Conceptualizations of Childhood, Pedagogy and Educational Research in the Postmodern

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A Critical Interpretation

By

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This book is dedicated to my late husband Bengt Eric Meynert, who supported me in all my endeavors to locate myself within the intellectual spaces in Sweden; and to my parents Elizabeth Zachariah John and Avicote Varghese John, who gave me the freedom to explore my intellectual horizons.

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PREFACE

This document is an outcome of my personal interest in children and childhood, which started in the late 70s when I decided to look at the interface between home and school socialization of children of two ethnic minorities, namely Syrian Christians and Moplah Muslims of Kerala State in India. Over the next five years, I went to two locales in Kerala State during my summer vacations and spent time in two separate villages, visiting the local schools and homes of children belonging to these two communities. In addition to ethnicity (which was my major focus), I was also interested in gender and class while considering the socialization of children in a semi-urban society. During the process of writing my dissertation, I found a dearth of theory into which this study could be located. The discipline "Sociology of Childhood" was unknown to me then; I only discovered it when I attended the World Congress of Sociology in Bielefeld in the 1990s. I attended the sessions of different research commissions and came across the Research Commission for Sociology of Childhood.

Over the next decade, I developed an interest in social theories of modernism and postmodernism. In 2007, I submitted a Master's essay discussing the structuring of identities within the modern and the postmodern that had been presented at the World Congress of the International Sociological Association, Sociology of Education mid-term conference (the theme being Identity, Politics, Multiculturalism and Education), held between December 1–3, 2000, in Hualien, Taiwan. When I finally picked up the threads of my interest in "childhood" in the early twenty-first century, I

discovered that ideas related to socialization and childhood had taken a radical turn. Hence, in 2008, when I got the opportunity to spend six months at the Department of Education at the University of Lund, I decided to explore the new theoretical trends conceptualizing childhood and the implication for pedagogy and educational research. The research issues this document addresses is the paradigmatic shift from modernism to postmodernism and how this has affected the conceptualizations of children and childhood, pedagogy and educational research.

Between 2007 and 2011, I had the opportunity to leisurely explore new directions within "Sociology of Education," "Sociology of Knowledge" and "Sociology of Childhood" at the Department of Education, Lund University. It is under the supervision of Dr. Glen Helmstad that this became a research document. My thanks to Prof. Mina O'Dowd, Prof. Bosse Bergström, Prof. em. Lennart Svensson, Prof. Sune Sunnesson, Dr. Glen Helmstad and my opponent Dr. Barbara Schulte for giving me valuable feedback that will hopefully make this document acceptable to the academic community. I also express my thanks to Britt-Marie Johansson, the Head of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Education, Dr. Gunnar Andersson, associate professor, Prof. Anders Persson (in the Chair) and the University of Lund for allowing this document to be submitted for a Phil. Lic degree.

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of developments following the popularization of critical theory in the 60s and the 70s came the debate between modernism and postmodernism. Opposition between conflict theorists and consensual theorists shifted to opposition between structuralism and post-structuralism. There developed an observable shift away from the concept of a "found" world, "out there," objective, knowable and factual towards a concept of "constructed" worlds. In the West, the "crisis" of power, patriarchy, authority, identity and ethics marked the new postmodern age (Illich, 1983; Meynert, 1993). This has shattered the hope that ultimate "truth" could be found in "grand narratives" and lead to freedom. Apple (1991) comments that in contemporary research located in the postmodern, reality is constructed from text (spoken or written utterances), subject to multiple interpretations, readings and uses. All discourses are understood to occur within a shifting and dynamic social context in which multiple sets of power relations are inevitable (Foucault, 1980), hence they are political not neutral.

As postulates based on the autonomous, unified, reified, essentialized, coherent and integrated subject capable of conscious rational action and objectivity have been deconstructed, a new understanding of subjectivity is emerging that is based on provisionality and contingency – a constructed subject engaged in the process of meaning-making (Meynert, 2000; Dahlberg, 2007).

