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Introduction to volume 4

After a one-year break, Hillary Place Papers is back!

This issue covers a range of topics that reflect the breadth of activity in the educational research community. The authors represent different universities but they are all united by their passion for study and scholarship. Their areas of interest are various but all have demonstrated a willingness to share work with the wider academic community. Working through the process of writing a paper, submitting for review and responding to feedback is an important educational process that helps to develop the skills of the researcher.

For this issue, the editorial team, all of them post-graduate students, worked alongside more experienced, university faculty reviewers in order to develop their own reviewing skills. The result of this process has been a marked enhancement of the editors' reviewing. The editors wish to commend faculty reviewers for their contribution to this journal and to the educational research community as whole.

Future issues are planned offering further opportunities for involvement either as an author, reviewer or member of the editorial team. Keep an eye on the website for up-dates and do take the opportunity to get involved; it's a worthy and rewarding process!

The first paper in this edition by **Stewart Gray** makes the case for teachers and researchers conducting research projects in which their own practices are the subject of study. Two research methodologies are discussed that offer teachers and researchers a structured way of sharing their insights with the wider research and professional community.

In a similar vein, **Aimee Quickfall** draws on her own research experience to consider the issues of ethics and data validity in 'insider' research, and questions the need for the demarcation of researcher-participant relationships.

In the context of developing countries, **Taiwo Frances Gbadegesin's** paper considers ways in which a theoretical framework embracing meaning-making, social construction of childhood experiences and democratic perspectives can be used to understand the socio-cultural dimensions of children's capacity for building a sustainable future. The study draws on the analyses of data collected through interviews and observations from early childhood care and education teachers and children in Nigeria.

Malgorzata Szabla and **Stefan Vollmer** review a five-day course on *Key Concepts and Methods in Ethnography, Language and Communication* at King's College London attended by PhD students and early career researchers from around the world. The aim of the course was to help participants to navigate the twin perils of over-and under-interpreting discourse data by introducing a range of key perspectives and tools used to study language and communication ethnographically, in a wide range of settings such as education, workplace, and health.

The final paper by **Nada Zal AlWadaani** reviews *The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally* by David Elkind. The book aims to articulate the importance of play in children's development as an

essential element of healthy growth. Elkind focuses on a shift in methods of rearing children, noting that the tendency towards academic learning, technological games and the overprotection of children is prohibiting and affecting children's normal growth.

The editorial team offer their sincere thanks to the contributing authors and reviewers and invite further contributions from the educational research community.

The Benefits of Self-research in Education: A Teacher-researcher's Experiences

Stewart Gray, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

ABSTRACT: This paper makes the case for teachers/researchers conducting research projects in which they and/or their own practice are the subjects of study. The author outlines and exemplifies two self-research methodologies through accounts of their own experience: (1) autoethnography, and (2) action research. With reference to these accounts of experience, as well as to the literature, the author highlights a number of ways in which self-research can be beneficial to a teacher/researcher by, variously, helping them to develop an understanding of themselves and their experiences, facilitating their on-going development, and enabling them to contribute their experiences, insights, and perspectives to the wider research field and professional community.

Introduction

As a practicing teacher and researcher, the experiences I most wish to understand and the problems I most wish to solve are, I must confess, usually my own. For this reason, I have conducted a number of research projects over some years, alone and collaboratively, in which the subject of study was myself and/or my practice. Doing so has enhanced my understanding of both, and has facilitated my on-going development as both a teacher and a researcher. In this paper, I describe my experiences on two projects in the hopes of encouraging others to conduct similar research and providing an example that will facilitate doing so.

Why research yourself?

As I reflect on the reasons for researching myself, an experience comes to my mind. After submitting for review a paper on a class I had taught with a colleague, I was surprised and unhappy to find among the reviewers' comments the criticism that we had provided only a 'sketchy' description of the research participants. 'Who are these teachers?' the reviewers asked. It was then my colleague and I realised. In writing about participants in the project, we had focused on the students and largely left ourselves out. It had not occurred to us that it mattered who *we* were.

In fact, a researcher's identity and the relationships they have to research participants unavoidably influence data produced and analysis done (Garton and Copland, 2010). Therefore, researching yourself is useful because it provides you with the information you need in order to understand the role you may be playing in the co-production of data that ostensibly comes from others (Pavlenko, 2007).

Moreover, research that involves observing and reflecting on yourself and your actions has numerous benefits. Among those benefits exemplified below, self-research allows you to gain an understanding of your experiences and how they relate to the context in which you have them (Méndez, 2013). Sharing that understanding as research makes it possible for others in your field and in similar contexts to learn from your experiences and analyses (ibid). Self-research can also facilitate self-directed changes and improvements in a teacher's practice (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005; Farrell, 2016).

It must be noted that the process of observing ourselves, reflecting on our experiences, and writing about them necessarily involves recreating those experiences from our own viewpoint (Bruner, 2004) and therefore this recreation cannot be an objective record of what actually happened (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). In light of this, some commentators have warned against research as mere fiction writing (Walford, 2004, in Méndez, 2013). However, with the application of appropriate research methodologies and theoretical frameworks (Pavlenko, 2007), research on your own experiences can not only be valid as research, but also has the potential to produce unique insights (Méndez, 2013) and facilitate the development of your practice (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005) and the practice of others. To illustrate these points, I provide two accounts of my own experience of self-research below.

Understanding experience: Autoethnography

Before continuing, I must include some background information on myself. I am a British teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL) who has been living in South Korea and working with students of all ages for seven years at the time of writing. I am also a student in the school of education at the University of Leeds. The focus of my PhD research is EFL teachers in Korea as learners and users of the Korean language, a topic I chose because it is close to my heart. I am such a teacher, myself, and the often very turbulent emotional experiences I have had in learning and using the language form a large part of my research motivation.

One day, while searching for material relating to my PhD research topic, I came upon a blog by a foreign teacher in Japan (Makino, 2016). Offhandedly, the blogger mentioned that he had been experiencing 'stereotype threat' – the sense that a mistake in his use of Japanese would confirm for onlookers that as a white foreigner he was ignorant of the language (ibid). Reading this, I was struck by how closely it mirrored my own experiences in Korea. At once, I was inspired to research ways in which the theory of 'stereotype threat' might be applied to explain things in my own context.

But who was I to use as the focus of study? Who had the time to indulge a short-term, deeply personal research interest of mine? The answer was obvious. Me. On the one hand, as a research subject for myself, I was especially accessible (Méndez, 2013), and on the other hand, it was my own experiences that had motivated a lot of my research up to that point, and I desperately wanted to understand what I had 'been through'. I felt confident that such an understanding would help a great deal with my PhD research, for which I would be asking other people about *their* experiences.

I began to read into methods of self-research, which led me to *autoethnography* – the generation and analysis of 'salient narratives' (Hughes and Pennington, 2017) of my own experiences. I decided I wished to produce and analyse my narratives in the most 'valid' way I could, so I turned to a pre-existing framework for reflection: Kolb's learning cycle (1984). The first step in this cycle was to produce reflective narratives as close to how they happened as I was able. I sat down at my keyboard and began remembering, and writing.

Halfway through the third or fourth narrative, I felt a sudden wave of shame wash over me, and I stopped writing mid-sentence. I had stumbled on a memory of conflict with former teaching colleagues that still fills me with profound regret. I had read that this was a risk of autoethnography,

but I had not thought that I would experience any difficulty. In the event, writing out my memories proved quite challenging. However, working with painful memories also provided an opportunity – as the memory was of my own poor behaviour, analysis of it allowed for a certain catharsis, self-criticism (Méndez, 2013), and potentially, atonement (Hughes and Pennington, 2017). In light of the pain, I ceased writing for a day, before returning to it and pushing on through the discomfort until I could remember nothing more that seemed relevant.

The next two steps in Kolb's (1984) cycle were more dispassionate: (step 2) considering why my experiences had played out as they had, and (step 3) extrapolating principles from this consideration. To prepare for this, I read widely on the subject of stereotype threat to construct a theoretical framework (Pavlenko, 2007). I then analysed my data through this frame – why had my experiences taken the form they did? And, how could the theory of stereotype threat help me to understand this? Finally, I wrote up my conclusions and published them (Gray, 2017).

By the time the project was complete, I had made a series of gains. I had become acquainted with a hitherto unfamiliar theory, and I had applied that theory to myself and my own context in a way that provided valuable grounding for my on-going study of others in that same context. I had also come away with a much-enriched sense of understanding of the nature of my own experiences and past behaviours, something I had long desired. In this way, the project was academically useful, intellectually satisfying, and emotionally cathartic. Indeed, by the time I was done with my analysis, I felt that the psychological burden of my unhappier memories had been lessened, somewhat.

While I did not use, and could not have used my experiences to make generalisable claims (Méndez, 2013) about all foreign teachers living in Korea, what I was able to do was to understand how my own experiences, as I constructed and related them, revealed my relationship to Korean society (Pavlenko, 2007). This is one use of autoethnography – It allows us to see how reality is a product of the relationship between actors and contexts, between the personal and the social (Méndez, 2013), and as long as this is our goal, a lack of generalisability need not scupper us (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

That being said, once I had completed the project, I was delighted when a friend of mine who had read my paper approached me to thank me for writing it. Apparently, my own experiences mirrored her own so closely that she was able to see herself in my writing, and to understand her own experiences better through the same theory that had helped me to understand mine. On this basis, I contend that although the experiences analysed in an autoethnography are ultimately unique to the author, such research can, nevertheless, be relevant and informative for others – in this sort of research, particular observations, descriptions, and insights substitute for general laws (Stenhouse, 1979).

Experimenting with practice: Action research

While achieving a theoretical self-understanding is potentially valuable, for in-service teachers practical problems in their own teaching contexts that need to be addressed are often more to the point. Here, too, self-research can be very effective. By researching their own teaching, teachers can develop a greater understanding of what's happening in the classroom whilst actively experimenting with and improving their practice.

A case in point: some years ago, I was approached by a colleague, who abruptly offered to buy me lunch. Over that lunch, she inquired: would I be interested in co-teaching a class of young learners with her? She was interested in seeing what could be done to help these young, beginner-level EFL students engage in discussion and critical thinking as part of their English education. I shared her enthusiasm for these things, and so I agreed to co-teach the class.

Together, we read into the literature on critical thinking and young learners' EFL education. What we found was a great deal of complexity and divided opinions. The very definitions of critical thinking that we found varied widely. Some commentators argued critical thinking was important for young EFL learners, others that it was not possible or reasonable to include critical thinking in such classes. Notable in this was Sarah Benesch (1999), who asserted (decades ago) that actual classroom data would be necessary to settle this issue. However, on checking the literature, we found that none of the existing classroom research had been done in classes quite like ours. So, with this in mind, we decided to do the research ourselves.

For this project, we became acquainted with *action research* – the cyclical process of trying something out in your practice, observing the results, reflecting on these results, and continuing to experiment on the basis of these reflections in an on-going fashion (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005; Farrell, 2007). Following this, we would walk into class each week, start audio-recording, and begin teaching. As we taught, we would make quick, written notes about what we were doing and saying, same for the students, as well as any noteworthy incidents that occurred in class. After class, we would listen back to the audio recording and transcribe noteworthy portions.

