

Application of Basil Bernstein's Classification and Framing to Zambia's Early Childhood Education Policies on Play Vis-à-Vis the United Nations Convention on the Rights for Children Articles 28 And 31

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to assess how educational policies and practices have provided for play in early childhood education (ECE) in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Article 28 (1) and 31 using Basil Bernstein's classification and framing. This study departs on the Bernstein's (1975) assumption that the concepts of classification and framing are useful "for the analysis of transmitting agencies". With this in mind, this study problematises ECE policy and play in line with the UNCRC Articles 28 and 31 as both a philosophical and sociological problem. The findings presented a shifting construction of discourses owing to conflicts, lack of understanding and competitions pointing alluding to power struggles which characterise policy. The findings were of particular interest with regards to the classification and framing of problematising play in ECE policies in line with the UNCRC. The intertextuality among the policy texts was strong in unison with the UNCRC thereby having weak classification and framing of play in ECE presenting integrated codes. This made it difficult to sustain and protect the discourses on play practices in ECE.

Key Words: *Classification, Framing, Play, Early Childhood Education Policy, Rights of the Child*

Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) in the large part of the early 20th century was not an area of attention in the confines of state policy as children were generally seen as 'an appendage of their parents', thus a part of the family structure. According to Pence, Evans and Garcia (2008) the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) in 1989, made children's rights more visible in the educational policy agenda. This has consequently catalysed a shift in the theoretical and conceptual traditions and empirical discourses in the social, educational and policy landscape in ECE (O'Sullivan, 1989:219). This realisation is reflected in Zambia's increased attention towards the educational needs of children seen in the policy terrain since the ratification of the UNCRC. Against this background, young children are struggling to live, learn and play in Zambia today

Discourse on child-centred education has propagated play activities as providing unique opportunities for positive learning, development and imaginative capabilities created for children to direct their learning (Woods, 2014). In as much as educational policy upholds the rights of children in society, there has been increased tensions between play-based approaches and curriculum goals. As alluded to by Brooker and Edwards (2010), the tensions are further perpetuated by consensus shift in policy in most countries to centralised curricula for ECE. These tensions emanate from the interaction exhibited at the point of rationalising the international and national agenda on education and play. The extent of influence of the UNCRC on the national agenda has always been contentious as issues of

sovereignty arise. Play in ECE retains a global face, but how it speaks to Zambian policy through international legal frameworks such as the UNCRC in Articles 28 and 31 requires interrogation. Moreover, actors dictate sense making at national level as they attend to the international agenda. This, according to Koyama and Varenne (2012), provides the basis for negotiating the friction as created by emerging assemblage. It is for this reason that a transposition of the international instruments' domestication goes through processes of interpretation for re-contextualisation. Ball (1990:3) describes the process of policy formulation within policymaking in education, as clearly a matter of the 'authoritative allocation of values', but values do not float free of their social context. We need to ask whose values are validated in policy, and whose are not. Child-centred approaches denote a level of power in terms of how they are structured in educational policy as a measure of control is retained by teachers' beliefs and values and the different meanings attributed to play (Wood, 2014).

Classification and framing aptly put forth by Moore (2013), provide a language to conceptualise the modalities of pedagogical discourse seen in the classroom's social structure that regulated the relationship between elaborating and restricting codes. Children's successive engagement into an equal and playful dialogue with each other brings about learning. Education through play forms the basis of ECE and from a philosophical perspective, education both as a social function and necessity of life, serves the purpose of social reproduction, control and framing. Bernstein (1996:1) reminds us that "control is double faced for it carries both the power of reproduction and the potential for its change". He further maintains that, "classification and framing describe the structural and interactional aspects of pedagogic practice, exposing the power and control relations that are inherent in pedagogic practice". The point is that classification cannot retain itself without framing. In pedagogy, classification and framing are seen through strong or weak lens. In so doing, Bernstein (2000), conceptualised classification as 'the strength of boundary insulation between categories and contexts such as educational knowledge and everyday knowledge; the home, community and school or the world of work; within educational knowledge between subjects; within the school between work time and playtime; in personal relationships between sexes, age groups and status groups; in space between the 'art room' and the 'science room'. These spaces provide the justification to analyse the comparison or levels of insulations between the international and national realms in the policy arena. Moore (2013) underscores the need to apply classification externally and internally and this can be realised through the formula