New ways of viewing children and childhood, pedagogy and research, theory and practices have emerged from the scattered discourse surrounding the modernity/postmodernity

debate. Methodologically, there is a movement away from the traditional search for objectivity towards a multi-layered, non-unitary and comparative construction of social reality. Epistemological positions have shifted from positivism (a position that genuine knowledge is acquired by science); anti-positivism (a view that social science needs different methods than those used in natural sciences) such as interpretative research /hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism and ethno-methodology; and post-positivism[1] (belief that observations are theory-laden and that scientists are biased by their cultural experiences and world views) such as critical realism and constructive phenomenology, to existential relativism.

The notion of de-centering,[2] Kuhn's study of the history of science and Wittgenstein's notion of language games have strengthened the postmodern relativist position (Apple, 1991). The break with the mould of traditional research has resulted in the emergence of what is called "daredevil research," whose grounds for rigor shift from traditions of validity to aesthetics and ethical interests (Jipson and Paley in Bleakley, 2004). Enlightenment ideals that promised a better society were problematized and their key principle "progress" was questioned – progress for whom? And towards what? Enlightenment was seen as a Western European invention that

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[1] The post-positivism subsumes several trends of which two important ones are constructivism and critical realism. Constructivists believe that each of us constructs our view of the world based on our perceptions of it. Critical realists are critical of our ability to know reality with certainty and recognize that all observations are fallible and prone to errors, and that all theory is revisable. Constructivism is far more of a departure from empiricism than critical realism, and therefore it has a different set of implications for strategic research (Crystal, 1990).

[2] For post-modernists, "de-centering" is an inevitable consequence of the decline of meta-narratives because the "old belief systems" that gave people a strong sense of identity and belief systems based on clear concepts of class, gender, age, ethnicity and location are deconstructed and fall into disrepute.

was permeated by a variety of important biases such as Euro-centrism, patriarchy, racism, classism, uncontrollable industrialization, etc.

Feminists of various persuasions have pointed out that the Enlightenment's project of the realization of the rational "man" through education was "his" story and not "hers" (Bleakley, 2004). At the same time, education, which was central to the post-Enlightenment, emancipatory, liberal-humanist project of modernism, found it difficult as a discipline to accommodate the radical critique of postmodernism (Usher and Edwards, 1994).

The ambivalent relationship between modernism, postmodernism and "Third World" developments has triggered postcolonial, Critical School and subaltern discourses. Texts exploring postmodern discourse in this study emerge from spaces located in the post-industrial, post-capitalist pockets of both the North and the South. Many discourses that sprang up from conditions of the capitalist and post-capitalist West percolated down ideologically into the capitalized (characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods) and academic (universities and institutions of higher learning) spaces in the South and are appropriated by those occupying these spaces. I mention the Third World in this essay in order to establish that postmodern discourses are not only taking place in the North but are widely used in the production of intellectual ideas and discourses in the universities of the South. This percolation of ideas from North to South is due to the center-periphery bias of information flow. The Third World has a contradictory double function. According to Fredrick Jameson's (in Colás, 1992:1) theory of postmodernism, it is both:

a) the space that is expected to be eradicated by the logic of capitalist development and consolidate late capitalism – postmodernism being its cultural dominant; and

b) the space that remains untouched by the processes that struggle against repressive social formations that have homogenized the terrain of the "First- World" subjects.

Even the "multiple modernities" advocates (who contend the Euro-centricity in modernization theories) agree that theoretically once it had taken root in the West, the "project of modernity" would begin to have global relevance and spread to the rest of the world. Reinhard Bendix (in Schmidt, 2004) comments that industrialization need not have exactly the same effect everywhere, but once it has occurred somewhere, it alters the international environment of all other societies. All countries were expected to sooner or later react and adapt "on pain of extinction" (ibid, 2004: 4).