Triangulating between written notes and transcriptions (Farrell, 2007), we discussed together the reasons for things happening as they had, extrapolated principles from this that we could use, and planned future classes according to these principles. Collaborating on this made things much better. Alone, we experienced classes on an emotional level, with prominent emotions being (unsurprisingly) elation and frustration – whereas, together we challenged each other's interpretations of what had happened, and were able to arrive at a much more rigorous understanding of things.

After repeating the reflective cycle again and again for several months, we ended up with a mound of data and several workable principles and practical activity suggestions for encouraging dialogue and critical thinking among young, beginner-level EFL students such as ours. We then wrote this all up and had it accepted for publication (Lee and Gray, 2019).

As in the first example, this project yielded a lot of gains for my colleague and I. As well as learning a lot about getting children to discuss together in a second language, this project gave us the opportunity to add our voices to the discussion surrounding critical thinking. During and after the project we conducted many conference presentations at which audience members told us that they found our project to be unique and useful. Candidly speaking, it was gratifying to be praised and to be viewed by others as something of an expert. But in truth, my colleague and I did not do anything methodologically ground-breaking. All we did was record our own teaching, reflect on it, speculate about why it went the way it did, try to make improvements, and then, crucially, repeat this process (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005).

This reflective action research process, though admittedly somewhat time-consuming, represents an accessible way for teachers to develop their practice (Farrell, 2016). Importantly, the results of such research are of immediate relevance to you, the researching teacher. The problems and challenges addressed are your own. The researcher that observes is also the teacher that learns and grows. And while this process does not *require* a formal write-up, disseminating your classroom research serves to enrich the wider teaching community and promote the inclusion of teachers' perspectives in the field of education alongside those of academics. It also opens your work to comparison, comment and feedback, from which you will most likely benefit, and which is not available to those who keep their research to themselves (Stenhouse, 1981).

Concluding remarks

There are many complex questions relating to self-research that I have not addressed in this paper. For instance, just how much of yourself should you reveal in your research? How close should you try to position the audience to yourself (Wyatt, 2006)? [1] What ethical issues are peculiar to this sort of research? I also have not discussed the merits of the collaborative self-research methodology of *duoethnography* (Grant and Radcliffe, 2015). I advise readers interested in conducting research on some aspect of their own lives, experiences, and practices to read Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), Méndez (2013), Grant and Radcliffe (2015), and Hughes and Pennington (2017), particularly, for more methodological information and examples.

For my part, I hope that the descriptions of my experiences that I have provided may encourage other teachers/researchers to conduct similar projects. The professional community of teachers and the educational research field stand to benefit greatly from written accounts of the lives and practices of practitioners. I say this as someone who has profited tremendously by reading self-focused research conducted by other teachers and researchers in my field. I find such research is often of the greatest relevance to me and to the challenges I face and goals I have in my classroom and in my studies. Therefore, I highly encourage teachers and researchers to keep on writing. Those who do are likely to benefit, both from improvements in their own self-understanding and professional development, and also from the chance to contribute to the wider teaching community and make their voices heard.

[1] Readers will note, in the present paper I have tried to position them quite close to myself.

Author's biography

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‘Insiderness’ in my Pilot Study Research

Aimee Quickfall, Sheffield Hallam University

Abstract: I am in the second year of my EdD and have just completed my pilot study. My research aims to illuminate and interrogate the stories mothers who are also Primary and Foundation Stage teachers tell about their experiences of this special situation of ‘teacher-motherhood’. My pilot study involved one participant, Sian (pseudonym) in one unstructured, life story interview (Goodson, 2013). The methodological approach for this pilot and the main study is a postmodern feminist narrative approach. The pilot study findings suggest that Sian’s story of te`acher motherhood describes her as being ultimately responsibility for all of the children she cares for, including her own child, at all times. A major feature of my thinking (and worrying) about the pilot study has been the idea of insider research; what this means and what implications there are for the validity of data if insider research is carried out (Drake, 2010). In this article, I will be considering the insiderness of the research relationship between Sian and I. It has been a recurring theme in my research journal and has touched every aspect of the pilot study project. The issues I faced as an insider researcher are also explored and the definition and need to demarcate research relationships are questioned. It is not my intention to cover the pilot study in detail, but some context will be given for clarity.

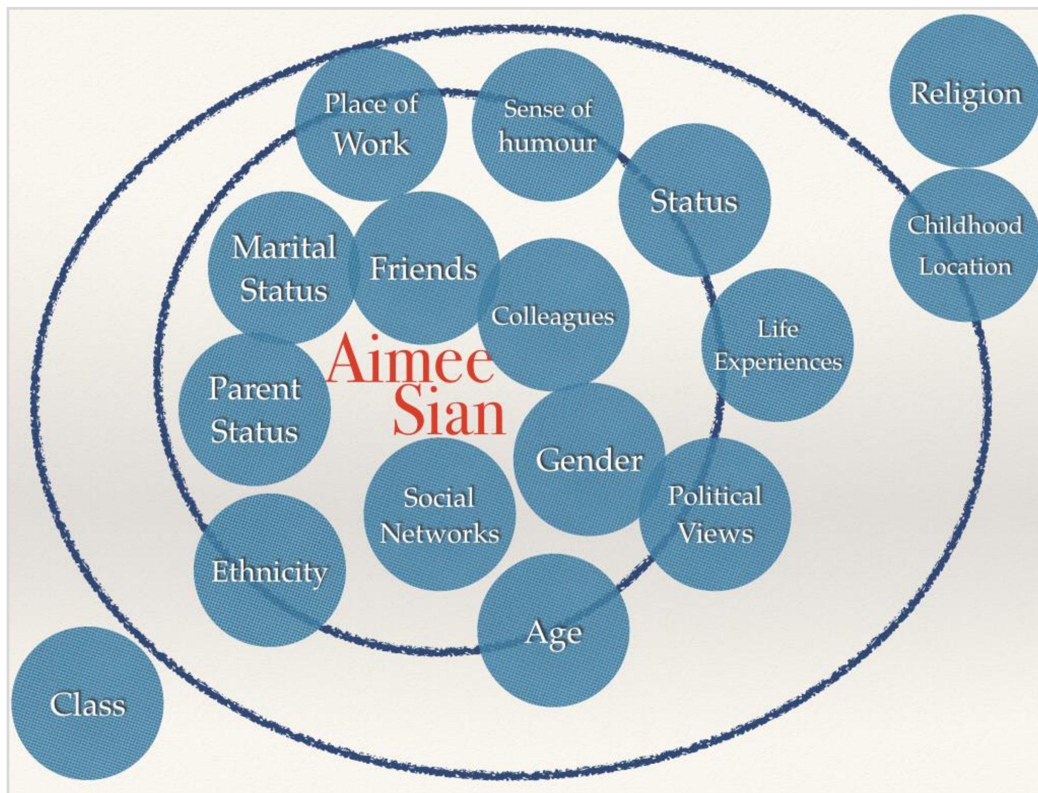
Introduction

My pilot study was designed to be a ‘chip off the block’ of the subsequent main study, to find out if a life history interview would feel like the right method for my participants, and to answer my research question. This was part of the reasoning behind recruiting Sian to the pilot study. She is a friend and ex-colleague of mine, with a long history of giving honest feedback about my ideas and I knew she would be candid in her appraisal of the method. Sian is also a teacher-mother, and well aware of my teacher-mother status. Our children know each other, our partners have met, and we have known each other for over ten years. Because of this close relationship, I became interested in issues around insider research relationships, particularly from a feminist perspective in terms of ethics and co-production of knowledge. Sian has known about my doctoral research focus from the application stage and has been pestering to be involved, intermittently, since I started the programme.

Insider research is traditionally applied to qualitative research (Blythe, Wilkes, Jackson and Halcomb, 2013; Griffith, 1998), particularly ethnographic studies, where the researcher hopes to become part of the ‘tribe’ they are investigating (Acker, 2001). It is generally described using similar terms; insider research is ‘conducted by people who are already members of the community they are seeking to investigate’ (Humphrey, 2012, p.572, also see Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). Insider researchers share a ‘subjective position’ with their participants, based on ethnicity, social class, disability, race or other intersecting signifiers (Malpass, Sales and Feder, 2016; Griffith, 1998). Insider researchers and participants have ‘undergone similar experiences, possess a common history and share taken-for-granted knowledge’ (Hill-Collins, 1986, p.526). These definitions of ‘insider researcher’ all apply to my pilot study. Sian and I are members of the same community - in terms of our social networks (online and in ‘real life’), we have worked at the same place, have been primary school teachers for many years and are both now mothers. We share various other intersecting signifiers, as the diagram in figure 1 illustrates.

Further distinctions have been made in the researcher/researched dynamic, including the idea of ‘indigenous and external’ (Banks, 1998, p.7), pertaining to the origins of the researcher/participant. Banks sees the insider/outsider distinction as a perspective taken during the research, whereas the indigenous label would denote a more significant and lasting bond between the researcher and the participant, such as being from the same town, or having worked at the same place for many years.

Figure 1: Intersections of descriptors, inner circle denotes significant similarities, outer circle denotes some similarities.



Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards (2011) suggest that motherhood is a core identity for many women, which in terms of my study, makes this ‘motherhood’ signifier particularly important to the idea of being an ‘insider’. Insider/outsider researcher distinctions are often a feature of qualitative studies, when interviews are chosen as a method (Cotterill, 1992; Perryman, 2011; Southgate and Shying, 2014).

Griffith (1998) suggests that as researchers from any discipline, we cannot be ‘outside of society’ (p.361), suggesting that there is an element of insider work in any research project, just as we may also remain outsiders, based on some descriptors or signifiers (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2013). It would appear, given the definitions of insider research stated above, that most researchers in education are going to be affected by this distinction, whether they are conducting interviews, case studies, netnographies (see Kell, 2016, for an example), or meta-analyses. There will be shared signifiers such as similar backgrounds and beliefs, even in research relationships that are conducted over a distance. What became very apparent from the beginning of the planning stage of the pilot study, is that the concept of the insider researcher is pertinent to my study, as this journal extract (figure 2) demonstrates:

Figure 2: Journal Extract, June 2017 - evening before interviewing Sian.

…because I knew the participant, and know her very well, recruiting her to the project bordered on the ridiculous. Sian has been a friend of mine throughout my MEd studies, she read my EdD proposal through as part of a proof-reading favour and she has heard me talk about my interest in parents and teaching, many times, as has everyone I have worked with. She knows my child and we have talked about our experiences of parenthood and teaching before.

Firstly, this demonstrates a beneficial aspect of insider research to the time-poor doctoral researcher; the possible ease of access to participants (Blythe et al., 2013; Moore, 2007).