Bernstein (2000) further explains framing as the regulation of the laws of control within categories and contexts. It involves the sequencing and pacing of the acquisition of knowledge includes the aspect of controlling of the process. In the educational arena, we would allude to strong framing, in cases where the pacing acquisition is under the control of agencies such as schools, universities, or government or occupation bodies. They state the timing within which prescribed knowledge can be suitably acquired at a particular time and in a certain order (term, semester, period or academic year). Apparently, framing can be external or internal depending on the extent of modes of communication.

This study explored play in Zambia's ECE policy using the UNCRC as a philosophical problem to be analysed through Bernsteinian classification and framing. The UNCRC qualifies as a lens of analysis because of its global influence and focus on play and ECE policy. It is through policy about programmes and services that implementation of the convention is facilitated in day-to-day practice. In institutionalised forms, Bernstein's code theory is recognised in two mechanisms of classification and framing, respectively, which point to power and control. At macro level, classification generates categories of agents and discourses; categories or insulations are instantiations of power. Conversely, at micro level, classification is about the organisational or structural aspects of pedagogical practice.

Literature Review

Play as a Policy Imperative at Early Childhood Education

As pointed out by Alcock (2013) and Anning (2010), play is an important part of children's lives constructed as the 'holy grail' of ECE and highly influenced by culture. This is further consolidated by it being recognised as one of the most ratified international instruments, the UNCRC as an instrument for the rights for children. Under Article 31, parties are encouraged to recognise the right of the child to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child (United Nations, 1989). In propagating for children's rights, the convention's articles are highly interdependent and mutually reinforcing as they collectively conceptualise all aspects of a child's development.

The UN produced a General Comment centred on Article 31 of the UNCRC to reinforce the systems in state parties in order to fulfil their responsibility towards children's right to play. The general comment clearly describes play and its significance for the development of children. It states that:

"Children's play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Care givers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as means to an end. Play involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental or emotional activity, and has the potential to take infinite forms, either in groups or alone. These forms will be adopted throughout the course of childhood... While play is considered non-essential, the committee reaffirms that it is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive emotional and spiritual development." (United Nations Committee on the rights of the Child, 2013, Paragraph 14c)

Therefore, countries that have domesticated the UNCRC have a pertinent responsibility to understand what the transposing text mean in particular contexts which regulate the aspects of policy texts filtered out (Ball, et al., 2011). Play in ECE is realised in social environments where intended goals are observed. Play, both as a policy imperative and philosophical problem is consistent with Basil Bernstein's and Gadamer's works. Ryall *et al.* (2013) posit that Gadamer's theory postulates that play as a concept from a philosophical perspective helps us understand how we must approach 'the other for dialogue to attain fruition and transform an event'. Children's successive engagement into an equal and playful dialogue with each other brings about learning. Education through

play forms the basis of ECE and from a philosophical perspective; education is a social function and necessity of life, which serves the purpose of social reproduction, control and framing.

Bernstein (1996:1) reminds us that “control is double faced for it carries both the power of reproduction and the potential for its change”. He further maintains that “classification and framing describe the structural and interactional aspects of pedagogic practice, exposing the power and control relations that are inherent in pedagogic practice”. The point is that classification cannot retain itself without framing. In pedagogy, classification and framing are seen through strong or weak lens and in what Bernstein (1975) termed infant education now ECE, he identified visible and invisible pedagogies. Play is an invisible pedagogy understood through aspects of a child’s outward expressions dictated to by the developmental stage. Bernstein further postulates that the concept basic to invisible pedagogy is that playing of a child is a means through which children exteriorise themselves to the teacher. Therein lies the significance of play at ECE. As children play, they learn and this can provide a guide to the developmental stage.