The question of applicability of postmodern discourse in general, and particularly that concerning the child and childhood, pedagogy and research of the South or the "Third World," is not a linear or straightforward one. Features of postmodern condition exist in contemporary developing societies – containing pre-modern and modern moments and fragmenting modernist structures. McCarthy (1994) notes that the Indian situation reveals that modern structures have never been free from the interplay of feudalism, which re-surfaces in the postmodern condition, and there is a relationship between postmodernism, tribalism and communalism. The lens of India reveals feudalism and tribalism are not completely eliminated by formal modernizing structures of nation-state and citizenship, of public and private. Thus tribalism and communalism surface when the capitalizing and homogenizing modernist forces are on the decline, resulting in postmodern moments (the postmodern condition). This phenomenon is also seen in the West and theorized by sociologists such as the French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1996), who observes that as the culture and institutions of modernism decline, societies embrace nostalgia and try to re-

appropriate the organizational principles of the distant past, and hence the postmodern era would be the era of neo-tribalism (ideology that human beings have evolved to live in tribal society rather than mass society).

From the ashes of these diverse and other divergent, self-contradictory discourses and tendencies for fragmentation has arisen what is called the new sociology of childhood, and new directions in pedagogy and research, creating new spaces for constructing notions of children and childhood. I attempt in this essay to read texts in order to document the paradigmatic shift from modernism to postmodernism and sift out new directions in conceptualizing childhood and the resultant implications for pedagogic and educational research theory and practice, with as much coherence as possible. In selecting the texts, I was limited by the time span and accessibility to literature related to the purpose of this exploratory essay. Since postmodernist understanding shares boundaries with the previously dominant modernist one, I delimited this literature study mostly to literature published in the 70s, 80s, 90s, 00s and 2010s. In order to connect the evolution of childhood to previous epochs, reference has also been made to literature published in the 60s (see Ariès, 1962).

Discussions on educational philosophers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (like Jean Piaget, John Dewey and Maria Montessori) have been reconstructed from my reading of more contemporary literature in order to release the child from reified and essentialist conceptualizations of child and childhood, and open up spaces to accommodate a freer and more plural conceptualization of children and childhood. To digress into original readings of modernist educational philosophers would not have served the purpose of this particular essay. I have constantly been challenged by intellectuals around me who have fed the evolution of this essay, and who have interacted with the text dialectically and

caused me to re-evaluate my constructions on various issues, preventing me from closing the hermeneutic spiral.

In the process of writing this essay, my understanding of concepts such as modernism, postmodernism, the new sociology of childhood, the new sociology of knowledge and their resultant implications for the sociology of education has grown by leaps and bounds (as it should). I have brought together disparate discourses in these areas that have evolved both in the North and the South under different socio-economic conditions and documented them in order to feed and inform the prevailing discourses within the Swedish pedagogical academia (of which I am a part). I have also attempted to show how the indigenous discourses in the South (particularly those in South Asia) challenge the Euro-centricity of mainstream discourses on childhood as well as reflect childhood realities in similar and dissimilar ways.

Research Problem

I assert here that there is a general need

a) for clarity within educational research regarding how childhood, pedagogy and educational research constructs are evolving, and the roots of this emergence;

b) to explore these emerging discourses, with a critique of the discourses of the previous cultural domain as a point of departure in order to contribute to a more coherent understanding of how the concepts of childhood are located within the modernity-postmodernity debate; and

c) to explore and construct new understandings of childhood that free the child's agency from structures located in the modern to one that locates the child within a postmodernist frame of reference.

Until recently, modernist theories of childhood were understood as being the last words on the subject. With input from Kuhn in the early 70s, however, it became obvious that these self-evident paradigms were not infallible and permanent but transient and fleeting. Theories of childhood located in postmodernism open up spaces for a multiplicity of childhood, a more dynamic child, more flexible pedagogy, and more sensitive research perspectives. This is an ongoing conversation that will continue to contribute to the understanding of childhood in a post post-structural/ postmodern paradigm.

Structure of the Study

In this introduction, I have presented discourses that started in the 60s and 70s as a point of departure. This created new spaces for the advent of postmodern discourses that consolidated in the 80s and 90s, and resulted in an epistemological shift to relativism and a questioning of the Enlightenment ideals. It also presents an understanding of the spaces within postmodern discourses that existing conditions in the Third World can occupy.