Sian is a friend and we have worked together; we also have many 'signifiers' or descriptors in common. I immediately thought of Sian as a participant because I felt that she would be more likely to feedback honestly on methods, having been 'critical friends' for each other in the past, and also because she was interested in the study and therefore an interview would be easy to organise. If insider research is a threat to validity (Drake, 2010; Lather, 1993), then it would appear that I have wasted her time and my own, if the data collected could not be used in the main findings (Butler, 2002). However, researchers disagree on the advantages and disadvantages of insider research. The following is my attempt to untangle the arguments, apply the theory to my own study and to question whether the distinction between inside/outside needs to be drawn at all.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Insider Research

The Issue of Knowledge - Assumed, Presumed and Enhanced

Researcher assumptions are often cited as a major drawback in trying to conduct insider research (Couture, Zaidi and Maticka-Tyndall, 2012; Drake, 2010; Mercer, 2007; Sanger, 2010). Drake (2010) likens this to the difference between an outsider or insider exploring a coastal geographical area. The outsider uses maps to get an overview of the coastline, noticing all of the inlets and spurs in context and in comparison to the rest of the map. The insider is like the local person, who has a working knowledge of the place and many memories of it - but perhaps has a distorted mental map of distances, landmarks and other features. The insider researcher may not describe a situation in the same way, they may assume or presume that everyone involved has the same understanding as them. They may also assume that their experiences and memories are representative of the community (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2013). In the literature this is usually described as an innocent occurrence, but there is also a suggestion that as well as misunderstandings, there can be deliberate misrepresentations, designed to serve the researcher's interest or that of the community (Wallbank, 2001).

Drawing upon Drake's metaphor of the coastal explorers, I think we sell the research community short if we assume that they are either conscientious outsiders or comfortable, lazy insiders. When conducting research for a doctorate, for a funded project or for our community of peers, the process is more likely to be a mixture of map reading, researching previous expeditions, taking advice from experienced explorers and reflecting on our own experiences of a place. Assumptions can be pervasive and hard to identify - but a thorough literature search (map search!) will uncover assumptions and misremembered or misrepresented information. There is also the benefit of the local knowledge that Drake refers to, and many have suggested that insider studies are likely to

gain deep insight and engagement, because and not in spite of the shared knowledge that the researcher and participants have (Blythe et al., 2013; Cooper and Rogers, 2015; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Mercer, 2007). Tacit knowledge, a greater understanding of the participants (Blythe et al., 2013; Griffith, 1998) and the epistemic privilege of the insider researcher could be said to exceed any advantage that the outsider researcher may gain from a position of supposedly increased objectivity (Southgate and Shying, 2014). This sounds like a cosy and winning circumstance, but it is important to consider, throughout the project, that building a relationship that has some basis on being an insider in a community can also be seen as exploitative in nature (Cotterill, 1992). A possible antidote to the exploitative nature of research is the active reduction of 'symbolic violence', which Bourdieu (1999) felt was intrinsic to the research encounter. Insider research is a way to combat symbolic violence as the insider researcher is capable of putting themselves in the respondent's place (Malpass et al., 2016) and have 'engagement through personal involvement' (Bourdieu, 1999 p. 619, also Oakley, 1981).

Linked to the idea of insider researcher assumptions is the question of whether this type of research can have academic rigour (Cooper and Rogers, 2015). Insider research is eyed with suspicion, with questions raised about the possibility of an objective view from the inside (Blythe et al., 2013). Rooney (2005) suggests that insider research has the potential to increase validity through the richness and authenticity of the responses, and Cooper and Rogers (2015), go further and forward the idea that the suspicion aimed at insider research has led to researchers being more reflexive and careful about their assumptions, thus increasing validity.

Tricky Relationships

It has been suggested that when carrying out insider research, a difficulty arises when researchers try to resist the co-production of knowledge (Platt, 1981) - the researcher, as part of the community, will find it difficult to separate their own hopes, fears and opinions, and to stay 'out' of the conversations. Could co-production be productive? Harvey et al. (2016, p.142) suggest that the researcher and participant constantly influence one another and are 'co-creating knowledge together', which has positive effects on the depth and detail of an understanding of experiences. Research of this kind is necessarily a relationship between the researcher and the participant - the concept of self is crucial to building relationships and relationships are two way (Stanley, 1993; Stuart, 1993).

A feminist standpoint perspective on insider research suggests women are the best informants about their own lives (Acker, 2001). A feminist researcher should therefore come as close as possible to 'positioning herself as the interlocutor' (Wallbank, 2001), but there is no guarantee of rapport in the research relationship (Blythe et al., 2013).

Ethical Concerns

My biggest ethical concerns with the pilot have been anonymity and informed consent; which may still have been a concern as an outsider researcher, but the ethical implications for this study are made all the more 'human' because I know the world that Sian has to negotiate. There is a suggestion that it is impossible to anonymise insider data (Murphy and Dingwall, 2001), because members of the community will be able to identify themselves and others. Sian's interview transcripts would certainly make her identifiable. I had considered that being an outsider researcher might be preferable to participants (Blythe et al., 2013), who might feel more assured of

anonymity because there is no physical or social link between them and the researcher: the reported responses could be ‘anyone’. An example of how to deal with issues around anonymity comes from Welch, Happell and Edwards (2010), who simply don't promise anonymity, but in their findings and discussion do not give any details about participants or report their responses verbatim. Even the inclusion of Sian’s role or the age of her child would ‘out’ her - because of the web of relationships that I am an ‘insider’ of - someone who could potentially read this assignment would recognise her from minimum description. This has implications for the inclusion of Sian’s responses in the main study, something that she was keen to be a part of.

There are identifiable ethical dilemmas around informed consent (Humphrey, 2012), for example, informed consent rituals are more of a formality than a real consideration of whether to take part or not (Juritzen, Grimen, and Heggen, 2011). Although she received an information sheet and signed the consent form, Sian potentially was not given the opportunity to consent as an informed participant (see Figure 3). Because of our relationship, she had not read the information sheet prior to the interview (by her own admission, during the pre-interview talk). By the time she read and heard about the detail of the interview, we had already met. I had driven an hour to get there resulting in significant pressure of her to go through with the interview. However, consent and understanding could be thought to be a renegotiated situation throughout the research process, rather than a fixed, summative point (Miller and Bell, 2002). Fully informing participants, particularly in this type of qualitative study, might not be possible or desirable as the research methodology and methods may benefit from revision throughout the process (Juritzen et al., 2011).

Figure 3: Journal Extract, week before the interview with Sian.

She responded, slightly exasperated that I had asked if she wanted to take part, as I already knew she did. I sent the information sheet through to her, knowing she wouldn't read it as she already had a fair understanding of what the study is all about. So ethically, I am not really convinced that I will have informed consent - she thinks she knows what it is to be, but actually, I have no way of knowing whether she understands or not.

Insider research is difficult and emotional (Cooper and Rogers, 2015; Coy, 2006) making the researcher question their own ‘history, moral position and place in the research process’ (Cooper and Rogers, p.6). This can be ‘painful, emotional and provocative’ (Cooper and Rogers, 2015, p.6). The emotional effects on the researcher can bleed through into life outside the research, as I found in the days and weeks that followed may interview with Sian. I found that I was not able to disentangle myself from the research, after the interview, and supposed that the same experience might occur once the researcher/participant relationship with Sian has finished (Moore, 2007). Detachment can be difficult for insider researchers (Sikes and Potts, 2008).

How would we go back to being friends, with the added dimension of the interview transcript hovering between us? Relationships outside of the research could potentially be damaged (Moore, 2007). However, the researcher may also experience a renewed commitment to the ‘tribe’. The ethical implications of this strain on the researcher and their relationships has to be taken into account. As previously discussed, the closeness of the insider researcher to the issues and situations experienced by their participants can be a strength, but in keeping with the BERA ethical guidelines (2011, p.7):

> They [the researcher] must desist immediately from any actions, ensuing from the research process, that cause emotional or other harm.

The breakdown of a friendship or professional relationship would surely constitute 'emotional or other harm'. It seems sensible that this potential outcome must be declared in the information sheet and the briefing for participants in the main study, if I have a relationship with them previous to the invitation to take part in the project. Given the depth of Sian's response in the life story interview, her motivation to share her feelings, and the reported benefits she felt following the interview, I would seek to recruit participants from a similar insider group, if possible and if I can be assured that no harm will be done to them because of the research. Professional and personal relationships break down outside of research; this is part of life and not perhaps a reason to consider Sian as a vulnerable participant (Wallbank, 2001). However, research ethics demand that participants be informed of risk. It is arguably unethical to neglect to make a participant aware from the outset that relationship damage may occur.

Power and Politics

Insider researchers may become desensitised to 'potential role-conflicts' (Humphrey, 2012, p. 573). It is suggested that insiders may overlook power relations, (Ryan, Kidman and Aaron, 2011, as demonstrated by the questions we do not ask our participants, the questions we do not even consider asking. Before the interview with Sian, there were in evidence the colliding and converging roles (Humphrey, 2012). Sian asked me to proofread her reports to parents, two weeks before our interview was scheduled (see Figure 4). From her point of view, this was not an unusual request and something we had done for each other in the past, but for me, our relationship now had two realms: our friendship and our researcher/participant relationship.

Figure 4: Research Journal Extract, May 2017.

Was she asking this because she felt that I owed her something? Was this a form of bartering, an interview for some proof reading? I felt like the interview was out of the question, in this situation. As a friend, I didn't feel I could refuse to help her; she was in a tight spot at work and refusing to help her would damage our relationship, besides which, I had time and energy to do her proof reading. I also didn't feel that it would be appropriate to then ask her to complete the interview, if I had turned down the favour - she would most likely be confused and hurt by the refusal, which would make the interview uncomfortable for her and me, and the dialogue certainly different to what it would have been.

I struggled with whether the proofreading 'favour' would constitute something like a bribe or mean that she felt she could not change her mind about participating. I also knew that Sian would be upset if I cancelled the interview, as she was keen to be involved. To add to the complexity of the relationship, I am also still a friend of her line-manager, so Sian's participation in the interview and her request for proof-reading support (from outside of the school) put her at some perceived risk in terms of sharing information and being 'found out'.

The political and organisational complications here have to be carefully managed to avoid participants, researchers and other parties feeling disconcerted by the research (Plummer, 2001), or betrayed (Moore, 2007). Sian could feel that my findings had been used against the interests of

her, or her organisation, family and friends (Wallbank, 2001). I can imagine Sian questioning 'whose side are you on?' (see Acker, 2001 for further discussion).

The individual realities of Sian and I are vital to the understanding of her experiences - 'insider research remains a necessary, albeit messy vehicle in social research' (Cooper and Rogers, 2015 p. 1). In short, it is within my power to protect Sian from the messy, negative impacts to her career, but it is important to reflect on the necessity for this situation to arise, in the first instance. Recruiting Sian as a participant possibly minimised the power differential between researcher and participant, due to our equal standing in our careers and her view of me as a person, rather than as an inspector or evaluator of her performance (Blythe et al., 2013).

Conclusion: The Notion of an Insider Researcher

Thinking about whether Sian would categorise me as insider or outsider gives rise to the idea that the community confers insider status on the researcher: it is not the researcher in isolation that decides what their position is (Zinn, 1979). Boundaries may also shift throughout the research process and during the interview itself (Griffith, 1998). Sian and I might have classed the 'insiderness' of the relationship at different levels. I have considered asking Sian about this but feel that this imposes an uncomfortable task upon her. She would probably feel pressured to respond in ways that would minimise potential damage to our relationship.