Play retains a lot of characteristics and none should be isolated. The role of an educator at ECE level must be to provide space which will allow for an all-inclusive opportunity for a child to play with the realisation of fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity. In an effort to achieve all facets of play and what it should be, the difficulty attributed to the definition of play is further perpetuated by cultural and class differences among groups. Largely, culture dictates how play is structured and experienced by children. It influences where, how and whom they play with. As observed by Brooker and Woodhead (2013), in traditional societies, children experience play in homestead environments whereas in developed countries their counterparts have facilities such as nurseries, kindergartens where children are able to experience guided and unguided play. The significance attached to play is ascribed by the immediate environment of the child, as revealed by ethnographic studies conducted by Gaskins *et al.* (2007). A society's cultural values can influence tremendously how play is 'accepted' or 'cut off.' The contextual dimension was very important for Bernstein’s play framing because the views of adults about children's play are closely related to the economic conditions and way of life of the family. It is these perspectives which have further been reflected and influenced by how ECE policies have been shaped. Most countries have acknowledged the significance of play but clear recognition in ECE policies still remains a façade. In a study conducted by Lungu & Matafwali (2020), ECE teachers identified play as a significant part of children’s learning. This was exhibited in the adoption of conventional and indigenous play activities during school. The use of the terms ‘conventional play’ and ‘indigenous play’ sets the tone on the conflicts which arise in how play is framed. What qualifies as conventional and indigenous and by whose measure? The questions called for the need to interrogate the framing and classification of play in Zambia’s ECE policies.

Methodology and Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach which allowed the researcher to represent any given reality from a range of different perspectives, providing 'the possibility of multiple, valid descriptions of the same phenomenon' (Gerish, 2003; Mapoma & Masaiti, 2012; Masaiti, 2015). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was the design of choice. CDA based on Fairclough's approach brought into perspective the historical, social and practices of policy and more importantly the role of power. Dunn (2006) explains CDA as a method to examine the presence, nature and meaning of shifts in policy discourses and their relationship with social practices in which they are embedded. CDA is an instrumental method to unpack how language is implicated in the service of powerful players and interests (Fairclough, 2001). As noted by Kiersey (2011), quoting Gill, (1996:143) "*all discourse is organised in a manner that it is persuasive to the readers.*" Considering that policy analysis aims to unravel the complexities underlying decision-making processes, the qualitative research approach is a good alternative when used with CDA (Taylor et al. 1997: 40). This study will seek to answer questions stressing how to create and give meaning to social experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:8). Text analysis, as outlined by Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009), has infinite number of possible interpretations of any given text and each interpretation is equally valid to the extent that it reflects the meanings attributed to the text. This allows for many potential legitimate interpretations of a given text as the "researcher seldom seeks other's interpretations".

As rightly asserted by Van Dyk (2006: 252), CDA relevance in research is understood through its ability to aptly deal with pressing social issues bordering on issues of power. The study focused on trying to construct sites of struggle where we questioned who and who does not possess the power in framing play in policy. The research employed Fairclough's three level models to understand the framing of pedagogical play in ECE policy. The three levels looked at the language text in written form and, secondly, the discourse practice primarily done through text production and interpretation. At the third level, the focus was the socio-cultural practice. These three facets guided the framework of this thesis. The first step included looking at the synchronisation of the UNCRC and ECE policy, how the ratification has been done. In this case, the researcher examined the socio-political conditions in which the UNCRC instrument was transposed and the extent to which it shaped the text produced, consumed and interpreted. It provided for the guidelines of the instrument and the social norms, power relations and ideology within which the text was produced and exists. The focus at this point was dominant discourses that shaped the existing national policies after 1991.