The rest of the document is divided into four chapters. The main ideas of these chapters are outlined below:

Chapter One consists of methodological issues related to the hermeneutical reading of texts that helps to gather several strands of discourses located within modernity and postmodernity in order to construct a somewhat cohesive understanding of the concepts related to childhood, pedagogy and research. This chapter also includes the delimitations of the thesis and ends with a statement of the purpose of the research and a presentation of the research questions.

Chapter Two consists of the construction of the project's modernity and postmodernity from various unconnected sources; how knowledge is understood within the modernity-

postmodernity paradigm; and discussion on the convergence and divergence between postcolonial and postmodern discourses as well as a critique of postmodernity in Third-World and postcolonial discourses.

Chapter Three develops the historical evolution of the theories on childhood and education; the construction of the modern and the postmodern child; the politics of the globalization of concepts about children; and an exploration of the convergence and divergence of Western and Indian discourses on childhood.

Chapter Four documents the implications of, and challenges to, postmodernity. The chapter is divided into: i) what the implications for locating the concepts childhood, pedagogy and educational research in the postmodern are. This is followed by ii) problems postmodern constructs pose for education, and iii) a synthesis of critical education and postmodern discourses. Finally, the author concludes the essence of this essay, and ends by taking a critical postmodernist position by straddling modernism and postmodernism and appropriating the progressive ideals of both traditions.

CHAPTER ONE

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

This essay is an examination of contemporary discourses related to childhood, pedagogy and educational research within modernism and postmodernism, and an effort to understand and interpret the text. In this chapter therefore I develop the notion of hermeneutics as a research approach and how it has shifted in focus and understanding over different epochs. I also digress into the concept of critical hermeneutics because this essay is a critical appraisal of modern and postmodern texts.

Text and "written document" are often used as synonymous terms. The term text can be applied to a wide range of phenomena. Texts are social facts produced, shared and used in socially organized ways; they are a heuristic (exploratory) device to identify data consisting of words and images that have become recorded (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Texts can be read passively, deriving the meaning that authors infuse in their texts, or actively, where the reader interprets, resists the meanings meant by authors and arrives at resistant reading (Bryman, 1984). It is always possible to argue for and against interpretations, to confront them, to arbitrate between them and to seek agreement. The researcher always operates within an ever-widening circle of socially constructed truth claims that must be negotiated (Kvale, 1987). The researcher positioning himself/herself within this debate becomes a dimension of methodology.

I use a citation from the Stanford Encyclopedia (given below), where Ramberg and Gjesdal (2005) describe how the

concept of hermeneutics has shifted over a period from the Middle Ages and Renaissance to hermeneutics that provide the critical horizon for discussions of contemporary philosophy within an Anglo-American context and a more continental discourse.

According to Ramberg and Gjesdal (2005):

> The term hermeneutics covers both the first order art and the second order theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions. As a theory of interpretation, the hermeneutic tradition stretches all the way back to ancient Greek philosophy. In the course of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, hermeneutics emerges as a crucial branch of Biblical studies. Later on, it comes to include the study of ancient and classic cultures. With the emergence of German romanticism and idealism, the status of hermeneutics changes. Hermeneutics turns philosophical. It is no longer conceived as a methodological or didactic aid for other disciplines, but turns to the conditions of possibility for symbolic communication as such. The question "How to read?" is replaced by the question, "How do we communicate at all?" Without such a shift, initiated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and others, it is impossible to envisage the ontological turn in hermeneutics that, in the mid-1920s, was triggered by Martin Heidegger's Sein und Zeit and carried on by his student Hans-Georg Gadamer. Now hermeneutics is not only about symbolic communication. Its area is even more fundamental: that of human life and existence as such. It is in this form, as an interrogation into the deepest conditions for symbolic interaction and culture in general, that hermeneutics has provided the critical horizon for many of the most intriguing discussions of contemporary philosophy, both within an Anglo-American context (Rorty, McDowell, Davidson) and within a more Continental discourse (Habermas, Apel, Ricoeur, and Derrida). (ibid, 2005:1)

