research is also important from a cultural point of view. The didactical design of e-learning environments reflects a western idea about efficient and effective learning via the Internet. Perceptions of e.g., Chinese students about these innovative learning environments in contrast to their traditional environment have hardly been studied.

Henderson (1996) noted that "the relationship between cultural context and instructional design has received little attention in the educational technology and instructional design literature. Understanding cultural backgrounds of learners when designing computer-based learning is important to consider when designing computer-based learning because culture shapes learners values, perceptions and goals and determines how they respond to computer-based learning (Collis 1999). Cultural needs and cultural differences need to be taken into account at every phase of the design and delivery of online materials and support if courses and learning content are to meet learner needs (Brennan, McFadden & Law 2000).

## **THEORETICAL BASE**

### ***Conceptual model***

Building on the available theoretical and empirical base, the following research model has been studied with regard to cultural contexts, characteristics of the learning environment, student characteristics, student perceptions of the learning environment, and the relationship between mediating variables and student learning outcomes in e-learning (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Conceptual model explaining the interplay between characteristics of the learning environment, student characteristics and perceptions, and student learning outcomes in an e-learning environment.

The theoretical base for the studied variables and their interrelationships is described below.

### ***Conceptions of culture***

Diverse conceptions of culture are available in literature. The definitions given by Clifford Geertz and Clyde Kluckhohn are among the most frequently quoted. Kluckhohn (1952) suggests that culture is "the total way of life of a group of people... the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached values; cultural systems may on the one hand be considered as products of action, and on the other hand as conditioning elements of further action." Geertz (1973) interprets a culture as "systems of shared meaning". He describes culture as a shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared sense-making. Other conceptions of culture also stress the collective property of a group. For example, Bodley (1994) uses the term "culture" to refer collectively to a [society](#) and its way of life. Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (2002) use "culture" to refer to the "shared way of life of a group of people".

Giroux (2001) describes culture as the site where identities are constructed: it is "the site where young people and others imagine their relationship to the world; it produces the narratives, metaphors, and images for constructing and exercising a powerful pedagogical force over how people think of themselves and their relationship to others". Hence, culture is intrinsically pedagogical (Soetaert, Mottart & Verdoodt 2004).

### ***Epistemological beliefs***

Beliefs about the nature of knowledge and knowledge acquisition are known as epistemological beliefs (Schommer 1990; 1994). Knowledge acquisition is referred to as knowing or learning (Hofer 2000; 2001; Hofer & Pintrich 1997; Howard, *et al.* 2000; Schommer 1990; 1994). In Schommer's hypothetical framework, a learner who holds naive epistemological beliefs, generally believes that knowledge is simple,

certain and that learning ability is innate and fixed. In contrast, a learner who holds sophisticated epistemologies believes that knowledge is uncertain and can be constructed by the learner (Howard, *et al.* 2000; Schommer 1994). Schommer (1994) defined in her theoretical framework five different epistemological belief dimensions, namely Innate/Fixed Ability, Omniscient Authority, Certain Knowledge, Simple Knowledge and Quick Learning. Her studies with North American college students revealed four factors. The dimension of belief in 'Omniscient Authority' was not extracted. As to students of other ethnic groups, Chan and Elliott (2004) found out four epistemological beliefs dimensions in Hong Kong students based on an adaptation of the Schommer questionnaire: Innate/Fixed Ability, Learning Effort/Process, Authority/Expert Knowledge and Certain Knowledge.

Research has paid growing attention to the conditional or situational factors that shape learning experiences of students (Alexander, *et al.* 1998; Brown, *et al.* 1989; Chan 2002; Chan & Elliott 2004). One of these factors is related to the epistemological beliefs of students (Abelson 1986; Garner & Alexander 1994). Educational researchers have become increasingly aware of the impact of these beliefs about knowledge on learning and learning related processes (Alexander, *et al.* 1997; Wineburg 1991). The available research suggests that epistemological beliefs affect how learning is conceptualized, which in turn affect the adoption of specific approaches to study.

### ***Conceptions of learning***

Learning means different things to different people. Conceptions of learning have been explored mainly in terms of "cognitive process", "motivation", and "behavior change". The acquiring, knowing and application phases of learning are most often identified, such as "acquisition of facts", "increase of knowledge" (Säljö 1979), "memorising and reproducing" and "applying" (Marton, *et al.* 1993; 1997); "understanding" is also considered part of this cognitive process (Dahlin & Watkins 2000; Marton, Watkins & Tang 1997). Learning is a process that depends on experience and leads to progressive changes in potential behavior. "Changing as a person" (Marton, *et al.* 1993; 1997), "seeing things in a different way" (Marton, *et al.* 1993; Purdie, *et al.* 1996; 2002) and "development of social competence" (Purdie, *et al.* 1996; 2002) are reflections of this potential improvement. Motivational conceptions of learning include "learning as a duty" (Cliff 1998; Pillay, *et al.* 2000; Purdie & Hattie 2002) and "learning as empowerment" (Meyer 1997). Students' conceptions of learning seem to vary culturally (Purdie, Hattie & Douglas 1996).

Previous studies suggest that students' conceptions of learning are derived from and influenced by the individual beliefs about the nature of knowledge and knowledge acquisition. Research has consistently demonstrated significant relationships between epistemological beliefs and a variety of learning perceptions, strategies and outcomes (Hofer 2000; Hofer & Pintrich 1997; Schommer-Aikins 2002; 2004; Wood & Kardash 2002).

### ***Approaches to learning***

Approaches to learning have been studied in reference to how students tackle specific learning tasks within a course and "deep and surface approaches" are identified as two different levels of processing (Marton & Säljö 1976). The two approaches are elaborated further by Entwistle (1981), Ramsden (1992), and Biggs



(1987; 1993), among others. A third approach, known as achieving or strategic approach, is defined as a very well-organised form of surface approach, in which the motivation is to get good marks (Entwistle & Ramsden 1983). Previous research has generally supported the underlying structure of surface, deep, and strategic approaches to learning (Biggs 1993). Learning approaches are often elaborated in two aspects: “motive” and “strategy” (Biggs 1979; 1992). Biggs emphasizes that the motive/strategy model is only meaningful in context. Empirical studies have indicated that learning approaches are context-dependent and have a procedural process (Case & Marshall 2004). Some studies have attempted to identify additional approaches in particular contexts of knowledge domain.

According to Marton, *et al.* (1993), there is clear evidence that conception, approach, and outcome are linked by a chain of functional relationships. It seems that students who are only capable of conceiving a quantitative conception of learning can only achieve a surface approach to learning, and that awareness of a qualitative conception of learning is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the adoption of a deep-level approach (Watkins & Biggs 1996:6).

### ***Students’ motivation and learning strategies***

Many factors influence students’ learning, among them, students’ motivational orientations and learning strategies play an important role. Previous studies have shown that the greater the degree of student involvement, the greater the students’ learning and affective development (e.g. Astin 1984; 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991). Ames (1992) suggests that the learning environment itself is critical to fostering motivation and cognitive engagement. She asserts that learning environments that emphasize active participation and responsibility on the part of the learner are likely to foster a motivational orientation toward deep-level cognitive processing, persistence and effort. Pintrich, *et al.* (1993) also argue that contextual factors are likely to have a significant effect on students’ motivational beliefs. Previous results show that students exhibit greater motivation when course content interests them and when they perceive some personal relevance with the content (Adler, Milne & Stablein 2001; Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz 2003). Furthermore, as students become more experienced in online learning, their attitudes toward e-learning and blended approaches may change.