The research sample comprised Zambian ECE policy documents and all related texts which included documentation provided for consultations, meetings, news releases and speeches. Some of these policy documents included:

- (a) *ECE Standard Guidelines (2014)*
- (b) *Early Childhood Syllabi 3-6 years; and (2013)*
- (c) *Early Childhood Teachers Diploma Syllabus (2015)*
- (d)

All relevant documents for this policy area were found and examined in the broader context of policy.

Data corpus was gathered from the textual samples providing insight into the scope and essence of ECE conceptualisation and playing as a social problem, elucidating the dialectical relationships and systems and experience influenced by theoretical perspectives on power relations between the international and national levels. The researcher selected text samples describing systems and activities in accordance with Bernstein which assist in framing and classification of ECE and play provision at the centre of inquiry in Zambia in line with the UNCRC

Results

Deconstruction of the level of discourse practice navigated children's rights on ECE and play as stipulated by the UNCRC and Zambian policies. The focus was on how ECE and play have been framed. In so doing, the researcher further went on to engage with the laws and policies which give effect to the right to play. To understand the genesis of these laws and policies, it was necessary to look at the historical socio-political terrain which has shaped ECE and play. The examination of the policy documents guided the process of classification and framing of ECE and play in Zambia's policies *vis-à-vis* UNCRC.

Presentation of the Context of Policy Text Production

The texts analysed were initially examined from a descriptive text level of Fairclough's dimensions of discourse through critical assessment of the appearance and organisation. These parameters provide guidance on the genre chains and provide the physical construction of the documents and how together they foster the classification and framing of knowledge on play in ECE policies.

The policy documents range from 2006 to 2016 and they were considered individually. The finding of this exercise is what informed the linguistic textual analysis in the next part of findings presentation. The texts considered concentrated on the structure and content of the policy texts and the visual presentation. The physical construction of the policy texts is an important exercise which reflects the reinforcement of the ideology behind (Kiesey, 2011). Additionally, Fairclough (2004) points out that the review of physical features and context of policy text production is necessary in CDA as it enlightens the researcher and more importantly wider audience a clear perspective to guide the overall argument. The order of discourse as presented in the texts is a necessary tool as it necessitates contextualisation of the policy analysis process.

ECE Standard Guidelines

The document had the required minimum guidelines for one to set up an ECE centre and was published in 2014. This is in an effort to continuously improve the quality of ECE. The text has a rich cover page which depicts the nature of play among children in an ECE setting with teachers. The text has five chapters with pages ranging from 1 to 24. Our area of interest is in the background which outlines the tenets of an ideal learning environment which are presented in a Table, play grounds or indoor space are paramount as well as indoor play). With no exception, any registered ECE centre must have adequate space to facilitate outdoor play and more importantly, a suitable area within proximity of the ECE

centre must be selected for a play park. The other area of focus was the need to provide play equipment for both indoor and outdoor activities.

The importance attached to play is reflected in the colourful pictures on pages eight and nine where play facilities are typical examples of local materials used in the different parts of Zambia. Additionally, pages 19, 20 and 23 further showed how important play was, as could be seen from the pictures how play centred methods were used in delivery of the ECE curriculum.

ECE Syllabi: 3 to 6 Years

The text is composed of 65 pages with print text on white paper. The syllabus provides study areas for children between the ages 3 to 6 years. In the preface, the text clearly points to the importance of play in ECE by stating that:

Play will be the cornerstone in the delivery of the syllabi, therefore teachers and care givers should provide adequate play opportunities for children to explore the maximum environment (CDC, 2013: XI).

The text on pages 26, 27, 59 and 60 emphasise the need for children to display skills in movement, manipulation, coordination, correlation, observation, self-expression and appreciation of beauty, of which they all required a child to demonstrate ability to physically interact at play.