For the purpose of this research, I stress hermeneutics as the art of interpretation, where the ultimate focus is that the meaning we seek to understand helps to better understand our world. It has been argued that there are several streams in hermeneutic traditions with different but complementary

elements that help resolve the tension inherent in understanding (Elliot, 2008). The following discussion on hermeneutic philosophers has been re-contextualized from Kinsella (2006) and Elliot (2008): Dilthey's (a German historian, psychologist, sociologist and hermeneutic philosopher) older hermeneutic tradition was concerned with text interpretation and the human sciences. Hirsch (an American educator and academic literary critic) argued that the meaning of a text is determined by the author's intent. He opposed the relativistic idea that interpretation should always be applied to the present. Texts acquire different meanings or relevance in the course of their reception but one has to take care that the actual fact or meaning gathered from the original meaning of the texts, that is, the meaning of the text in the mind of its author, remains the focus of hermeneutics.

Gadamer (a German philosopher) argued that the meaning of the text goes beyond the author, and therefore is determined by the point where the horizons of the reader and the writer meet. While Gadamer underlined the belongingness of the interpreter to his object and his tradition, Habermas (a German sociologist and philosopher) took a reflective distance from it. Jürgen Habermas, who is located in the Frankfurt School, claimed that hermeneutics teaches us that our understanding and practices are always motivated (knowledge is always guided by some interests) and linguistically articulated. Because our experience of the world is linguistic, it is open to self-correction and can overcome its limitations by seeking better expressions and becoming less rigid, and is open to any meaning that could be understood.

Ricoeur (a French philosopher known for combining phenomenological description with hermeneutics) argued that the text is independent of the author's intent and original audience, and therefore the reader determines its meaning.

For Ricoeur, understanding does not have to appropriate the subject matter naively and it can stand at a critical distance from it. Through being suspicious one can get rid of superstition and false understanding, and such hermeneutics can be conducted in the hope of a better and more critical understanding. A "hermeneutics of trust" thus remains the ultimate focus of his work – the meaning we seek to understand is one that helps us better understand our world and ourselves. Gadamer denies the existence of objective truth. Correctly interpreting a text then involves a "fusion of horizons" – a "community of interpretation" made up of scholars who decide what the community's view of truth will be. Each participant contributes his perspectives to this mix of interpretations. A community standard of truth is the best one can hope for (Elliot, 2008).

The hermeneutic (nearly synonymous with *verstehen*, which is German for understanding or interpretation) approach to reading text brings out the meanings of the text from the perspective of the author and the interpretation of the reader of the text. There is an alternation between the whole and the part, between pre-understanding and understanding, interpretation of meaning, the use of "growing" as a metaphor and the integration between theory and practice (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 1994). While negotiating these alternations, the attempt here is to grow in knowledge, following a "hermeneutic spiral" going up instead of just going around in "the circle." The phrase "hermeneutic circle" refers to the circle of interpretation necessarily involved when understanding a work of art. "Hermeneutic spiral" is used when one argues that interpretation can never reach any sort of closure because it simply goes around and around forever. According to this theory, it is not possible to really understand any one part of a work until you understand the whole, but it is also not possible to understand the whole without

understanding all of the parts. This approach simultaneously narrows the gap between the reader and the text through understanding, and broadens the gap between the reader and the author through critique. One starts with a wide perspective, narrowing it as one finds interesting questions or details to focus on.

Phillips and Brown (1993) identify an approach to text reading and interpretation they call critical hermeneutics (a partnership of hermeneutics with a critical approach). This entails contextualizing the text within the social and historical context. Here texts are collected and re-contextualized or interpreted with an understanding of their context. The texts are interrogated and themes extracted critically. Qualitative text reading comprises searching out the underlying themes in the materials being read and extracting them implicitly. The critical hermeneutic approach draws on practices associated with qualitative content analysis; that is, an emphasis on the point of view of the author and sensitivity to the content. What is critical is the link between reading, understanding the text from the point of view of the author, and the social and historical context of its production.