The concept of insider/outsider researchers has been questioned and critiqued from several standpoints. As researchers, we are already insiders, and outsiders (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2013). Even in traditional 'laboratory' conditions, as researchers we will feel we have more in common with some participants than others do. They may share a gender, a religion, an accent or some slight gesture that reminds us of a loved one and endears us to them. The 'insider' descriptor relies on a narrow parameter: in my pilot study, I count myself as an insider because of my previous place of work, career and relationship with Sian. However, Sian may not see me as an insider and might find she has more in common, or a better rapport with someone we would both class as an 'outsider' (Tang, 2002). The question is raised: 'How do we know when we are inside or outside or somewhere in between?' (Acker, 2001, p. 153).

It is this richness of human experience and identity that is disruptive to the reductionist idea of an in/out border that the researcher crosses, like a threshold. Sian and I are insiders on some descriptors, very much outsiders on others; 'it may be more useful to blur the boundaries of insiders and outsiders' (Southgate and Shying, 2014, p.223). The in or out distinction becomes something much more like a spectrum or continuum; a myriad of factors that change over time (Perryman, 2011, also Mercer, 2007). 'Groups or collectives that claim Insider status are not themselves homogenous groups' (Griffith, 1998, p. 363). Sian and I might think of ourselves as insiders, but we are clearly not the same. If I was interviewing Sian and the category of religion was raised, the insider relationship would be different; she would need to explain in more detail her beliefs and thoughts, as we do not share a religious faith. In life stories method, any aspect of her life could be included in the interview, as she wishes, so thinking about insider status as purely based in school work, motherhood or shared experience is ignoring all the other experiences, emotions and beliefs that are part of Sian's world.

My struggles with being an insider researcher continue, yet I feel that the strengths of this particular and peculiar situation would encourage me to enter into another insider research relationship. If the ethical issues can be resolved for the participant, the researcher and their overlapping worlds, then the benefits of a shared vocabulary, myths and legends of a friendship group, workplace or locality bring a richness and depth to the interview. What is said and unsaid must be carefully analysed and reflected upon.

Author's biography

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Building Children's Capacity towards Sustainable Future: Making a Case for a Socio-Cultural Approach to Understanding Sustainability

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ABSTRACT: Children's capacity to contribute to the social and economic status of a nation is being given more recognition than ever. Global policy priority aimed at ensuring sustainable development has been concentrated on the developed nations of the world. However, many developing countries have continued to puzzle out the extent and possibilities of exploring sustainability within their socio-economic environment. This paper considers ways in which the theoretical framework of Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999; 2007) and Moss (2007; 2012), which embraces meaning-making, social construction of childhood experiences and democratic perspectives, can be used to understand the socio-cultural dimensions of children's capacity for building a sustainable future. This paper analyses data collected through interviews and observations from early childhood care and education (ECCE) teachers and children in Lagos, Nigeria. A distinct finding is that children's participation in building a sustainable future is a consequence of the knowledge of the workings of their social, economic and cultural contexts, often influenced by the socio-political condition and not a matter of economic wealth per se. It further argues that sustainability is situated within a complex network of local and global contexts. It thus challenges the present neo-liberal approach and advocates a democratic and innovative approach to preparing children for a sustainable society. It concludes that sustainability cannot be built on what may be seen as decontextualized responses to meeting children's learning and development.

KEYWORDS: Children, ECCE, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

In this paper, I explore children's capacity for participating in a sustainable project that affects their present and future lives, and specifically the roles of children in ensuring a sustainable future. Employing a sociocultural lens (Fleer et al., 2004), I explore the social construction of sustainability and its connection within the contexts of early childhood care and education in Nigeria. The study suggests that children's capacity can be better enhanced through an eclectic approach that challenges and critiques the present attitude to children's services while also being forward-looking. This paper is centred on the tensions between cultural barriers and contemporary ideologies which limit children's capacity towards sustainable development.

This paper situates children's capacity for participating in a sustainable future as a socio-cultural project that demands a broad range of negotiated learning, informed by the interconnectedness with the wider community. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014, DESD) established that education is germane in the creation of sustainability principles, values and practices. Such knowledge becomes much more effective if it can be inculcated at the early stage of life, as children have now been perceived as capable of sophisticated thinking (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2010; Prout, 2005). The social project named 'sustainability' that aims to build a unified system of developmental potential for the global community is imperative in a diverse and multi-ethnic society which Nigeria presents. Its achievement, however, becomes problematic when confronted with the relevance of contextual elements in the forms of social, cultural, political and economic structures. It is imperative to emphasise that if the culture of sustaining supporting elements of life

is lacking from the cradle of life as foundational knowledge, there is the possibility of an endangered essence of life in the future.

Sustainable Development Education (SDE) can be described as the platform for posterity of social, cultural, environmental, ecological and economic values in society (UNESCO, 2007). Undoubtedly, quality education and the sustainable project do not have to be mutually exclusive. A country might want to see how achieving one might help to lay a foundation for another and vice versa. The process of training and educating a child as an agent of a sustainable future entails knowledge on how to design and preserve an environment wisely, consume wisely, interact wisely, collaborate wisely, relate with culture wisely and utilise resources wisely (World Education Forum (WEF), 2000). Invariably, quality education has been recognised as a veritable tool for sustainable development in any society (UNDP, 2015). In other words, the fundamental issue which underlies the significance of sustainability is how an organised body of knowledge that is capable of preserving the present and future lives in the 21st century can be agreed upon and passed from one generation to the other. The desire for a better future demands that the organised knowledge is unveiled from the cradle by inculcating these values into children's learning content. Every individual ought to be an agent of creation and recreation irrespective of age in the democracy of sustainable development (Davies et al., 2009).

Contextual Background: Nigeria and Sustainable Development

Nigeria is a society characterised by diverse cultures, values, languages and socio-cultural ethics of behaviour, endowed with multiple resources and bio-diversity (UNESCO, 2004; UNDP, 2001; WUP, 2007; Stuart, Adams and Jenkins, 1990). The society portrays the social-cultural attributes in contemporary times of modernisation and globalisation. However, with the growth in industrialisation and urbanisation, increased pressure has displaced many of the natural resources and the environment, causing depletion and destruction of nature that provides basic support for livelihood. The basis of life constitutes social, environmental, economic, cultural and ecological maintenance of its elements (Stahl and Bridges, 2013). The depletion of natural resources manifests in the form of environmental pollution, flooding, desertification, deforestation, destruction of earth, biodiversity and nature (Oribhabor, 2016; Tirima et al. 2016). Siraj-Blatchford, Smith and Samuelsson (2010) suggest that rapid consumption of natural resources has the tendency to create dangerous consequences in terms of global warming, ecological imbalance, threat to bio-diversity, rising sea levels, insecurity of life, increasing poverty and health hazards due to insufficient attention to their management.

The global agenda for sustainable development as enshrined in 17 global sustainable goals (UNDP, 2015) is aimed at ending poverty, fighting inequality and injustice, and tackling climate change by 2030. The fundamental premise of these goals is to allow countries in the Global South, Nigeria inclusive, come up with strategies to help younger generations to begin to think, in an inclusive manner, about a sustainable future for people and environment. The concern about younger generations might relate to the assertion of Boyden (2015) that the relative position of young people determines, to a great extent, the political and social conditions of any society. Thus, learning about preservation of values and environment, including living and non-living things, constitutes foundational learning in accomplishing these goals. This involves a conscious effort in inculcating formal and informal learning contents into young people's activities through a sustainable, democratically accountable learning system. In this case, the assertion of Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) that the educational institution is a "forum" for a democratic project is

applicable. The project in this case is the pursuit of sustainability goals through inclusive and participatory approaches. Undoubtedly, the outcome of this democratic approach can lead to a new policy direction for incorporating children into sustainable projects.

Around the globe, a growing trend in depletion has generated public and political concern, necessitating policy directives on how a society can maintain a sustainable future through advocacy and quality education (Davies et al, 2009; Mitchell and Carr, 2014) even at the pre-school levels (Clausen , 2015). The concepts of sustainable peace, citizenship, cultural values, tolerance, moral values, gender recognition, family values, health values, nature significance, environmental awareness and others are fundamental, not only for the past and present but also for the future generation. Quality education, an essential aspect of these goals, has been adduced as one of the key drivers of a sustainable agenda. Education is considered viable public goods in many developing countries and is often perceived as a tool for eradicating poverty and illiteracy in society. However, the concepts of quality and sustainability are in themselves contentious and open to academic and political debates. I do not explicitly set out an argument about these concepts in this paper, since many authors have extensively explored the concept of quality education (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss and Dahlberg, 2008) and sustainability (Robins and Roberts, 1998; Dernbach, 2003; Cerin, 2006; Stoddart, 2011; United Nations General Assembly (Bruntland), 1987; Odora, 2015) in the literature. I suggest that children should be considered important actors who could promote sustainability. The subject of sustainability has been found to contribute towards improving environment and livelihood for the present and the future generation (Carney, 1998).

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the principles of sustainability can be better understood and acknowledged as culturally-situated constructs, often shaped by the tension between traditional values and contemporary educational ideology as portrayed by institutional attitude. The idea of sustainability, though it varies across the globe, is aimed at achieving a similar goal. For instance, they are targeted towards eradication of inequality and poverty. I suggest it is how nations can begin to see how to ensure a smooth inter-generational transition of cherished values, resources and heritage. Thus, it is important to consider contexts and routes of ensuring knowledge transfer and creating necessary awareness. It is important to note that, though it is often claimed that the world has become a global village (Swiniarski and Breitborde, 2002), issues that relate to socio-economic, cultural and environmental approaches are country-specific. It suggests that contextual application should be understood in the first instance if the goal is to be pursued effectively. This contention is perceived to be rooted in adults' roles and agencies' attitude to the notion of childhood and what children can do. For instance, children are expected to engage in direct learning of the natural environment and moral instruction from adults. Going by the African culture, the inherited way of life can be said to be entrenched in agrarian and communal culture, and as such, children's engagement with nature and immediate environment is a natural learning ground. This entails integrating children into family businesses and agricultural activities like gardening and livestock farming.

Cultural learning thus becomes an imperative aspect of imbibing sustainable behaviour and is often passed across to children as early as possible, when they play around, they are taken to farms, gardens and poultries. As institutional education becomes an invaluable aspect of children's lives (Prout, 2005), there are influences of global ideals on local practices. A notable influence on young children is the use of technological gadgets in disseminating information. Moreover, economic ideologies bring about a piecemeal, competitive and individualistic approach to children's services.

The imperative to preserve natural resources such as nature for the purpose of a sustainable environment is well embraced by the relevant stakeholders, but decontextualized to the needs and experiences of a Nigerian child. Hence, this paper examines the socio-cultural approaches to understanding sustainability and capacity building especially in early childhood education and care (ECCE).