ECE Teachers Diploma Syllabus

The text is of particular importance by virtue of it being the first nationally recognised syllabus. In the introduction, the text pointed to the need for trainee teachers to appreciate the importance of play in children is the learning process. The teacher's trainers must provide adequate play opportunities to explore the environment (CDC, 2015: 1).

Among the study core areas in Sociology of Education and Child Psychology, play is an important component where the focus on outcomes covers a wide range of items which include; 'Learning and Play', 'Theories of Play', 'Types of Play', and more importantly, 'Role of Home/School in Child's Play' (CDC 2015:13).

In the teaching courses, Expressive Arts (CDC, 2015: 62) emphasises the need for teachers 'to demonstrate ability to teach Environment Science concepts through play-based learning'. In EA, play is equally emphasised especially in development of motor skills as the children dance and sing songs. The case is the same with Pre-Mathematics, where among the key competencies, trainee teachers are expected to master the skill of teaching mathematics through play and games.

From the text, it was visible to see that 'play' is an important area which teachers need to master as they undertake their training.

Formation of genres

Genres tend to reflect certain patterns or chains of information flow which tend to have an impact on how it is classified and framed. As stated by Fairclough (2000), a genre chain

provides linkages among different genres which form pattern and in the case of ECE policies in Zambia, the trend has been the international agenda on education having an influence on certain pertinent issues and the political voice as seen in changes of regimes from United National Independence Party (UNIP) to Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) then Patriotic Party (PF). The resolutions of the EFA conferences and Summit on Children in 1990 and 2000 highly influenced the ECE agenda so that the government of Zambia took up the responsibility of reshaping the discourse as reflected from the classification and framing.

Analysis of Policy Classification and Framing

The UNCRC as a regulative discourse or social order of rules at the international level retains its rightful position considering that it is one of the most ratified legal instruments. It is an influential framework on ECE policies adopted at national level globally as it provides conditions of focus, character and themes of educational policies at ECE level and particularly play (Bernstein, 1975). The framework's influence was seen through the hierarchical relations which were either explicit or implicit in the selected policy documents.

The policy documents presented a superficial explicit relationship at discourse level but implicit in the texts. The transmission of knowledge forms the regulative to instructional discourses is acknowledged but its navigation of the policy terrain has been inconsistent as is reflected in the texts. The framing of play in ECE policy documents was well embedded in articles 28 and 31 of the UNCRC as the dominant discourse. At this point, it is important to note that the tools of instructional discourse vary and this was observed in the selected policy documents.

Analysis of the policy documents showed that in some texts, the regulative discourse was well embedded and strongly framed. In the following policy, documents the framing was strong:

- (a) Early Childhood Syllabi: 3 to 6 years; and
- (b) Early Childhood Education Teachers Diploma Syllabus.

Play was strongly framed and balanced with the local level in the 'ECE Standard Guidelines' as the transmitter provided clear boundaries where local play was at centre stage with the concept of western play on the periphery. The commonality lies in both the regulative and instructional discourses pointing to the importance of play and the need to identify localised play initiatives as more paramount. On the other hand, in the seventh National Development Plan, the framing was strong as the framing of play took a silent tone. There was no explicit pointer to the importance of play. The text resonated with implied stance on the need of play at ECE level.

In the ECE Syllabi and ECE Teachers Diploma Syllabus as transmitters explicitly depicted play as an important facet of ECE as underpinned by the UNCRC. The framing was weak in that the regulative discourse was able to permeate the instructional discourse to a point

where it was difficult to identify the demarcation or separation. In this case, the aspect of policy implementation will indicate the level of control on how much influence the UNCRC has on the conceptualisation of play in line with Articles 28 and 31.

The variation in the levels of framing is an expected occurrence in policy discourses or texts as formulated at different times even when the ideological underpinnings are the same as was seen in the case of ECE policies on play in the Zambian setting.