Available research states that motivation and learning strategies are significantly correlated with student academic performance (Pintrich & De Groot 1990; Pintrich & Schrauben 1992). In particular, studies stress the positive relationships between the motivation variables and learning outcomes, and indicate that motivation is one of the most important factors in determining student success (Albaili 1997; McClendon 1996; Barker & Olson 1999). In addition, the study of Barker and Olson (1999) validates that intrinsic motivation and student self-efficacy are significantly and positively related to student grades.

Recent studies have also examined the relationship between motivation, learning strategies and student learning outcomes in e-learning environments (Ergul 2004; Zimmerman 2002; Risemberg & Zimmerman 1992). Ergul (2004) stresses that learning is more personal and more responsibility is handed over to students in e-learning as compared to traditional learning environment. A high motivation level and self-discipline are necessary for students to be successful in e-learning (Ergul 2004).

### ***Computer competence***

Studies indicate that students in an online environment need a certain competence level in computer skills (Dutton, *et al.* 2002; Halsne & Gratta 2002). A lack of technological expertise will result in fear to work in an e-learning environment (Piotrowski & Vodanovich 2000). Other studies report that a high computer competence level has a significant effect upon e-learning participation (Alexander 2001). Furthermore, Lim (2001) states that computer competence is a statistically significant predictor of student achievement in online courses.

### ***Students' perceptions of learning environment***

In learning environments research, students' perceptions of the learning environment are considered to have a pervasive influence (Biggs 1985; Den Brok, Brekelmans & Wubbels 2007; Entwistle & Ramsden 1983; Thomas & Bain 1984). In this respect, students' perceptions have specifically been studied to evaluate the nature and quality of educational interventions (e.g. Khoo & Fraser [1998](#); Teh & Fraser [1994](#)).

The study of Nilles (1995) points out a need to better understand the students' perceptions of e-learning components in a hybrid instructional approach. Learning theory suggests that learning is promoted or enhanced when students are actively involved in the learning and when critical thinking is promoted through applied and reflective activities (Bransford, Brown & Cocking 2000; Driscoll 2002). Online instruction, including asynchronous group discussions, can facilitate learning by providing real-life context to engage learners in solving complex problems (Duffy & Cunningham 1996; Honebein 1996).

Previous studies suggest that student learning experience, the learning context and the learning outcomes are not to be seen as separate variables and processes (Marton & Saljo 1976; Entwistle & Ramsden 1983; Marton & Booth 1997; Prosser & Trigwell 1999). In this context, Ramsden and Entwistle (1981) focused their studies on the relationship between the perceived characteristics of the learning environment and approaches to learning, and the influence on student learning outcomes. This is congruent with the studies of Lizzio, Wilson and Simons (2002) who conclude that student perceptions of their learning environment are a stronger predictor of learning outcomes at university level as compared to their prior achievement at secondary school level.

The available research can be readily framed within the 3P model of learning of Biggs (1992) and Trigwell and Prosser (1997). This implies that personal and situational factors influence a student to adopt a particular approach to learning, which in turn influences the types of outcomes achieved; and secondly, that presage factors (e.g. perceptions of the learning environment) can also directly influence learning outcomes. Students approach their studies in relation to their perceptions of the learning environment, which affect students' learning outcomes.

Collis (1999) points out that it is important to consider the cultural backgrounds of learners when designing and implementing computer-based learning because culture shapes learners values, perceptions and goals and determines how they respond to computer-based learning. A greater number of learners raise concerns about how cultural differences are managed in online learning environment. Asian and Western

cultures generate different educational philosophies and beliefs. Chin, Chang and Bauer (2000) reported that a Western student group seems more confident in using web-based learning than Asian students. Their results support that Western students are more accustomed to student-centered learning environment whereas Asian students prefer a teacher-centered approach. Relationships between teachers and learners vary across cultures. In a Chinese context, how to create and maintain a harmonious e-learning community is a big task for tutors (Chen 2006). The study of Thompson and Ku (2005) pointed out that Chinese e-learning participants indicated that online learning was an interesting experience for them, however, they had mixed attitudes toward this unfamiliar mode of learning. The study of Li and Kirkup (2005) finds out that although Chinese students are self-confident about their computer skills, they are less likely to use computers for study purposes than British students. Tjong and Yong (2004) also noticed that CHC students are low participants when it comes to group discussion among peers and teachers.

## **LEARNING IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

Learning has a central role in the development of human behavior as put forth by psychologists. “We are what we are because of culturally based learning” (Segall, Dasen, Berry & Poortinga 1990).

According to Hofstede (1980) and Hofstede and Bond (1984), Chinese culture is characterized as low on individualism and high on collectivism. The Chinese culture is commonly regarded as part of the Confucian-heritage cultures (CHC), which are widely referred to as a classification of Asian cultures that are found in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Korea and Japan (Baron 1998; Smith & Smith 1999; Watkins & Biggs 2001). Flemish culture inherits major elements of [European culture](#). Its culture reflects elements of both the Anglo-Saxon culture (which dominates sciences, professional life and most news media), French and Latin cultures.

As a guideline for culture-comparative studies, Whiting (1976) says that culture has to be dissected into separate contextual factors. Lonner and Adamopoulos (1997) further state that culture can also be seen as context. Rather than as an assembly of independent variables, culture serves more as an overarching frame encompassing all kinds of interactions and relationships between variables. Cultural variables that have been elaborated by researchers include language, religion, aesthetics, law and politics, social organization, technology and material culture, education, values and attitudes (Tersptra & Sarathy 2000). Among them, the most commonly used variables that have impacts on learning are motivation, value orientation, and philosophical perspectives (Biggs 1996 & 2001; Marinetti & Dunn 2002; Tweed & Lehman 2002; Watkins 2000).

Learning perceptions and approaches may depend on students' values and motives (Biggs 1996; 2001). Niles (1995) compares the patterns in the motivation and learning strategies of Western and Asian students and how they approach learning. The findings show that the need for “competition” is a motivation factor for Western students (achievement), whereas an equally important motivation factor for Asian students is social approval. In Chinese culture, there is a strong push towards achievement because education is valued as a means of economic opportunity and status.

In Western culture, individual differences are respected, people are encouraged to stand out, be unique and express themselves. The individual's responsibility for the community and family is not as important as in Asian societies (Rhee, Uleman, Lee & Roman 1995). Also, the notions of persistence and obligation to learn are less strongly developed (Pillay, Purdie & Boulton-Lewis 2000). In Chinese culture individual differences are not considered as highly relevant. Effort, persistence and obligations are considered as the determinants of what a person achieves. Everyone is assumed to be capable of learning (Paine 1992; Pratt 1991). People are encouraged to conform to the societal demands.

Triandis (1990) summarises differences in values between individualism and collectivism, as a dimension to describe cultural differences in social behaviour. In collectivistic cultures, the cardinal values are reciprocity, obligation, duty, security, tradition, dependence, harmony, obedience to authority, equilibrium and proper behaviour. In individualistic cultures, the cardinal values are creativity, bravery, self-reliance, and individual responsibility.