For Habermas, hermeneutics is one dimension of critical social theory (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). In studying postmodern texts, hermeneutics locates itself in the phenomenology of existential understanding. According to Porter and Prior (ibid, 2003), discourse analysis focuses on how different versions of the world are produced through interpretative repertoires, claims to "stakes" in an account, and construction of knowing subjects. In placing the text in a wider context, it reveals how it has come into existence and how it is to be read or consumed.

At this point I want to make a brief distinction between hermeneutics and discourse analysis in order to assert that my attempt at reading texts is not to be mistaken as an attempt at

discourse analysis, although forms of discourse analysis such as deconstruction and narrative analysis are subjected to hermeneutic scrutiny in this essay. Hermeneutics is the study of meaning and meaningful things and actions found in literature and culture, while discourse analysis is a study of the way versions, world, society and psyche are produced in the use of language and discourse. It is the analysis of language use itself and not an attempt to get behind the discourse or find what people really mean. It is concerned with the linguistic features of a text, the processes relating to the production and consumption of the text and the wide social practice to which the communicative event belongs (Allan, 201:3). There may appear elements of similarity between hermeneutic intention and certain strands of discourse analysis such as critical discourse analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis, which are concerned with how social and political inequalities are manifested in discourse (critical discourse analysis), and the political intent to focus on power relations – a focus on how discourses facilitate what can be said, by whom, where and when (Foucauldian discourse analysis).

In this study I read and re-contextualize discourses related to childhood, pedagogy, knowledge and research located within modernist and postmodernist theoretical paradigms in order to understand the discourses in a meaningful way and see the convergence and divergence between them. I use both approaches of text reading – passive and active. Passive reading involves understanding the text from the point of view of the author, while active reading consists of responding to the text and participating in a dialogue with the author. Passive reading allows the reader to take seriously the author's own voice instead of resisting the author's meaning or distorting it through a critical lens. Passive reading is hence valuable as an act of accessing the original textual intention of

the author. Active reading is "recursive"—a reading that returns the reader to a previously covered terrain with a deeper and more thorough interpretation. It raises questions about the text, author, the context and the reader.

The choice to read passively, actively or critically depends on the reader's intentions, and what kind of reading is required to interpret, understand or make explicit the ideology underlying a given text. One may claim that all readings are active since reading requires engaging the text we read with an alert, active mind. Louise Rosenblatt, an American literary critic and anthropologist who first advanced the Reader-Response Theory in 1938 and recognized the reader as an active agent, adopts different approaches to different texts – the goal is to "rethink" and "reread" a text and one's initial response to it, and to move from a more "obvious" to more complex examination of the text at hand.

I read contemporary text and hypertexts[1] in order to locate my work in conjunction with the new emerging ideas within childhood, pedagogy and research, evolve a critique of modernity and locate myself somewhere between modernist and postmodernist discourses. I do so in order to appropriate ongoing conversations that are running parallel to each other and connect them in order to create cohesion. The text of this research document is indebted to other texts and discussions with others.

The essay has evolved according to the principles of the hermeneutic "circle" or, more appropriately, "spiral." In the process of understanding concepts as a whole, I had to digress into the individual aspects that make up the whole, and vice

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[1] Hyper-texts are texts displayed on a computer display or other electronic devices with references (hyperlinks) to other text that the reader can immediately access through a click of the mouse. They overcome the old linear constraints of written text, contributing to a postmodernist fragmentation of worlds that allow users to create their own navigation path, adding meaning to the texts.

versa. I have also attempted to locate the meaning of concepts (or texts) that I explored within cultural and historical contexts. I started with an attempt to identify the characteristics attributed to children and childhoods in different cultural epochs – modernity and postmodernity – which inevitably digressed into discourses prevalent in differing geographical and ideological locations.