Theoretical Framework

Connections between Early Childhood Care and Education and Socio-cultural Context

The theoretical underpinning that fits into the context of the Nigerian ECCE is deeply embedded socio-cultural thought as propounded by Vygotsky (1962) and upheld by Rogoff et al. (1998). This implies that teachers, educators and other stakeholders need to understand the development of children in the context of their own immediate environment, because children adapt through the norms, belief and nature of interactions that occur in their communities. On this note, Clarke (1998), Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) and Moss (2002; 1994) establish the concept of quality and learning pattern of a child within the context of a specific society. For instance, the quality of children's experiences has been described as a socially situated concept capable of generating socio-cultural meanings while also addressing the issues of efficiency, effectiveness and performance in a particular context (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008). It is also indicated that quality cannot be presumed on a pre-constructed framework or on an intended conceptualised structure. In this study and in a developing economy context, consideration for integrating children into a sustainable plan cannot be divorced from the assertion of Clarke (1998) as supported by Moss & Dahlberg (2008:5) on quality assessment as art of a process of depoliticisation that displaces "real political and policy choices into a series of managerial imperatives"–substituting managerial methods for democratic deliberation" (Moss and Dahlberg, 2008:5).

In other words, the quality of children's experiences often emerges from sociocultural meaning(s) generated from a democratic deliberation agreed upon by relevant stakeholders in a particular context (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005), especially in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society like Nigeria. According to the authors, the "meaning making" concept entails the process of interpretation, reflection, dialogues, argumentation, judgement of values, contextualisation, evaluation through participation, democracy, collective deliberation, pedagogical documentation and negotiation (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008; Dahlberg , Moss & Pence, 2007), as against the modernist schools of thought (Toulmin , 1990) on an objective view of knowledge acquisition.

Practices associated with learning in a diverse society cannot be easily and precisely mirrored in the context of a universal formula; rather it is somewhat contextual and democratic in nature. The concept of democratic practice in ECCE has been vastly examined in the extant literature (Moss, 2007; 2011; Mitchell and Carr, 2014; Clausen, 2015). According to Moss (2007), it is the process of negotiating with children in performing learning activities. Moss (2011) described the democratic process in the context of ECCE as a phase that involves every individual as an agent of change, including children. He stated:

> Recognition, respect and valuing of diversity – of people, practices and perspectives – and of choice understood as participatory and inclusive collective decision-making (the democratic

> exercise of choice) are conditions for democracy in services for young children, another essential value that should underpin all aspects of these services. (Moss, 2011:2)

Democratic practice also involves the development of children's skills in specific culturally relevant tasks that relate to arts and community design. Putting young children at the heart of policy formulation as emphasised by Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (2007) is a sustainable goal. Therefore, this paper further provides some insights into the socio-cultural context in relation to SDE in Nigerian ECCE.

Concepts of Sustainability and Early Childhood Education

The term "sustainable development" was mentioned for the first time in 1987 by the Bruntland World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). In this context, sustainability means "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p.43). Various summits have been held in respect of sustainable development education (The Bruntland World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987; The UN Earth Summit, 1992; World Education Forum (WEF), 2000). These summits have focused on the scope of education for sustainable development with the aim of establishing a capturing definition to include consumption and utilization in relation to the younger generation. This also involves developing a vision in relation to resources preservation, meeting of needs, conservation and maintenance. Subsequently, the focus has been shifted to creating a society with no or relatively low poor populace and meeting the needs of the disadvantaged. A more direct way of achieving this is the formulation of policy directives targeted at equal accessibility to educational opportunities and creating equal economic social groups (Pearce, 2007).

The concept has since begun to receive scholarly attention and gained extended scopes and approaches. Sen (2013) viewed sustainability as a serious subject which should incorporate the individual, acting as an agent of change. Sustainable development is described as '*development that promotes the capabilities of present people without compromising capabilities of future generations*' (Sen, 2013, p.5). The emphasis in this definition is on building children's capacity in such a way that a synergy between the present and the future is assured. Such synergy requires an approach to policy making that attends to the present need sufficiently without destroying the fate of tomorrow. It suggests that children are necessarily a vital aspect of sustainable projects and should be treated as such in order to ensure projects' success.

Sustainable Development Education and Strategies

The relevance of education in the dissemination of the message of sustainability is imperative. This might relate to the fact that education has continued to feature in the national agenda. For instance, the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and UNESCO (2004) incorporates education for sustainable development in the Education for All (EFA) goals. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2010, p.5) emphasise visions for human and economic wellbeing, cultural traditions and respect for the environment as the three important pillars in their definition of SDE. According to the authors:

> It is therefore important to recognise that sustainable developments are supported by these three pillars acting together, and that any practices and policies developed without taking each into account are likely to be weaker and may even fail (Siraj-Blatchford et al:5).

Furthermore, the authors maintain that:

> Education for sustainable development has the potential to integrate and build upon a number of established areas of curriculum development including 'futures education'; 'citizenship'; 'peace education'; 'multicultural and gender education'; 'health education'; 'environmental education'; and; 'media literacy'. It also provides a platform and rationale for the further development of more recent curriculum initiatives such as those concerned with developing children's economic understanding (along with positive attitudes towards) sustainable credit and saving (Siraj-Blatchford et al:6).

It is possible to inculcate sustainable culture in children, having recognised the input of international fora such as UN Convention on the Rights of a Child (1989), United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, 2009) on ensuring access, equity and quality of education for children especially in the developing countries. It implies that a plausible step is to work on policy measures that are contextually fit for the present and future expectations. Indeed, Prout and James (1997) and James and Prout (2015) suggest that children's experiences and situations in the Global South should be contextualised and managed through a dialogic approach on how best to achieve optimum results . A feasible way of doing this is to reduce the pressure of western hegemony of ideologies on many of these countries. For instance, policy that will sufficiently address childhood poverty in Nigeria may want to look at the socio-cultural approach to meeting children's needs in the society while also challenging the economic ideology of neo-liberalism, which are not properly coordinated in the best interest of children.

Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2010) highlighted eight principles on how ECCE can be constructed to ensure that children serve as agents of SDE: access for all to a process of lifelong learning, all gender inclusive, learning for change, networks, arenas and partnerships, professional development to strengthen education for sustainable development across all sectors, education for sustainable development in the early childhood curriculum and sustainable development in practice. However, there are diverse approaches identified in extant literature with the involvement of children in the design process, surveying land by encouraging use of measuring tapes, open space and participation in various stages, parent, practitioner and child discussion, gardening and training, discussion on forestry, outdoor learning, child's interests, environment (Nitecki & Chung, 2016; McClain & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2016; Fisher-Maltese , 2016; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2010; Sylva et al., 2010; Bates and Tregenza, 2004; Hart , 1997; Odora, 20015; Little and Green, 2009).

In relation to environmental sustainability, Odora (2007) identifies agriculture, food preparation and allocation, effective water management, caring and treatment of infection and communicable diseases, farming activities such as hunting, fishing, cloth making, management of ecological relations of society and nature, adaptation to environmental/social change, reading of climate, husbandry, as components of education for children. The United Nations World Summit for Social Development (2000) emphasises social sustainability which include peace and security, tolerance, preaching against racism and skin colour. Robins and Roberts (1998) and Fien (2002) discussed lifestyle, consumption, energy utilization, natural resources and the impact on environment education.

As stated by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2010), the essence of incorporating different aspects of sustainable development into the ECCE programme is to create global awareness among children's

agencies and service providers on the fundamental need for interdependence and collaboration in achieving a sustainable agenda for the younger generation. This gives rise to the question: How is the notion of sustainable development education contextualised in Nigerian ECCE settings?

Research Method

This paper considers ways in which the theoretical framework of Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999; 2007) and Moss (2007; 2011), which embraces meaning-making, social construction of childhood experiences and democratic approaches, can be used to understand the socio-cultural dimensions of children's capacity for a sustainable future. In this study, I adopted a qualitative interpretive approach. Data was collected by conducting interviews and observations on teachers and pre-school children in ECCE settings. In this respect, interviews served as a useful tool to gather all the necessary information needed for the study because the study intends to explore how sustainable development education is administered to children. Also, observational studies were conducted to capture specific practices in the classroom. This entailed direct observation of children during the performance of activities and teachers' actual practices.

The interviews were conducted with a homogenous group of people, purposively sampled based on substantial years of experience in ECCE and knowledge about sustainable development goals. Creswell's (2003) suggests that the purposive method serves as a useful approach in identifying and choosing stakeholders or participants, with the aim of gaining deeper insight into a key phenomenon. The sample size is limited because the focus is much more on the point of data saturation that characterises a qualitative study (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002).

In this study, 13 interviews were conducted which included five proprietors/school-owners, four nursery/kindergarten class teachers and four children (see Table 1). The interview process was conducted with the participants until there appeared a reoccurrence or repetition of responses. The qualitative principles in this study aim to ensure that meanings are generated from participants' narratives and are formed into themes (Marsh and White, 2006). Through this approach, a clearer picture, interpretation and understanding of sustainable education and the implications were examined. Table 1 presents the profiles of the respondents.

The following sub-questions underlie the basis of the study:

(i) How do ECCE stakeholders perceive the notion of SDE within the socio-cultural framework of educating children in Nigeria?
(ii) What are the innovative practices that teachers and children engage in to support SDE?

Following a thematic data analysis, themes were generated from the data. Final themes that emerged indicate the bulk of the findings in the context of specific educational approaches for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Findings

The two themes generated from the data are *Local versus contemporary practices in inculcating SDE in children in Nigeria*, and *Democratic approach to building sustainable principles in Nigerian ECCE*. They are discussed below.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Number of interviews	Years of Experience	Pseudo-nyms	Profiles	Organisation Type
5	10-20 years	MK, PK, ZK, JK, YK	Proprietors/ head teachers who are trained in early childhood education with teaching and administration experience(5 females)	Registered & Licenced ECCE centres; Day care, kindergarten, nursery and primary classes.
4	5-16 years	MT, PT, ZT, JT	Teacher in pre-primary classes (2 males and 2 females)	Registered & Licenced ECCE centres; Day care, kindergarten, nursery and primary classes.
4	Age 4-6 years	XB, YB, XG, YG	2 girls and 2 boys	Public and private schools, Lagos State.