Bond and others (Chinese Culture Connection 1987) developed a Chinese Value Survey (CVS) to measure and evaluate cultural values within the setting of a Chinese social value system that is derived from the Confucian ethos. The CVS highlighted Chinese values such as Integration, Confucian Work Dynamism and Moral Discipline (Chinese Culture Connection 1987). Using the CVS, Matthews (2000) identified Development of Self, Relationships with others and Social Responsibility as important dimensions in the Chinese value orientations.

Tweed and Lehman (2002) use a Confucian-Socratic framework to analyse the influence of culture on academic learning. Fung Yu-lan, one of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century authorities on the history of Chinese thought, also compares Confucius' influence in Chinese history with that of Socrates in the West. The Socrates philosophy valued private and public questioning of accepted knowledge and expected students to evaluate others' beliefs and to generate and consider their own hypotheses. The Confucius philosophy valued effortful, respectful, absorptive, and pragmatic learning, and viewed the role of a learner as one of absorbing and transferring knowledge rather than expressing personal hypotheses. The framework suggests that for Western students, the tendency to question and evaluate was essential, while for Chinese students, absorption of key knowledge elements is fundamental. The framework also suggests that Chinese students prefer to learn in a more structured way as compared to Western students.

Previous studies have indicated that culture plays a significant role in individual epistemological beliefs (Alexander, *et al.* 1998). According to Hofstede (1980), Chinese culture is characterized as low on individualism and high on collectivism. In contrast, students in a Western culture experience a lower power distance and higher uncertainty avoidance compared to students in Chinese society. Previous studies show that the need for "competition" is a motivation factor for Western students, whereas for Asian students social approval is an important factor (Niles 1995). Respect and obedience to authority is valued by Chinese students, however, effort and persistence are considered as the determinants of what a person achieves. Everyone is assumed to be capable of learning (Paine 1992; Pratt 1991). In Western

cultures, efforts are stressed less compared to personal abilities for achievement. In this study, Flemish students are from Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium.

Only very few researches have attempted to compare epistemological beliefs of Chinese and Western students. For example, Qian and Pan (2002) have found out that Chinese students – as compared to American students – believe to a greater extent that knowledge is simple and certain. The study of Chan and Elliott (2004) confirms the existence of differences in epistemological beliefs of Hong Kong Chinese students and North American students. For example, the belief that knowledge requires learning effort and is based on experts is more prominent in Hong Kong Chinese students.

Recent studies reveal that Asian and Western students differ significantly in their conceptions of learning when it comes to memorizing and reproducing, understanding, personal fulfillment and duty (Purdie, *et al.* 1996; Pillay, *et al.* 2000). Noteworthy are the studies focusing on Chinese students that indicate that memorizing and understanding rather have to be seen as interlocking processes (Biggs 1996; Marton & Booth 1997; Marton, *et al.* 2005). Memorization does not necessarily lead to surface approaches in Chinese learners.

Empirical studies indicate that approaches to study are context-dependent (Case & Marshall 2004). In addition, differences exist in learning processes between students from different cultural context. For example, Western students are more apt to consider that learning can be a fast process and that understanding is usually the result of sudden insight compared to Chinese students (Dahlin & Watkins 2000). Chinese students - more so than Western students - believe in learning as a long term process that requires efforts (Kember & Gow 1994; Watkins 2000).

## **LEARNING IN A COLLABORATIVE E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Collaborative learning involves the joint construction of meaning through interaction with others (Lewis 2000; Littleton & Hakkinen 1999). Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) is based on the pedagogical assertion that students learn – construct knowledge – through group interaction (Gerlach 1994). In doing so, learners work together on a topic or task, exchange their opinions about domain knowledge, clarify the conceptual base, and aim at a shared problem solution. Each learner taking part in collaborative learning carries out activities that trigger cognitive processes, such as induction, deduction, relation, selecting or compilation. Other activities are especially induced by the collaboration context; e.g., explaining to one another, giving mutual assistance, planning, agreement or disagreement, etc. These activities also generate respective cognitive processes, e.g. knowledge elicitation, internalization, and can have an impact of cognitive load. It is especially the latter type of activities and cognitive processes that are claimed to be the strength of collaborative learning (Dillenbourg 1999). This is also obvious when we look at the type of learning goals that are pursued, next to the acquisition of declarative or procedural domain knowledge. The research literature refers e.g., to the development of critical thinking skills, reasoning and problem-solving skills (Dennen 2000). The pedagogical assertion that students learn – construct knowledge – through group interaction is the foundation of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (Gerlach 1994; Harasim, Hiltz, Teles & Turoff 1995; Roblyer, Dozier-Henry

& Burnette 1996). A specific type of CSCL is the use of asynchronous discussion groups. CSCL-tools allow that discussions are not restricted by time and place as was the case with face-to-face discussions. Learning through discussions is one of the key aspects of the student learning experience in higher education (Ellis & Calvo 2004). It is presented as an important strategy for good teaching (Ramsden 1992).

CSCL creates a learning environment of “a collaborative respectful interdependence where the student takes responsibility for personal meaning as well as creating mutual understanding in a learning community” (Garrison 1993:17). Harasim (1990) described the greatest strength of CSCL as its ability to facilitate interaction and saw the strength of computer-mediated communication in group activity. The social, affective, and cognitive benefits of peer interaction and collaboration, which had previously been possible only in face-to-face situations, were now possible with the mediation of computer communication. The online shared learning spaces can become the locus of rich and satisfying experiences in collaborative learning, an interactive group knowledge building process in which learners actively construct knowledge by formulating ideas into words that are shared with and built on through the reactions and responses of others (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles & Turoff 1995:4).

Group discussion is one of the key activities of collaborative learning during which students develop effective cognitive learning strategies through social interactions. These social study strategies encourage the adoption of a deep learning approach and have been shown to be effective in enhancing student achievements. This learning method is also perceived as a mutual support system especially for students who are learning in a second language and do not have previous experience with the assessment task. From longstanding cultural reasons, collaboration is very much a latent dimension in Chinese students' learning.

Friesner & Hart (2003) clearly state that a simple text translation into Chinese has a series of problems. Chinese culture is collectivist and often depends upon informal chains of communication. Therefore open discussion in forums or web casts could be seen as an infringement of cultural values (Can 1999). McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) mentioned that some of the concerns for cross-cultural e-learning are the lack of face-to-face communications, and the presumed ‘culturally neutral’ design of instructional design models.

Although some research seems to indicate that CHC students are inclined towards collaborative learning activities (Bond 1991; Tang 1996), they are low participants when it comes to group discussion among peers and teachers (e.g. Tiong & Yong 2003). Every country has its unique culture. Thousands of years of history has cultivated a unique Chinese culture and it influences education in many ways. The literature suggests that the following four factors have influenced Chinese education: face, authority, harmony, collectivism.

Wild (1999) noted that there had been “few reflections on the educational impact of new technologies on culture”. He argued that despite the lack of identifiable research in this area “there is a clear consensus that culture must have a definite and very strong influence on the design and use of information, communication and learning systems, as well as their management...”(1997). Jae-Eun Joo (1999:246) pointed out that “ethical and cultural matters related to Internet use have been largely

marginalised in education". Ziguras (1999) contended that there has been little research in the cultural bases of student experiences of learning in virtual environments. He states that "research is needed to inform the development of relevant, appropriate and culturally sensitive pedagogy for the virtual learning spaces that are increasingly being inhabited by students all over the world" (Ziguras 1999).