The discussions in this document are situated within the modernity-postmodernity paradigm. According to Kuhn (1970), scientific paradigms are shared commitments to beliefs and values. Thomas Kuhn, one of the initiators of the "New Sociology of Education" (Young, 1971), was one of the contemporary researchers who documented (the Sophists started this discussion in the 1st to 5th centuries AD) that there were no absolute criteria for truth, scientific knowledge or rationality (Krieitzberg, 1993). Kuhn's influence in revising all the cultural paradigms of modernity or the programme of the Enlightenment should not be underestimated. He rejected the epistemological "mirror" metaphor (ibid, 1993), and, according to Rorty (1980), without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accurate representation would not have suggested itself. Rorty is a critic of the modernist epistemology – knowledge as representation, as a mental mirroring of a mind-external world. The mirror metaphor has a long tradition in philosophy and plays a major role in the discussion of realism and materialism versus idealism and constructivism. It suggests that our perceptions are a reflection of reality – that they are unbiased and objective. According to Rorty (1980), modern epistemology is not only an attempt to legitimate our claim to knowledge of what is real but also an attempt to legitimate philosophical reflection itself.

In this essay, I locate my subject within the modern and postmodern paradigms; hence I digress to explore the concept of paradigm itself. Gough (in Bager, 2003) sees paradigms as being metaphorically equivalent to "architectural foundations" and "myth-stories" in which individual experiences are embedded and form the larger framework of shared values (and meanings and purposes) that have persisted over a long period of time in culture. Polkinghorne (ibid, 2003) makes a distinction between the "narrative" and "paradigmatic" way of knowing. "Narrative" knowing is about conveying our experience of the world through stories that integrate aspects like time, emotion and a social context. "Paradigmatic" knowing revolves around systematizing abstract conceptualizations built on aspects relating to "rules," "variables," etc. In the modernist notion, paradigms are considered incommensurable despite their apparent similarity, and see the world in different ways, while the postmodernist view takes a "metaxological" approach to the concept of paradigms and emphasizes mediation, leaving the between open (as opposed to the dialectical) and the interplay between sameness and difference.

Delimitations

The discourses in this essay are mostly located in the West because they emerge from capitalist, late-capitalist and post-capitalist conditions that dominate the Western economy. The question as to whether these discourses are valid to the conditions in the South is an open one. We live in a connected space where the nations of the North and South are part of the capitalist world system – a social system that has "boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence" (Wallerstein, in Carlos, 2001: 2).

Communities and societies of the North and the South are subject to the ongoing tensions of capital accumulation

(hegemonizing forces) and capital flight (de-hegemonizing forces) and the resultant cultural fallout. Hence it is expected that there are spaces within the countries of developing societies that contain pre-modern and modern moments, and fragmenting modernist structures – resulting in the postmodern moment. Northern discourses are getting globalized – initiatives from UN organizations and international conferences that are predominately loaded with discourses from the North are disseminated to nations in the South. Hence discourses in the academia of the South (even opposing ones) are informed by Western discourses due to center-periphery bias. It is also important to point out that even in countries of the North, postmodern conditions and discourses are localized within certain pockets of cultural, social and intellectual life.

Purpose and Research Questions

The aim of this document is to integrate parallel and socially constructed discourses within different disciplines such as Sociology of Childhood, Sociology of Knowledge and Sociology of Education. This document aims specifically to explore and read text within contemporary (modernist / postmodernist) dialogue in order to appropriate the emerging ideas within childhood, education and educational research. Furthermore it attempts to explore and read text related to the construction of childhood both historically and within modernist and postmodernist educational theory. The goal of the study is to sift out and document some implications for the understanding of childhood, pedagogy and educational research when located within postmodern discourses. Finally I try to present problems posed by postmodernism for education. In order to reach this goal, texts from primary and secondary literature were read, discourses analysed and located in a context juxtaposed against each other.

The following research issues are addressed in this study:

a) The methodological approach called hermeneutics has been used to read and interpret text on modernity, postmodernity, construction of knowledge, childhood, pedagogy and educational research.
b) The nature and content of discourses that have constructed the continuity-discontinuity paradigm within the projects of modernity and postmodernity.
c) How contemporary discourses within the study of childhood have crystallized into what is called the new sociology of childhood.
d) The implications emerging from conceptualizing children and childhood, pedagogy and educational research in the postmodern.
e) The problems arising from postmodern constructs for education and resolving the problematic by constructing critical postmodern education.