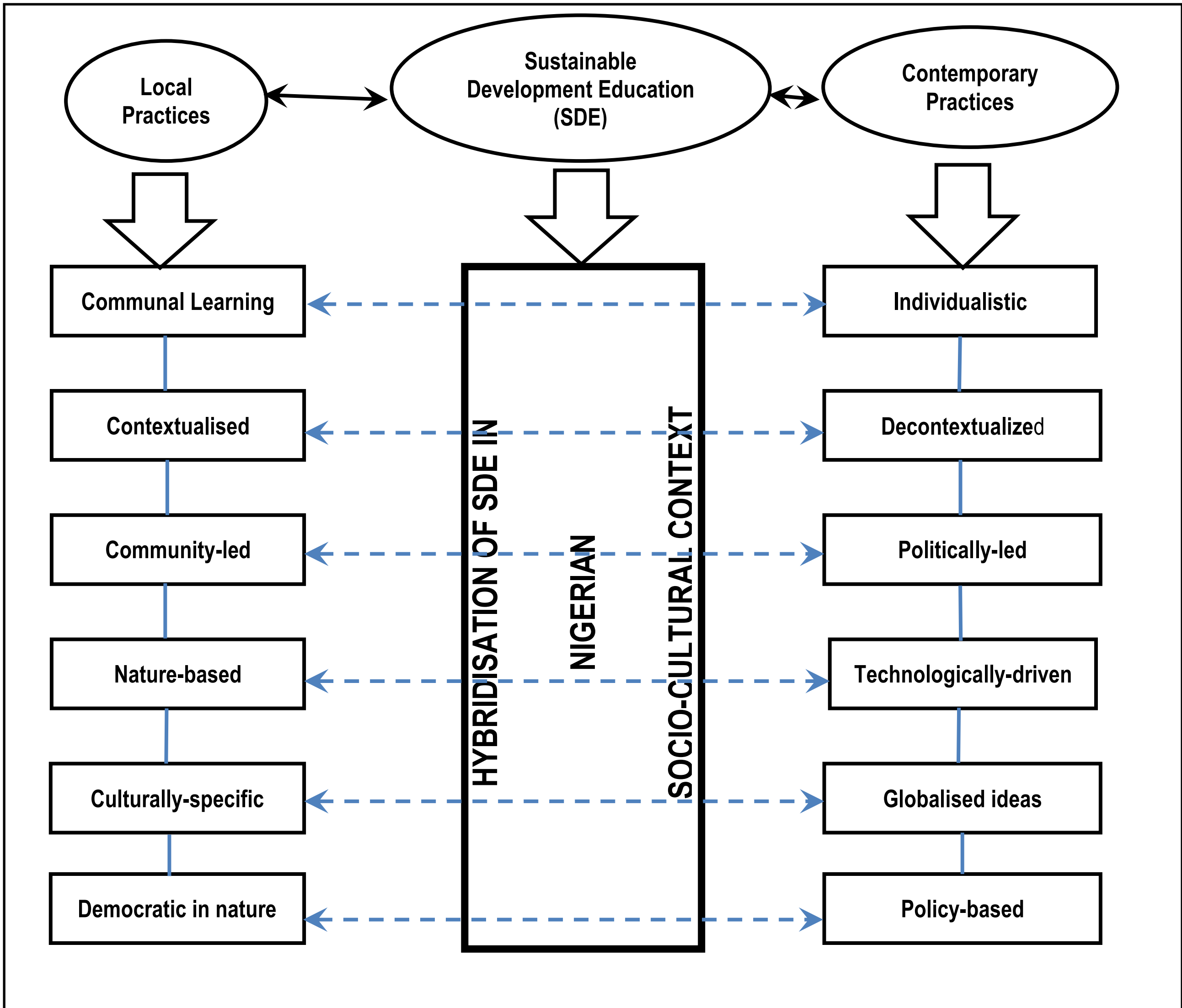
Local and contemporary practices of SDE

Respondents expressed different opinions when confronted with questions on the notion of SDE in ECCE context. Many of the responses seemed to be divided along a generational transition between local and contemporary notions of sustainable practices of integrating children into the local and wider society. Contemporary ideas that govern the wider society are sometimes not in tandem with local practices (see Figure 1).

Four of the teachers interviewed (MT, PT JT and YT) believed a sustainable mentality starts from within and should imbibe cherished heritage and culture that binds community together in children. Cultural and environmental learning was perceived as an essential aspect of ensuring a sustainable future. In a global sense, they often referred to the role of technological and knowledge transfer that can upgrade any cultural lapses and remove cultural barriers to sustainable progress in children. Emphasis on an integrated approach cuts across the social, economic, cultural and political workings of the society. The most featured phrases include "cultural learning, meeting children's needs, embracing diversity, giving hope, re-orientation, government functional role and participatory approach". I suggest respondents are interested in achieving a synergy between local and global practices in a way that children can benefit. For instance, while technology was perceived as a veritable tool, two of the teachers (ZT and PT) believed that the intricacies of sustainability cannot be fully understood through technology. For instance, teacher ZT stated:

> Technology is very good and a useful tool for engaging children in sustainable learning activities. But as good as it is, these gadgets are throwing some things that make us Nigerians away from the children. I believe a sustainable future must incorporate cherished values like communal responsibilities, discipline, and the issue of extended family.

Figure 1: Principles guiding local and contemporary practices of SDE in Nigeria



Source: Author's own construction from findings (2016/17)

PT added:

> ...when a child is locked up in the house to spend most of his or her time with technology without any relations with human or nature, how can sustainable behaviour be ensured?

Democratic approaches in the Nigerian ECCE

Sustainability was not perceived from a need-based perspective but rather a project to be worked on democratically by all relevant stakeholders. All the teachers felt that children's agencies and services should incorporate a more democratic and participatory approach to meeting children's needs in the classrooms and the society at large. They believed children's voices should be adequately incorporated and adults' roles should be modified. The tension between adults' control and children's capacity for participation should be eased and considered.

The findings in the context of democratic approaches generate two sub-themes: Practical strategies and instructional approaches. According to the proprietors, SDE should advance proactive steps teaching children effective management and conservation of resources - both human and non-human in the environment - to get the best out of them.

Moreover, all the head teacher respondents described SDE as skills that children acquire both overtly or covertly from the society about the kind of future they hope for. While they emphasized the need to teach children and every individual on how environmental elements and resources can be utilised, they spoke extensively on the need for an inter-generational transfer of cherished values and culture. According to JK, one of the Proprietors:

> As a country, we are losing the value that underlies equality and justice for everyone, there is the urgent need to educate young ones from the early stage and give them hope of a sustainable future in order to avoid crisis in the future.

The opinions of the teachers are important because they have a closer relationship with the children. While two of the teachers (PT and MT) emphasised the notion of sustainable development education as a functional and quality education, suggesting a mutual relationship, they acknowledged the inadequacy of the present educational structure to fully accomplish this. Other notions ascribed to SDE include training children on how to be disciplined and organised in the use of resources in such a way as to avoid wastage and negative consequences on others and the environment. The other two respondent teachers (ZT and JT) opined that the broad concepts of SDE are embedded in moral instruction and character building in children. In this context, this is related to social sustainability, which is highlighted in the themes generated. Probing the strategic approaches adopted, two of the teacher respondents (ZT and MT) indicated as follows; ZT stated:

> ...as part of our commitment to make sure that these children know better than we adults for a better future, we have a day of practical activities including how to take care of environment, how to avoid bush burning, how to wet ground around the residential areas during a very hot whether like this because of dust and contaminated air, how to grow gardens, trees around the living premises, how to take care of flowers…

The response from MT revealed how the process of gardening and children's visits to farms are useful:

> ...we regularly show, demonstrate and instruct these young ones the function of hoes in weeding, cutlass in trimming grasses, shear in trimming flowers...though they might be young in doing these alone, but we stand by them…and encourage their parents to give similar homework to do in that direction… we have some demonstration farms in our premises as well.

According to one of the proprietors (head teachers):

> What we are doing are in line with our cultural philosophy which is subsumed in the principles of 'catch them young before it is too late…

The respondent teachers and head teachers stated that children are selected to play some roles and engage in creative activities that showcase sustainability and maintenance culture. A respondent teacher, JT, describes her personal beliefs about sustainability as entrenched in discipline. She stated:

> Train up your child in the way he should, when he grows up, he will not depart…the principle of environmental preservation is very crucial. It is the responsibility of every adult to teach children in their care. For instance, Lagos and some major cities recently experienced flooding which claimed many lives and properties…the causes of all these are poor habit of waste disposal and unkempt environment…

According to PT, the principles and skills of SDE should be inculcated in children from home, as stated:

> Having realised that … charity begins at home, we often encourage parents to allow children to practice what we teach them at home. For examples, how to participate in ditches cleaning, use of water, property waste disposal… and we monitor it through the expected feedback from their parents.

Emergent themes during the analysis indicate that children are trained in some ways to act short drama or sing songs that involve different roles including farming, conservation and preservation of resources, principles of saving, tolerance, love, peace and unity of purpose. According to the respondent teachers, the children wear special costumes and sing songs about the dangers of environmental degradation. Other innovative approaches adopted in ECCE are outdoor trips to some of the natural and cultural sites, such as museums, reserves, zoological gardens and universities' art galleries.

Outdoor education plays a vital role in exposing children to elements of the environment where they live, and the impact of conservation for their future is explained to them. As stated by one of the head teachers, PK

> The essence of the trips is to inculcate the principles of sustainable development in children and to educate them while it is pretty good to preserve and conserve nature for future advantages and to educate the children the behaviour of nature, the danger of negligence, the significance of planning against disaster in vulnerable areas around the coast.

In addition, another emerging strategy for sustainable development education identified is the illustration of nature and environment with the use of folktales and storytelling. This is usually done by bringing the community into the school environment. As stated by a teacher:

> In some cases, we bring some experts and elderly persons to narrate a story to using animals such as tortoise, monkey, goat, horses, frogs, parrots and others to explain the important of natural environment preservation…in most case it is amusing and entertaining to children and it reminds them that where they live need to be kept off dangers.

The foregoing strategy was confirmed from responses obtained from the children (4-6 years) on what they enjoy doing in their learning:

> I like it when it is story time. I like it when my teacher tells me story about nature, bush and animals and how I can keep our surrounding...home, dispose waste at home...and that it is not good to play with fire, not to turn on tap at home without any reason.

Figure 2 summarises the findings in the context of strategies adopted to inculcate SDE in Nigerian ECCE community.