## **LEARNING IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Constructivism has been a major conceptual framework that guides and shapes new instructional approaches (Fosnot 1996; Wilson 1996). This specific approach to learning and instruction has heavily influenced the design of ICT-based learning environments (Jonassen 1991). Wilson defines a constructivist learning environment as "a place where learners may work together and support each other as they use a variety of tools and information resources in their guided pursuit of learning goals and problem-solving activities" (Wilson 1996:5). A constructivist e-learning environment should address the critical features of constructivist pedagogy, that is, technologies should be used to keep students active, constructive, collaborative, intentional, complex, contextual, conversational, and reflective" (Jonassen 2001).

Brandon (2004) stresses that a constructivist learning environment should provide a supportive and motivating environment in which learners can solve problems, interact with others, and assess their learning. Regardless of the particular features recommended for constructivist e-learning environments, what is emphasized over and over again is the importance of the inclusion of collaborative opportunities that allow social interaction. Stacey (2003), for example, points out that one of the most valuable aspects of any learning moment is the interaction and exchange between peers. Garrison (1993:202) approached the field from what he terms a cognitive constructivist approach to learning theory where "learners attempt to interpret, clarify and validate their understanding through sustained dialogue (i.e., two-way communication) and negotiation".

Collins (1991) contrasts two views of pedagogy that "have been at war for centuries": the didactic and the constructivist. Collins associates the didactic view with the behaviorist and information transfer models of teaching where the facts and concepts of a domain are directly taught to students. Constructivism shifts the attention from teaching to learning where students are to "construct their own understandings and capabilities in carrying out challenging tasks". These views contrast strongly with the traditional or behaviorist model of the teacher being the central 'actor' or focus of learning activities.

For a long time, teaching at Chinese universities is definitely more aligned with behaviorist teaching models (e.g. Peng 2004). A constructivist approach has started to be promoted in some areas in recent years (e.g. Zhao 2003), but still limited. E-learning in China has been rapidly growing over the past few years. Since 1999, the Chinese Ministry of Education authorized 48 universities and colleges to offer online education in more than 50 subjects. E-Learning greatly increased the accessibility of higher education for many Chinese students who cannot be enrolled for campus education due to physical, geographical or financial reasons. The online courses are delivered via the Internet, CD-ROMs or Satellite TV. Recorded videos of classroom lectures and text-based learning materials are the main formats of online courses.

Multimedia courseware is available for a small number of courses. Online courses are often supported by online tutors, discussion forums, online exercises, emails, textbooks and supplementary learning materials (Ru 2002).

In Flanders, the traditional face-to-face approach of education was questioned since late 1990s, mainly due to the challenges of the increasing number of students and the use of ICT. Online education strategies have been used alongside face-to-face sessions to foster 'active learning', 'collaborative learning' and to give students continuous support. The impacts of the implementation of innovative teaching and learning approaches have been studied in a series of studies (e.g. Schellens 2005; 2006; De Wever 2007).

However, little has been studied as to the differential impacts of a constructivist e-learning environment in different cultural contexts (Gribble & Ziguras 2003). Intercultural factors can have a significant effect on how learners engage with their learning. Hannon and D'Netto (2005) argued that in an online learning setting, these effects become embedded and may be intensified. E-learning could be 'culturally inclusive' as Doherty (2004) assumes, but it does not eliminate cultural gaps, e.g. in students' preferences and perceptions of learning environments. Researchers have observed that there are 'cultural gaps' between individuals in online learning (Chase, *et al.* 2002), e.g. participation rates differ by cultural grouping in online communication (Macfadyen 2005).

## MAIN RESULTS

Our research adds to the existing literature regarding student learning in different cultural contexts. Significant differences were found between Chinese and Flemish students with regard to their epistemological beliefs and conceptions of learning. Compared to Flemish students, Chinese students adopted to a greater extent a belief about certain knowledge and to a lesser extent fixed ability. In the Chinese culture, effort, persistence and obligations are considered as determinants of what a person achieves. Everyone is assumed to be capable of learning (Paine 1992; Pratt 1991).

Chinese students reflected to a higher level of conceptions of learning as understanding, personal change and social competence. Traditionally, in the Chinese context, learning and passing examinations were considered as means of changing personal life and springboards for getting a higher social status. The research results give support to the statement of Watkins (1996; 2000) about the 'paradox' of the Chinese learner, which says that Chinese students are observed by Western teachers as making great use of memorization, however their self-report seems to show that they are not rote learners, as they see memorization only as a process in developing their understanding.

The results also indicate that Chinese students do not use more surface approaches to learning than the Flemish students and reflect a deep understanding of learning. As a result, the Chinese sample students in our study do not appear to be surface or rote learners. Our research results indicate that we cannot stereotype a student group by one factor. Different factors need to be considered when comparing student characteristics and designing suitable learning environments in different cultural settings.



The results of our study indicate that the Flemish students did perceive the constructivist e-learning environment more positively compared to their conventional learning environment regarding features such as discussion, critical thinking, problem-based learning, peer learning and interaction. The results support the theoretical assumption that a constructivist learning environment supports collaborative and constructive learning, interaction among peers, and problem-solving activities. On the contrary, the Chinese students did not perceive the constructivist e-learning environment more positively compared to their conventional learning environment. This could be due to that on one hand, Chinese students had a lower level of computer competence and internet use; on the other hand, teaching approaches at Chinese universities and high schools are traditionally behaviorist oriented. The Chinese students are possibly not used to the constructivist learning approach. Although a constructivist approach starts to be promoted in recent years, the emphasis on examination scores and the highly competitive university entrance examination still plays an important role, which affect student learning approaches.

As for the Chinese students, although their perceptions of the e-learning environment are significantly lower than the Flemish students, they are motivated to adapt their learning strategies towards learning strategies that are more in line with the constructivist learning approach. Their motivational orientations have increased significantly, and they reported to a higher level adopting learning strategies such as critical thinking, elaboration, self-regulation and peer learning. The results give support to the argument of Brandon (2004) that a constructivist learning environment should be motivating and be able to foster student cognitive strategies.

It has been argued that Chinese students need activities that are culturally tailored to avoid putting them on the spot as individuals where they may not be able to present themselves as knowledgeable. It seems to suggest that an adaptation to provide more structure and guidance to students in asynchronous online group discussion could be welcomed by the Chinese students.

The less positive perceptions of the e-learning environment might be due to the implementation of the e-learning modes from a Flemish course to a Chinese course, which might be not fully congruent to the cultural and educational context of the Chinese students. Chen (2006) puts forth that there are four factors that have influenced Chinese education: face, authority, harmony, collectivism. This affects the Chinese students' involvement in the online group discussion mainly in two ways.

The first way has to do with the expectation of teacher's involvement. Teacher or tutor plays a very important role in Chinese educational contexts. It also seems true in e-learning environments. Observations of the current e-learning programs in China indicate that e-learning tends to be heavily instructor led, using such as video lectures online. Friesner and Hart (2003) commented that the Chinese e-learner may feel that they are subservient to a teacher and this could prove problematic when no physical teacher or tutor exists. The second is the level of students' involvement in the online group discussion. Often the Chinese students only submitted a response that they think is "safe" or quoted a saying from literature instead of giving their own thought. The group members were almost never critical in order to keep a 'harmony' of group communication.

## CONCLUSIONS

Significant differences were identified between Chinese and Flemish students with regard to their epistemological beliefs, conceptions of learning, motivation and learning strategies. The study also found out that the Flemish students had a more positive perception of the constructivist e-learning environment, whereas Chinese students had a less positive perception of the constructivist e-learning environment compared to their conventional learning environment. However, Chinese students were highly motivated to adapt their learning strategies to be more in line with a constructivist learning environment. In the meantime, significant differences were discovered between the Flemish and Chinese cohorts with regard to their perceptions of learning environment, their motivational orientations and learning strategies, e.g. Chinese students demonstrated lower levels of group discussion and critical thinking.

The study provides useful practical implications not only about the effectiveness of a constructivist e-learning environment, but also about its differential effectiveness for students in different cultural contexts. The findings suggest that the tasks ahead will be to improve the e-learning environment to provide more structure and guidance to students in learning from asynchronous interaction and group activities, especially concerning the Chinese students in our study.

The results imply that cultural variables need to be considered for cross-cultural educational implementations. Our research results indicate that students from different cultural contexts perceive the learning environment differently, and possible adaptations should be considered when an e-learning environment is to be implemented cross-culturally. The findings also indicate that a constructivist learning environment can promote student motivation and learning strategies. Therefore, learning and instructional design should foster students' motivated strategies and eventually their achievement and knowledge construction.

Our study demonstrates that culture should feature an important consideration in a constructivist e-learning environment. In future studies, other variables such as student prior knowledge, epistemological beliefs, tutor scaffolding and their impacts on student performance and learning outcomes can be examined. The results also points at the persistent influence of earlier and dominant experiences with instructional formats. We learn from this that a change in student perceptions necessitates a more extensive and longer period of time.

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# **STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF, MOTIVATION AND LEARNING STRATEGIES IN A CONSTRUCTIVIST E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: COMPARING CHINESE AND FLEMISH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

A constructivist learning environment should be able to keep students active, constructive, collaborative, and reflective (Jonassen 2001), and it should be a motivating environment, which foster student motivational orientations and cognitive strategies (Brandon 2004). The current study examines student perceptions of and their motivation and learning strategies in a constructivist e-learning environment from a cross-cultural perspective. A parallel e-learning environment for a first-year university course was implemented for a Flemish group ( $n=217$ ) at Ghent University and a Chinese group ( $n=165$ ) at Beijing Normal University. The findings show that the Flemish group perceived the e-learning environment more positively than the Chinese group. However, Chinese students' motivation and learning strategies improved significantly after the e-learning experience, indicating that they are motivated to adapt their learning strategies to be more in line with a constructivist learning approach. Discussions about the results and educational implications are followed.

## **A CONSTRUCTIVIST E-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Constructivism has been a major conceptual framework that guides and shapes new instructional approaches (Fosnot 1996; Wilson 1996). This specific approach to learning and instruction has heavily influenced the design of ICT-based learning environments (Jonassen 1991). Wilson defines a constructivist learning environment as "a place where learners may work together and support each other as they use a variety of tools and information resources in their guided pursuit of learning goals and problem-solving activities" (Wilson 1996:5). A constructivist e-learning environment should address the critical features of constructivist pedagogy, that is, technologies should be used to keep students active, constructive, collaborative, intentional, complex, contextual, conversational, and reflective" (Jonassen 2001). Brandon (2004) stresses that a constructivist learning environment should provide a supportive and motivating environment in which learners can solve problems, interact with others, and assess their learning. Regardless of the particular features recommended for constructivist e-learning environments, what is emphasized over and over again is the importance of the inclusion of collaborative opportunities that allow social interaction. Stacey (2003), for example, points out that one of the most valuable aspects of any learning moment is the interaction and exchange between peers.

Collins (1991) contrasts two views of pedagogy that “have been at war for centuries”: the didactic and the constructivist. Collins associates the didactic view with the behaviorist and information transfer models of teaching where the facts and concepts of a domain are directly taught to students. Constructivism shifts the attention from teaching to learning where students are to “construct their own understandings and capabilities in carrying out challenging tasks”. These views contrast strongly with the traditional or behaviorist model of the teacher being the central ‘actor’ or focus of learning activities.

For a long time, teaching at Chinese universities is definitely more aligned with behaviorist teaching models (e.g. Peng 2004). A constructivist approach has started to be promoted in some areas in recent years (e.g. Zhao 2003), but still limited. E-learning in China has been rapidly growing over the past few years. Since 1999, the Chinese Ministry of Education authorized 48 universities and colleges to offer online education in more than 50 subjects. E-Learning greatly increased the accessibility of higher education for many Chinese students who cannot be enrolled for campus education due to physical, geographical or financial reasons. The online courses are delivered via the Internet, CD-ROMs or Satellite TV. Recorded videos of classroom lectures and text-based learning materials are the main formats of online courses. Multimedia courseware is available for a small number of courses. Some online courses are supported by online tutors, discussion forums, online exercises, emails, textbooks and supplementary learning materials (Ru 2002).

In Flanders, the traditional face-to-face approach of education was questioned since late 1990s, mainly due to the challenges of the increasing number of students and the use of ICT. Online education strategies have been used alongside face-to-face sessions to foster ‘active learning’, ‘collaborative learning’ and to give students continuous support. The impacts of the implementation of innovative teaching and learning approaches have been studied in a series of studies (e.g. Schellens & Valcke 2005, 2006; De Wever, Van Keer, Schellens, & Valcke 2007).

However, little has been studied as to the differential impacts of a constructivist e-learning environment in different cultural contexts (Gribble & Ziguras 2003). Intercultural factors can have a significant effect on how learners engage with their learning. Hannon and D’Netto (2005) argued that in an online learning setting, these effects become embedded and may be intensified. E-learning could be ‘culturally inclusive’ as Doherty (2004) assumes, but it does not eliminate cultural gaps, e.g. in students’ preferences and perceptions of learning environments. Researchers have observed that there are ‘cultural gaps’ between individuals in online learning (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, & Roche 2002), e.g. participation rates differ by cultural grouping in online communication (Macfadyen 2005).

## **STUDENTS’ MOTIVATION AND LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Many factors influence students’ learning, among them, students’ motivational orientations and learning strategies play an important role. In this study, we look at students’ motivation and learning strategies in a developmental perspective. Previous studies have shown that the greater the degree of student involvement, the greater the students’ learning and affective development (e.g. Astin 1984; 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini 1991). Ames (1992) suggests that the learning environment itself is critical

to fostering motivation and cognitive engagement. She asserts that learning environments that emphasize active participation and responsibility on the part of the learner are likely to foster a motivational orientation toward deep-level cognitive processing, persistence and effort. Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, and McKeachie (1993) also argue that contextual factors are likely to have a significant effect on students' motivational beliefs.

Previous results show that students exhibit greater motivation when course content interests them and when they perceive some personal relevance with the content (Adler, Milne & Stablein 2001; Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz 2003). Furthermore, as students become more experienced in online learning, their attitudes toward e-learning and blended approaches may change. Following this line of research, we assume that a constructivist learning environment could foster students' motivation and learning strategies, such as critical thinking and peer learning, which are more in line with a constructivist learning approach.