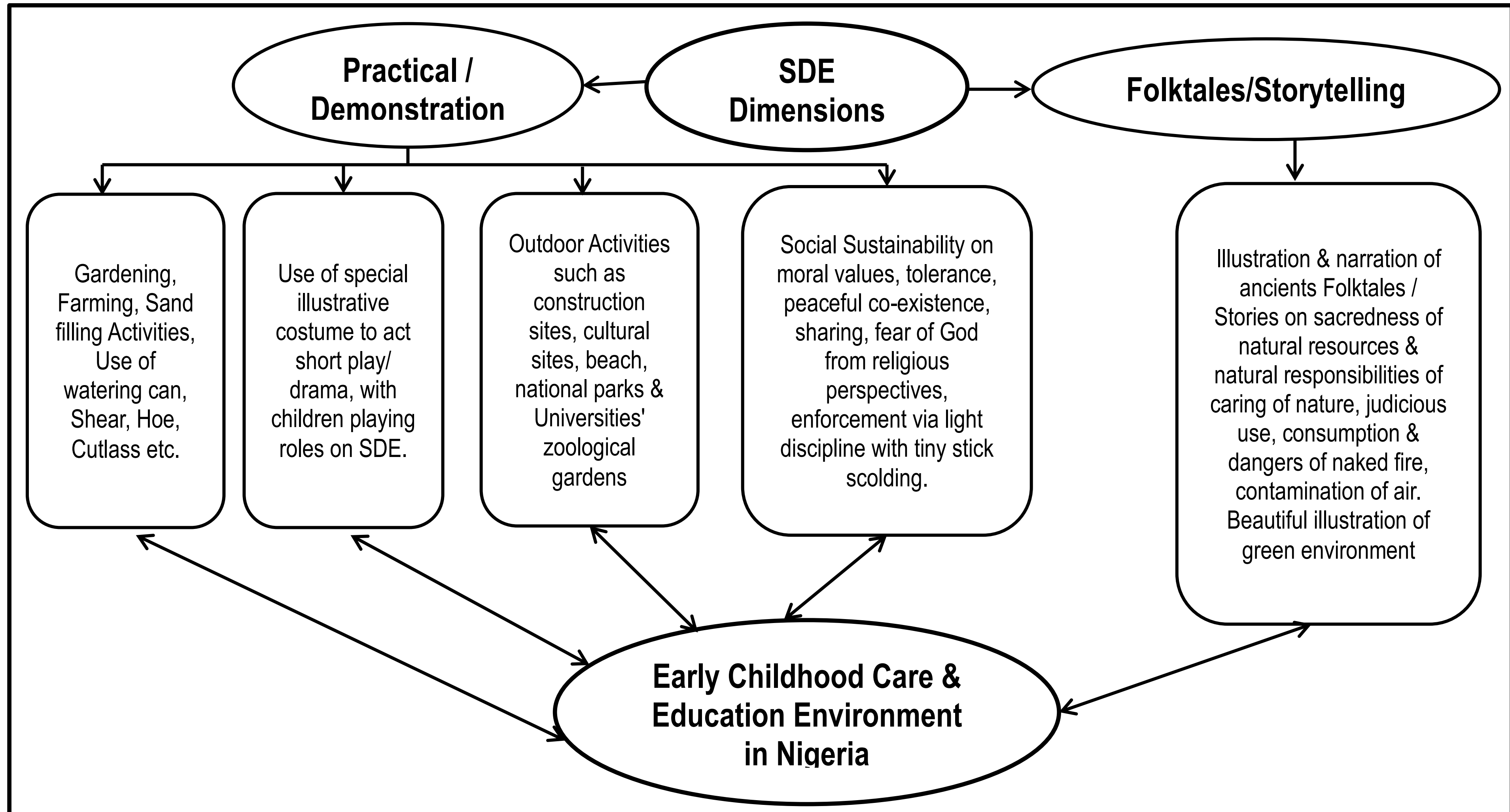
Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

In the study, teachers and owners of ECCE centres in Nigeria are aware of sustainable development education (SDE) and its interconnectedness with global happenings. Two themes emerged as discussed in the previous section; local versus contemporary practices of SDE and democratic approach in the context of SDE. These findings are explained within the theoretical underpinning raised in this paper. For instance, the issue of ECCE practice and quality in relation to SDE is in line with the opinions of Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999; 2007) that ECCE quality and practice is in country context, not on the basis of developed metrics often used in the Anglo-American context and neo-liberal system. The implication is that children's capacity for a sustainable future can be built on a proper cohesion of local and contemporary ideologies about childhood, their capacities and potentials.

In Figure 1, the respondent stakeholders were of the opinion that SDE is a culturally sensitive learning that involves a communal effort. According to the stakeholders, the communal effort should take advantage of contemporary practices like individual children's capacity and technologically-driven innovation in contributing to SDE. Another striking point is that SDE practices at the local level are based on informal practices which can be upgraded through the hybridization with the contemporary ideas that are based on political willingness and appropriate policy. Also, findings in this study indicate that SDE is character – based learning system which should incorporate moral instruction and character training in children. SDE also should be child friendly by incorporating children voices into decision making system at the school and policy-making levels. This implies a balance between adult control and children capacity for participating in SDE. A feasible way is to come up with an innovative policy that will synergise local and global contexts of SDE in the best interest of building children's capacity. It is important to state that this study was conducted with teachers, head teachers/proprietors and children in selected schools that operate pre-primary education in Lagos, Nigeria.

The foregoing discussion supports the work of UNESCO (2005) and Trima et al. (2016), which suggests that educational institutions are vehicles in the transfer of knowledge structures that guide a sustainable future. These authors and the findings in this study associate basic principles and concepts of SDE with contextual elements they could relate with. In addition, the descriptions of SDE provided by the respondents were coherent with the literature supporting the views of Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2010), that SDE constitutes three pillars; human and economic wellbeing, cultural traditions and respect for the environment, in which children can participate. The data which suggest that children are social actors in sustainable projects have some features identified in literature (Odora 2007; Robins and Roberts, 1998; Fien, 2002, Nitecki & Chung, 2016; McClain & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2016 and Fisher-Maltese, 2016).

Figure 2: Socio-cultural Dimensions to SDE in Nigerian ECCE



Source: Author's own construction of findings (2016/2017)

This study focuses on how children's capacity towards a sustainable future can be developed and enhanced in a developing country like Nigeria. Sustainable development education is viewed as necessary in the light of its local and global relevance. The aims are similar to ensuring a sustainable environment in the context of resource utilization and consumption, whilst also ensuring that contextual factors that influence its effectiveness are considered. SDE practices are situated within two categories; demonstration and instructional aspects. Practical aspects include gardening and farming activities, drama (playlet), visits to construction sites, zoos, parks and other environment-related activities. Instructional aspects include storytelling and teaching as shown in Figure 2

This paper also argues that an understanding of children's capacity for sustainability is situated within both local and global contexts. This can be explored through an active involvement of children's agencies in dialogues. This will involve a democratic approach that incorporates teachers, children parents and other relevant stakeholders in a contextually and globally. A distinct finding is that children's participation in building a sustainable future is a consequence of the knowledge of the workings of their social and cultural and not a matter of economic wealth per se. In other words, children are positioned to participate in sustainable activities. It concludes that sustainability cannot only be built on what may be seen as decontextualized responses by the relevant stakeholders to the needs and experiences of the "whole child".

Author's biography

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Key Concepts and Methods in Ethnography, Language and Communication: A Review

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PhD students and early career researchers from around the world met at King's College London from 11th – 15th September 2017, to participate in a short course on *Key Concepts and Methods in Ethnography, Language and Communication*. The annual course, which was initiated with funding from the Social and Economic Research Council (ESRC) in 2007, is organized by King's Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Centre. The five-day course was tutored by an international group of high-profile academics, which consisted of Ben Rampton from King's College London, Jan Blommaert from Tilburg University, Jeff Bezemer (UCL Institute of Education), Adam Lefstein (Ben-Gurion University of Negev), and Julia Snell from the University of Leeds. The participants, a diverse group both with regard to their geographical as well as academic background, were mostly doctoral students and some post-doctoral researchers. According to the organizers (King's College, 2017), the aim of this short course was to help the participants to navigate the twin perils of over-and under-interpreting discourse data, by introducing a range of key perspectives and tools used to study language and communication ethnographically, in a wide range of settings, such as education, workplace, and health.

On the first day, the main theoretical perspectives and frameworks concerning linguistic ethnography, as well as common difficulties and problems specific to this approach, were discussed. This intensive day concluded with a superb dinner in the National Theatre, where participants socialized and enjoyed tasty food and drinks within a friendly and informal atmosphere. The following days, respectively, focused on specific concepts and methods of analysis, such as micro-analysis, discourse genres, multimodal analysis, semiotic landscaping and trans-contextual analysis. Sessions were intensive with a high-level of involvement, as a lot of importance was placed on interaction between participants. Research related questions and problems were directly addressed during the lectures and answered by specialists in the relevant fields.

In addition to the daily readings, discussions, and workshops, several participants were given the opportunity to present data extracts from their own research during allocated data analysis sessions; here, room was given for in-depth group discussions and opportunities to receive extensive feedback from peers and the chairing tutors. These student-led data sessions further explored the analytical themes and methods discussed during the individual days. Much effort, both by students and tutors, went into the preparation of these data session. After submitting proposals in due time before the short course, tutors offered in-depth, one to one feedback via video call, to discuss suitable data samples from students' own research. Once a particularly relevant and exciting piece of data was agreed on, transcriptions were prepared, and contextualising documents were drafted.

One of the authors of this review took up the opportunity to prepare a 90-minute data session, focusing on the multimodality theme. In the author's case, a two-minute extract of interactional

data, showing the author's research participant utilizing his smartphone in an interview setting, was selected. A multimodal transcript and additional supporting documents were handed out, before the video sequence was shown numerous times. As expected, the data session was a very insightful and valuable experience; the supportive audience offered detailed feedback, confirmed and substantiated analytical ideas, and provided particularly useful commentary concerning issues related to the multimodal transcription of the presented data sample. More than that, entirely new facets and dimensions of the data snippet concerning the interaction between the participant and his smartphone were explored and brought forward by the audience. For the author, this was an equally fascinating and uncanny experience, as seemingly familiar moments within the data extract were interpreted in novel and unprecedented ways. Many of the thoughts and ideas that were developed and discussed during this particular data session at King's College are still significant and central to the author's research project today. Thus, preparing and sharing 'raw data' for discussion, was a unique and particularly stimulating experience, which can only be recommended.

The King's College *Key Concepts and Methods in Ethnography* short course has much to offer to novice ethnographers and early career researchers within the Social Sciences, particularly to those, who have already collected data and are in the early stages of analysis. Yet, the course is not cheap (£600 course fee plus one week's accommodation in London), especially for students who have no, or little, financial support. However, the authors are convinced that attending the course is well worthwhile for the following reasons; first, King's College offers stipends on course fees and provides complimentary food and drink during the week. More than that, a high-quality dinner was provided on the first night, further bringing down the overall costs. Second, the short course has been up and running for several years; this is a big plus, as the overall structure and style of delivery of the course is based on years of experience. It seemed that much thought was spent on the planning and preparation of each session. Furthermore, carefully selected reading packs with relevant literature were distributed before and during the course, which are useful resources to the authors thereafter. Third, during the course, participants work on real data and experience the analysis process from the introduction of 'raw data' to the development of analytical ideas. This hands-on and exemplary approach is helpful for novice researchers, who might be intimidated and overwhelmed by the data analysis process. Particularly those students who took up the opportunity to lead their own data sessions benefited greatly from this. Last, the length and intensity of the course makes a lasting impression; although the course is intense at times, the overall structure allows for formal but also informal interactions with both participants and tutors. During this week, many opportunities to connect and network with fellow students but also with the tutors themselves, who were very communicative and approachable, were given. Thus, it comes with little surprise that this short course has led to successful collaborations and lasting partnerships in the past, such as student-led workshops and conferences (e.g. the biannual *Explorations in Ethnography, Language and Communication* conference, instigated by Fiona Copland, Sara Shaw, and Julia Snell), as well as co-authored publications (Copland et al., 2015).

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Book Review: The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally

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ABSTRACT: This book review examines The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally. The author of the book is David Elkind, a well-known psychologist and author who has published several parenting books that discuss early childhood and issues that relate to young children. In this book, the intention is mainly about opening adults' eyes to the shift that has happened in methods of rearing children. The tendency towards academic learning, technological games and the overprotection of children is prohibiting and affecting children's normal growth. The book aims to articulate the importance of play in children's development and how it is considered to be an essential element of growing healthily. The book is written to increase awareness of the impact of the current shift towards academic learning and speeding up children's growth.

Summary

The author divides the book into three parts. Each part contains three to four chapters that discuss the current and common ways of nurturing children and provide several theory-based suggestions to enhance parents' parenting skills. The first part of the book introduces the cornerstone concept of the book, which is the importance of integrating play with love, to work to enrich children's experiences and to encourage them to obtain their full potential. According to Elkind, play, love, and work are not to be separated, not just for children, but for adults as well, if we want to have healthy and happy lives. Having a balance between these concepts is what is needed to overcome some of the challenges that parents, teachers and children face today. Children grow and learn through play, through interacting with each other and through the nature that surrounds them. Anything new, extraordinary and creative comes first from children's play. They acquire skills that promote their intellectual and social skills that will enable them to grow up and reach their full potential. Therefore, it is important to enter the child's playing world and use it to promote the trajectory of positive development. However, Elkind mentions that due to the reality in which we live today there are fewer chances for children to play games that help them to make sense of their environments, their world and their experiences. Cheap plastic games, technological games, indoor activities instead of outdoor activities, and structured organised activities instead of free play are what young children have today. Consequently, they play and interact with things that do not promote their emotional, social, physical and intellectual development as much as before. Instead, these kinds of games turn children into young future consumers who do not have any personal attachment to their toys and thus, do not value them.

Further, the author says that parents are partly responsible for these changes in the nature of children's play. At the present time, there are interrelated factors that cause parents to unconsciously decrease their children's chances of having effective play which in turn impacts upon their healthy growth. Elkind mentions that the overprotection and the persistent feelings of anxiety that something bad might happen if the children play freely outdoors are among the factors that cause parents to limit children's play. Another factor is peer pressure that parents feel to enrol their children in many structured and organised activities, thinking that it makes them better parents. Finally, the author concludes the first part by saying that childhood is not a race; it has natural sequences that come from integrating love with play and work. Play is a crucial part of

childhood and it has outstanding benefits that outperform the benefits that might result from pressing children to grow up too quickly and to learn academic subjects.

The second part of the book discusses the integration of play with learning and different aspects of development. Before the author gives the reader suggestions about how to integrate these aspects, he talks about the common confusion and misunderstanding of children's learning methods. First, he describes how adults think that children learn best by following the suggested steps and advice that they offer to them. According to Elkind, adults are the ones who should learn to watch, not children. Children learn from engaging completely with activities without any disruption. The second misunderstanding is that childhood is a critical period for learning and that children's brains are like sponges that easily absorb what is presented to them. This assumption explains the current tendency towards academic education in preschools. However, there are many studies that indicate that children's brains grow slowly and according to specific sequences; therefore, children's intellectual capabilities develop gradually while they are growing. The last assumption is the belief that children are not trying hard enough when they do not understand something that adults are talking about. What adults may fail to understand is that children have not yet acquired the intellectual abilities and perceptions that adults have, and that it is unreasonable to expect children to comprehend the sorts of things that adults can. As Elkind (2007, p.103) notes:

> …the child does not learn by 'watching', 'absorbing', or 'looking harder.' The young child does learn by constructing and reconstructing the world through his play-generated learning experiences.

Then, Elkind explains in detail how children develop numerous intellectual skills like reasoning and object permanence while they engage in free play. Mastering these skills is crucial to set the stage for the next levels of development where academic subjects like mathematics, reading and science are introduced. Further, Elkind points out several strategies that adults could use to enable their children to master intellectual, motor, and social skills through playing and storytelling. For instance, using stories to introduce facts, telling stories with rhythm and providing children with firsthand experiences are some of the learning methods that make children naturally motivated. 'Learning is most powerful when it involves self-initiation and personal motivation' (Elkind, 2007, p.151). In addition, children gain the necessary skills that prepare them for advanced skills through direct, active and humorous involvement with people and elements.

The last part of the book is intended to introduce some of the methods that help parents to have cheerful and happy parenting experiences rather than to take parenting too seriously. According to Elkind, humour reinforces children's learning and healthy growth. Parents are encouraged to integrate humour with love, play and work as a way to have a healthy parenting style for both themselves and their children. The author provides several real-life examples that illustrate his point of view and demonstrates how parents, through humour, can turn their negative feelings into positive ones. The long-term memory that young children will carry with them is one that is full of fun and loving moments, and play experiences as well, as these memories become their source of comfort and hope.

The author concludes by suggesting several educational practices and philosophies that integrate play, love and work. Despite the current educational system that focuses on accountability and academic achievement as the main aims of education, Elkind offers several approaches that

combine children's minds, hearts and bodies in school. He provides brief descriptions of John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and several other philosophers' approaches that take a holistic approach in teaching children rather than just focusing on children's minds. To enrich children's learning experiences, adults are provided with several choices: enrol their children in schools like Montessori and Waldorf schools, or follow some techniques that help to integrate play, love, and work.

Reviewer's Reflections

Over all, as an educator myself, I empathise with Elkind's perspective, which confirms what I already believed about children's development and the importance of play. During my teaching experience, my endeavours mostly reflected the learner-centred approach. My students are at the top of my priorities. I followed a teaching style that was driven by my students' interests, needs and characteristics. I tried my best to provide them with opportunities to express themselves freely. However, because of the evaluation system that was generated as a result of the emphasis on academic achievements, my teaching approach was challenged. The great tendency towards academic learning and achievement in the early years is increasing. Nowadays, kindergartens that focus on academic achievement are highly rated in my home country. Thus, I felt that as an early childhood educator I have to do something.

To be influential and contribute in shifting the emphasis on academic achievement, I decided to empower myself with knowledge. I came cross Elkind's book while I was reading about what really matters in the early years. I found it rich in knowledge and at the same time was easy to understand. Because I know that it is easy to be driven by the current tendency towards academic achievement, I feel that this book is helpful to remind all about what really matters. For parents, teachers and academics I believe that Elkind's book would be of interest because it informs them with the teaching and learning methods that supports children's development. Sometimes, with workload, pressure and the demands to academically achieve, teachers can forget about the essence of early childhood education, which is promoting children's development and progress through lived and shared experiences. Children need to explore the world around them to learn: they can learn best by doing and through playing and interacting with others. Elkind's book sheds light on ways children happily learn without the need of rigid instructions and preset outcomes. I found the book inspirational and a reminder about what really matters in early childhood.

Critique of the Book

The concept of the book is similar to the concepts of Elkind's other books like "The Hurried Child". The way he wrote The Power of Play illustrates how he is passionate about childhood and attentive to the challenges that are faced by children today. Through the book, he aims to depict the reality that children are living in today because of adults' misunderstandings and faulty assumptions about how children learn effectively and grow in a healthy way. The main audience is parents who are driven by the new tendency that believes a bright future for young generations will be gained through academic learning, extra curricula and structured activities, and technologic games. Elkind delineates the right approach that parents should follow through a constant calling in the book for the importance of finding balance between play, love, and work. In the book, he certainly does a great job in delivering his ideas and uses several methods to make them easy to apply.

First, he utilises real-life examples and stories, which in several cases were from his own parenting experiences, to illustrate and support his notions. For readers, these examples and stories that come from a genuine experience are what they want to learn from and what match their concerns. Integrating reality and the ways in which many parents live today encourages parents to seek change and to make sense of their own experiences. For instance, to explain parent peer pressure, Elkind mentions a parent whom he met in one of his lectures who said that he or she had to enrol his or her child in a football team because all of the boys in the neighbourhood were enrolled. For parents, it is such a relief to know that other parents also face the pressure and the difficult experiences that they face with their children. Thus, Elkind's integration of his notions with real-life stories is a clever method.

Secondly, Elkind supports his ideas with scientific theories. He uses Jean Piaget's theory to provide parents with insights about children's growth and the developmental stages that they grow through. His aim is to make parents realise that each child develops at his or her own pace and that children's capabilities differ from each other. Moreover, he uses several philosophers' theories like Jean-Jacques Rousseau who promotes children's individuality and that they learn best through their own ways of thinking and knowing. He also cites the work of John Locke and Maria Montessori who assert the role of the senses on children's growing and learning processes. He simplifies the theories so that any adult, regardless of the level of education he or she holds, is able to fully understand it.

Thirdly, the book is full of advice and suggestions about how to nurture children in ways that promote their healthy growth. At the end of each chapter, Elkind illuminates several approaches that integrate play, love and work. Some of his advice is about the importance of introducing learning experiences to young children. Another piece of advice is about how to answer children's questions appropriately in ways that encourage them to think deeply rather than discouraging them. In addition, he provides several crucial suggestions to parents about how to enjoy their parenting experiences and their children's childhood as it will end much sooner than the parents might think.

Moreover, through several explanations and examples, Elkind attempts to answer the questions that he knows many parents are seeking answers for. To illustrate, he mentions that the book chapters are designed as guidance on some questions that concern parents; for example, when and how much should we, as parents, expose young children to electronic devices? When is it too much and when is it enough? And many other timely questions that relate to the inquiries of today's reality. Parents, nowadays, are faced with new challenges such as when to introduce smartphones and for how long they should allow their children to browse the internet: the advice Elkind offers in this book is applicable and pertains to the issues that concern today's parents.

Overall, The Power of Play is a book that, in my opinion, every parent and teacher must read. It is highly accessible thanks to its clear writing style. Even the scientific theories and philosophies are simplified in ways that make it interesting and pertinent to everyday parenting and teaching styles. Further, the book brings up clear and useful guidance for parents and teachers to foster children's healthy growth and creativity by integrating play, love and work. Also, it shows how play is a crucial part of children's development and how it is an effective tool for children's emotional, intellectual, social, and physical growth.

What is really fascinating about the book is that while reading it one comes to the deep realisation about how childhood is being hurried. It is a wake-up call to pay attention to what is being taken away from young children these days and what is offered as an alternative. Simply, the author sends a message that says let children be children. Being a child who explores his or her world by his or her own abilities and interests is something that should not be compromised. Free play, fun moments and cooperative playmates are the effective learning tools that will fulfil children's need, curiosity and growth.

In spite of the tremendous strengths of the book and its abundant resources, there are some chapters that discuss and repeat the same ideas mentioned in previous chapters. In addition, due to the valuable and realistic notions and issues that Elkind points out throughout his book, it would be of benefit if the book targeted different audiences such as educators and policy makers. I believe that it would be very helpful if the book discussed how teachers could modify the curriculum to promote learning through play.

In conclusion, Elkind encourages adults to reintroduce play into children's lives to enable them to grow according to their natural sequences, instead of pressuring them and making childhood a period that just prepares them for adulthood. Through his book, Elkind not only provides enormous practical and realistic methods to reach children's fulfilment, but he also answers important questions, highlights parents' concerns and provides real-life stories and situations. It is not a book that is written from the perspective of a psychologist, it is the product of an expert, parent, and grandparent's perspective and that is what makes it really a special book. I would certainly recommend the book to parents, teachers and academic as a great and complete guide to nurturing children in a healthy way and also to enjoying parenting and teaching experiences.

Author's biography

Nada Zal AlWadaani is currently a PhD student at the University of Sheffield at the faculty of Social Sciences. Her focus is on early childhood education and issues that relate to the education of young children. She has a master's degree in early childhood education from the University of British Columbia. Her area of interest is in inclusion in the early years and how it can be implemented to ensure the needs of all children are met.

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