## **STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The study of Niles (1995) points out a need to better understand the students' perceptions of e-learning components in a hybrid instructional approach. Learning theory suggests that learning is promoted or enhanced when students are actively involved in the learning and when critical thinking is promoted through applied and reflective activities (Bransford, Brown & Cocking 2000; Driscoll 2002). Online instruction, including asynchronous group discussions, can facilitate learning by providing real-life context to engage learners in solving complex problems (Duffy & Cunningham 1996; Honebein 1996).

Collis (1999) points out that it is important to consider the cultural backgrounds of learners when designing and implementing computer-based learning because culture shapes learners values, perceptions and goals and determines how they respond to computer-based learning. A greater number of learners raise concerns about how cultural differences are managed in online learning environment. Asian and Western cultures generate different educational philosophies and beliefs. Chin, Chang and Bauer (2000) reported that a Western student group seems more confident in using web-based learning than Asian students. Their results support that Western students are more accustomed to student-centered learning environment whereas Asian students prefer a teacher-centered approach. Relationships between teachers and learners vary across cultures. In a Chinese context, how to create and maintain a harmonious e-learning community is a big task for tutors (Chen 2006). The study of Thompson and Ku (2005) pointed out that Chinese e-learning participants indicated that online learning was an interesting experience for them, however, they had mixed attitudes toward this unfamiliar mode of learning. The study of Li and Kirkup (2005) finds out that although Chinese students are self-confident about their computer skills, they are less likely to use computers for study purposes than British students. Tiong and Yong (2004) also noticed that CHC students are low participants when it comes to group discussion among peers and teachers.

In this study, we focus on students' perceptions of the learning environment in terms of group discussion, critical thinking, problem solving, peer learning and interaction, and their preferences in an ideal learning environment.

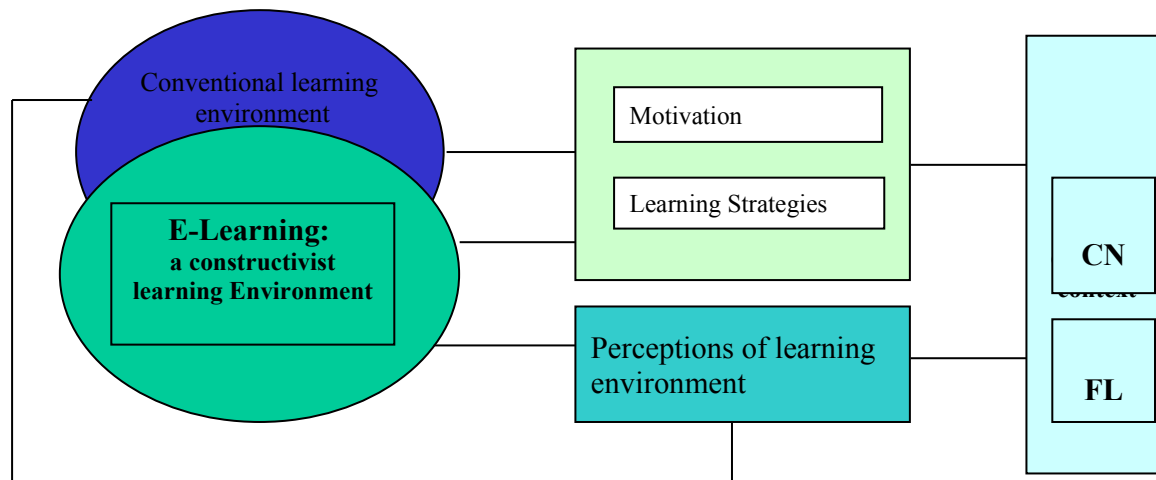
## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central research question of the present study is what are the differences between Chinese and Flemish students in their perceptions of and motivational level in a constructivist e-learning environment. More specifically, we address the following two research questions:

*Will Flemish and Chinese students have a more positive perception towards a constructivist e-learning environment compared to their conventional learning environment?*

*Will students' motivation and learning strategies develop in a way to be more in line with the requirements of a constructivist e-learning environment?*

Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model of the current study. As theoretically assumed, we expect that the students would have a more positive perception of the constructivist e-learning environment, and their motivation and learning strategies would be fostered, at least for the Flemish students. As the e-learning course was initially developed for Flemish students, it is the first time for the Chinese students to experience such an e-learning environment. Given some earlier findings about cultural differences in student participation in e-learning formats, we may hypothesize that there will be significant differences exist between the two cultural groups in their perceptions of the learning environment and the evolvement of their motivation and learning strategies.



**Figure 1:** The conceptual model of the current study

## METHOD

### Research Setting

A parallel e-learning environment (ELE) for a first-year university course in "Instructional Sciences" was implemented for both Flemish and Chinese students in Educational Sciences. The first-year university course "Instructional Sciences" is part of the curriculum of students studying Pedagogical Sciences at Ghent University. Besides face-to-face lecture sessions, students can access the e-learning environment for learning materials and immersed in a collaborative online learning environment. Asynchronous online discussion is one of the main features. It allows

students to express their thoughts and ideas with more freedom and ease, and also increase their own reflection and interactions with others (Hew & Cheung 2003). Through collaboration and social negotiation in an asynchronous online environment, individuals are able to construct knowledge and relate what they learn to their prior knowledge (Gilbert & Dabbagh 2005).

As part of a bilateral cultural exchange and cooperation, the course “Instructional Sciences”, including its teaching content and teaching methods (face-to-face lecture sessions and online learning environment) is implemented for the first-year Chinese students studying Educational Sciences at Beijing Normal University. In order to control as much as possible the research variables under the Chinese setting, we set up the research in a way that the students are both freshmen from the same study domain, the same professor giving the face-to-face lecture sessions, the same teaching material and the same e-learning environment with asynchronous online discussion groups are applied to the Chinese students.

### Participants

A total of 165 Chinese students and 217 Flemish first-year students studying Educational Sciences participated in this study. The average age of the two groups was similar and both had a larger proportion of female students than male students (Table 1).

**Table 1:** The average age and gender of Flemish and Chinese participants

	Average age	Gender	
		Male <i>N</i> (%)	Female <i>N</i> (%)
Chinese ( <i>n</i> =165)	18.74	53 (32.2%)	112 (67.8%)
Flemish ( <i>n</i> =217)	19.15	34 (15.7%)	183 (84.3%)

### Procedure

For the present setting, three course units (face-to-face lecture sessions, plus 9 weeks e-learning environment with asynchronous online discussion) are implemented cross-culturally. The lecture slides and content in the e-learning environment for the Chinese students are translated into Chinese. The e-learning environment gives information about course planning, learning objectives, lecture slides, guidelines on how to participate and contribute in online discussion groups, assessment criteria, etc. Students are randomly assigned to a group consisted of about 10 students. Similar discussion assignments for the theme of Behaviorism, Cognitivism and Constructivism are given to both Flemish and Chinese students. Each online discussion group was monitored by a tutor who gives support and guidance to his or her group.

### Instruments

The Motivated Strategies of Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia & McKeachie 1993) was used before and after the ELE implementation to assess student motivational orientations and learning strategies, in the scales of Intrinsic goal orientation, Extrinsic goal orientation, Control of learning beliefs, Self-efficacy for learning and performance, Rehearsal, Elaboration, Critical thinking, Metacognitive self-regulation and Peer learning. The reliability coefficients of the used MSLQ

subscales range from 0.62 to 0.93 for our sample in this study.

Student Perceptions of Learning Environment were measured with a pre questionnaire and a post questionnaire including scales in discussion, critical thinking, problem-based learning, peer learning, interaction and help. In the pre questionnaire, students were asked to self-report to what degree a certain feature is present in their actual conventional learning environment and to what extent they like such a feature in their ideal learning environment. In the pre test, students were also asked to report their computer competence and use of Internet. In the post questionnaire, students were asked to report their perceptions of the implemented e-learning environment, and their preferences in an ideal learning environment. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the subscales of the perceptions of learning environment range from 0.65 to 0.86.

### **Analysis**

First of all, t-tests for independent samples were used to compare Flemish and Chinese students regarding their prior computer competence. Secondly, in order to answer our research questions, paired t-tests were conducted to analyse the possible differences of student perceptions of the learning environment before and after the ELE intervention; similarly, paired t-tests were conducted to analyse the possible changes of student motivation and learning strategies before and after the implementation of e-learning course. In addition, we carried on Multivariate tests to analyse the cultural group effects on student perceptions of learning environment and their motivation and learning strategies.

## **RESULTS**

### **Student computer competence and actual use of the ELE**

The Flemish and Chinese students differed significantly in their prior computer competence and actual use of the ELE (Table 2). Compared to the Chinese students, the Flemish students had easier access to computer and Internet, and their computer competence was higher, including their familiarity with the use of computer such as word processing ( $p < .001$ ). The Flemish students used more often computer and Internet for learning purpose than the Chinese group ( $p < .001$ ). The Flemish students on average spent more time online daily and used more frequently emails than the Chinese students. The Flemish students were much more familiar with the use of the ELE than the Chinese students ( $p < .001$ ). However, the Chinese group on average posted more messages in the asynchronous group discussions than the Flemish group ( $p < .01$ ).

**Table 2:** Computer competence and actual use of the e-learning environment of the Flemish and Chinese group (scale from 0-6)

Variable	Mean		<i>t</i>
	Flemish	Chinese	
Access of computer	5.33	4.08	15.85***
Access of Internet	5.12	4.17	11.17***
Familiarity with the use of computer, e.g. word processing	5.04	3.11	18.28***
Use of computer and internet for learning	4.64	3.19	15.62***
Frequency of using emails	4.89	3.46	13.22***
Use of the ELE	4.47	3.56	9.57***
Messages posted in asynchronous group discussions per week	2.69	3.01	-2.46**

\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

### Perceptions of the e-learning environment: Flemish and Chinese students

Mean score of perceptions of learning environment of Flemish and Chinese students in pre and post tests are presented in Table 3. The results show that Flemish students had a more positive attitude towards the constructivist e-learning environment compared to their conventional learning environment with regard to almost all dimensions ( $p < .05$ ). However, the Chinese students had a lower perception of the constructivist e-learning environment compared to their conventional learning environment with regard to all dimensions ( $p < .05$ ). The paired mean differences are presented in Table 4.

For both Flemish and Chinese students, their perceptions of the preferred learning environment (ideal environment) are higher than their perceptions of the actual learning environment. The perceptions of the preferred learning environment of Flemish students increased after their ELE experience. However, Chinese students' perceptions of preferred learning environment (ideal environment) decreased.

As to the six dimensions measured, the Chinese students had a higher perception of peer learning, interaction and help in Pre-test than the Flemish students. However, their perceptions of the ELE in these dimensions decreased. For the Flemish students, they had a higher perception of discussion, critical thinking and problem-based learning in Pre-test than the Chinese students. Their perceptions in these three dimensions increased after the ELE experience.

Chinese students showed a higher preference of an ideal learning environment in terms of discussion, peer learning, interaction and help before the ELE implementation. However, their preferences to such features decreased due to a decrease of their perceptions of the actual ELE.

Furthermore, Multivariate test was conducted taking cultural group as the fixed factor, and the perceptions of CLE as covariates, and the perceptions of ELE as dependent variables. The results show that the cultural group effect is significant on all dimensions of the perceptions of learning environment ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 5).



**Table 3:** Mean score of perceptions of learning environment of Flemish and Chinese students in pre and post tests

	Pre-test				Post-test			
	FL		CN		FL		CN	
Variable	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Preferred
Discussion	4.36	4.39	4.30	4.95	4.83	4.92	3.58	4.55
Critical thinking	4.38	4.85	4.12	4.75	4.68	5.18	3.11	4.47
Problem-based-learning	4.59	5.03	4.19	4.97	4.80	5.33	3.61	4.43
Peer learning	3.61	4.43	4.07	4.72	5.14	5.40	2.95	4.50
Interaction	4.06	4.69	4.49	5.17	4.23	4.91	2.67	4.59
Help	4.24	4.94	4.61	5.14	4.06	4.70	2.79	4.47

**Table 4:** Paired mean differences of perceptions of learning environment of Flemish and Chinese students in pre and post tests

	Pre- & Post paired Mean difference			
	FL		CN	
Variable	Actual	Preferred	Actual	Preferred
Discussion	.48***	.53***	-.72***	-.40***
Critical thinking	.31***	.30***	-1.01***	-.28*
Problem-based learning	.23**	.29***	-.58***	-.54***
Peer learning	1.57***	.96***	-1.09***	-.22*
Interaction	.24**	.27***	-1.81***	-.58***
Help	-.21**	-.29***	-1.82***	-.67***

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

**Table 5:** Multivariate test results regarding cultural group effects on perceptions of learning

Variable	Multivariate tests: cultural group effects			
	Actual		Preferred	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Discussion	84.10	.000	18.29	.000
Critical thinking	61.82	.000	47.72	.000
Problem-based learning	115.96	.000	46.89	.000
Peer learning	231.62	.000	53.41	.000
Interaction	114.55	.000	8.65	.004
Help	68.13	.000	6.65	.011

### **Motivation and learning strategies of Flemish and Chinese students in pre and post test**

At the outset (pre-test) before the students started the e-learning activities, Flemish and Chinese students do not differ in their intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations ( $p>.05$ ). The Chinese students reflected a higher level of control of learning beliefs and self-efficacy than the Flemish students ( $p<.01$ ). However, the Flemish students scored higher regarding their learning strategies, such as elaboration, rehearsal, self-regulation, peer learning and help seeking ( $p>.05$ ).

In the post-test, no significant differences were detected for the Flemish students compared to their motivation and learning strategies in the pre-test, except that there is a significant decrease in one dimension, peer learning. However, the Chinese students scored higher in all dimensions of their motivation and learning strategies ( $p<.001$ ). The Mean and Mean difference of motivation and learning strategies of Flemish and Chinese students in Pre and Post tests are presented in Table 6.

Multivariate test was conducted taking cultural group as the fixed factor, and student motivation and learning strategies in pre-test as covariates, and student motivation and learning strategies in post-test as dependent variables. The results show that the cultural group effect is significant on control of learning beliefs, critical thinking and peer learning ( $p<.05$ ) (Table 7).

**Table 6:** Mean and Mean difference of motivation and learning strategies of Flemish and Chinese students in Pre and Post tests

Variable	FL (n=217)			CN (n=165)		
	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean difference	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean difference
Intrinsic motivation	4.99	5.01	.02	5.04	5.42	.38**
Extrinsic motivation	4.87	4.96	.09	4.83	5.30	.47***
Control of Learning Beliefs	4.69	4.64	-.05	4.97	5.48	.51***
Self-efficacy for learning and performance	4.28	4.12	-.16	4.71	5.20	.49***
Critical Thinking	4.48	4.47	-.01	4.39	5.14	.75***
Elaboration	5.19	5.22	.03	4.72	5.36	.64***
Rehearsal	4.77	4.75	-.02	4.48	5.06	.58***
Metacognitive Self-Regulation	4.82	4.85	.03	4.61	5.01	.40***
Peer Learning	4.02	3.80	-.22**	3.76	4.36	.60***

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 7:** Multivariate test results regarding cultural group effects on motivation and learning strategies

Variable	Multivariate tests: cultural group effect	
	F	Sig.
Intrinsic motivation	.20	.65
Extrinsic motivation	.09	.77
Control of Learning Beliefs	5.72	.018*
Self-efficacy	2.84	.094
Critical Thinking	6.45	.012*
Elaboration	.76	.38
Rehearsal	.98	.32
Metacognitive Self-Regulation	.47	.49
Peer Learning	4.58	.034*

\*  $p < .05$

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Perceptions of a constructivist e-learning environment**

The results of the present study indicate that the Flemish students did perceive the constructivist e-learning environment more positively compared to their conventional learning environment regarding features such as discussion, critical thinking, problem-based learning, peer learning and interaction. The results support the theoretical assumption that a constructivist learning environment supports collaborative and constructive learning, interaction among peers, and problem-solving activities. The Flemish students perceived less positively in only one dimension-‘help’, compared to their conventional learning environment. This is probably because students feel that they could not get as direct and immediate help from teachers and fellow students as in a face-to-face environment.

On the contrary, the Chinese students did not perceive the constructivist e-learning environment more positively compared to their conventional learning environment. This could be due to that on one hand, Chinese students had a lower level of computer competence and internet use; on the other hand, as we presented earlier, teaching approaches at Chinese universities and high schools are traditionally behaviorist oriented. The Chinese students are possibly not used to the constructivist learning approach. Although a constructivist approach starts to be promoted in recent years, the emphasis on examination scores and the highly competitive university entrance examination still plays an important role, which affect student learning approaches.

### **Evolution of student motivation and learning strategies in a constructivist e-learning environment**

The results show that the Flemish students do not have a significant change in their motivation and learning strategies in the pre and post test, except in one dimension, peer learning. This could be due to the fact that for the Flemish students, the research is set up in their real curriculum, they are already prepared for this learning environment at the outset and this approach continues for their further studies. Therefore, at least during the period of the research, the learning environment does not evoke significant changes of students’ motivation and learning strategies.

As for the Chinese students, although their perceptions of the e-learning environment are significantly lower than the Flemish students, they are motivated to adapt their learning strategies towards learning strategies that are more in line with the constructivist learning approach. Their motivational orientations have increased significantly, and they reported to a higher level adopting learning strategies such as critical thinking, elaboration, self-regulation and peer learning. The results give support to the argument of Brandon (2004) that a constructivist learning environment should be motivating and be able to foster student cognitive strategies.

### **Learning in different cultural contexts**

The current study seems to indicate that on one hand, Chinese students’ perception of the constructivist e-learning environment is lower than Flemish students, and on the other hand, they are highly motivated to adopt a constructivist learning approach. This should be discussed under the different educational and cultural contexts.

Although the Internet breaks down technological barriers to international exchange of information and communication, it does not eliminate cultural obstacles (Joo 1999). Ignoring cultural factors may lead to frustrating and ultimately ineffective learning experiences (Dunn & Marinetti 2002).

First of all, teacher-centred lecture method has been dominant in Chinese teaching and learning culture for centuries (Gu 2006). The teacher is often seen as the expert who directs students about what they should learn and what is needed to pass the end of course examination. In the Western classroom, questioning by students focuses on obtaining knowledge and understanding, whereas in East Asian classrooms students learn about the topic from memorization and reflection and then ask questions based on knowledge rather than ignorance—talking of the known rather than talking to know (Jin & Cortazzi 1998). Western education tend to promote student learning to know while students from Eastern cultures prefer to spend most of their time studying what is already known (Watkins & Biggs 1996).

Secondly, historically Western and East Asian education systems prepare students differently (see e.g. Cheng & Wong 1996). The traditional Western understanding of teaching is that it should promote a facilitative, informal relationship between the learners and their teachers. Students from East Asian cultures, though, consider that a more formal relationship is needed to show proper respect (Fengjiao, Petrosko, & Boyle 2001). Watkins (2000) uses the analogy of the Chinese teacher–student relationship as one of parent and child. He reports that British students characterized a good teacher as one who could explain, use instructional methods and arouse interest, while Chinese students saw a teacher as one with deep knowledge, able to answer questions.

Thirdly, using new technologies such as learning platforms and discussion groups can “excite” students and bring a large element of interest and motivation to their learning (McConnell & Zhao 2006); however, cooperative learning methods seem to face problems, to name a few: 1) competition is endemic in the Chinese educational system, which works against the cooperative learning ethic; 2) most students expect the teacher leads the discussion or poses questions; 3) Chinese students are not well equipped for exploratory learning methods; they expect to be taught.

It has been argued that Chinese students need activities that are culturally tailored to avoid putting them on the spot as individuals where they may not be able to present themselves as knowledgeable. Some students in our study expressed that they did not find the way that the discussions carried out are beneficial. “I did not know if I was correct and I could not comment to others either,” said one of the students. The students are eager to have some “experts” or “excellent teachers” to tell them if they are right or not. It seems to suggest that an adaptation to provide more structure and guidance to students in asynchronous online group discussion could be welcomed by the Chinese students.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The study found out that the Flemish students had a more positive perception of the constructivist e-learning environment, whereas Chinese students had a less positive perception of the constructivist e-learning environment compared to their

conventional learning environment. However, Chinese students were highly motivated to adapt their learning strategies to be more in line with a constructivist learning environment. In the meantime, significant differences were discovered between the Flemish and Chinese cohorts with regard to their perceptions of learning environment, their motivational orientations and learning strategies, e.g. Chinese students demonstrated lower levels of group discussion and critical thinking.

The study provides useful practical implications not only about the effectiveness of a constructivist e-learning environment, but also about its differential effectiveness for students in different cultural contexts. The findings suggest that the tasks ahead will be to improve the e-learning environment to provide more structure and guidance to students in learning from asynchronous interaction and group activities, especially concerning the Chinese students in our study.

The results imply that cultural variables need to be considered for cross-cultural educational implementations. The current results indicate that students from different cultural contexts perceive the learning environment differently, and possible adaptations should be considered when an e-learning environment is to be implemented cross-culturally. The findings also indicate that a constructivist learning environment can promote student motivation and learning strategies. Therefore, learning and instructional design should foster students' motivated strategies and eventually their achievement and knowledge construction.

The study demonstrates that culture should feature an important consideration in a constructivist e-learning environment. In future studies, other variables such as student prior knowledge, epistemological beliefs, tutor scaffolding and their impacts on student performance and learning outcomes can be examined.

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