Discussion

Fairclough (2009: 164) considers discourses as “semiotic forms of building world aspects (physical, social or mental) that can usually be associated with specific roles or viewpoints of various communities or social actors”. It is of paramount importance to note that the role played by political discourses is equivalent to language usage around a particular socially and historically situated topic that corresponds with a particular position and perspective (Bertrand et al., 2015). Policy discourses tend to be deeply involved in social structures as servitudes of legitimising functions. It is of utmost importance to recognise that discourses appear to overlap with other discourses (interdisciplinary or weak classification in Bernstein's words), which he terms ‘inter-discursivity’ (Fairclough, 1995). This is a situation in which one debate is present in another. In our case, the discussion on how foreign legally binding instruments affect national policy filters through how Articles 28 and 31 of the UNCRC influenced power issues in Zambia's ECE policy. The inter-discursivity process promotes re-articulation or weakens classification among fields within a stable or strongly classified field of discourse. Understanding that Zambia is a signatory to the UNCRC is not enough; knowing the degree to which it has influenced the definition of learning through play within ECE policies is important.

The understanding of play in Zambia's ECE policies is shaped by the dictates of the UNCRC. The level of cultural reproduction is dominant in national policies as can be seen in the messages of patterns of dominance. The values, rituals and international conventions are imported, thereby creating a misguided policy agenda at national level where ‘codes of distorted communication are noted in practice.’ Play has always been a part of African civilisation but it has been redefined by international agendas with their contextualisation bestowing less importance on national agenda as could be seen from the framing where in some cases it was very weak.

Bernstein (1990) presents an understanding of how a society classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates its perceived educational knowledge as public. In doing so, it reflects the distribution of power and the principle of social control. Educational policy is embodied in the curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation and how these three elements are subjects of society are dependent on the educational knowledge code. The code dictates the principles which regulate the classification and framing of knowledge education policy. Zambia's curriculum in 2013 at ECE level adopted the 60 per cent play and 40 per cent academic as the sum total of a child's experience. This structure of knowledge policy retains classification and framing and guides on power distribution and social control.

When considering aspects of classification and framing as postulated by Bernstein, the ECE policies on play reveal an intricate relationship between its contents and that of the UNCRC, in particular Articles 28 and 31. The insulation between the two regions was weak; hence the classification being weak. The UNCRC exerts so much influence on the contents of the text but when examining Zambia's UPR reports, the findings provided a worrisome scenario where after over 30 years, at practice level the insulation was strong in that what was advocated for was far from the reality on the ground. Zambia still faces many challenges in achieving the required standards as can be seen from the legal texts.

In the case of play in ECE, the government as an actor in creating the interaction between the national and international framing of play in ECE in line with the UNCRC is expected to balance between contextual demands and the global terrain to foster what is most beneficial to Zambia. Play in ECE is a right as stipulated from the international discourse and its influence through the UNCRC has been substantial. As postulated by Nsamenang (2008), most African countries, including Zambia, in their quest to meet standards and expectations of funding agencies tend to model their ECE policy texts in line with the western conceptualisation of play thereby marginalising indigenous content. To this effect, the UNCRC retains a very power force that Third World countries like Zambia tend to bend to the dominant discourses. This is in line with Ball and Nsamenang (2008), Pence and Marfo (2008) who allude to the undeniable fact that world organisations envision western ECE as the 'best approaches' to consolidate in policy thereby reducing African ECCDs to the same standards.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The impact of the UNCRC on the promotion of rights in Zambia cannot be downplayed. Zambia has been party to the UNCRC from the time it formally recognised the Convention by appending its signature in 1990, later ratified on 6th October, 1991, unreservedly. To this effect, it is paramount that actors in ECE recognise and rise to the challenge of weaving the international agenda to a firmly established national agenda. The stronger the insulation between the UNCRC and play in ECE policies, the more dominant the discourse. It is important that a shift is engineered where policy texts desist from being merely promotional documents but be clear directives as to how play will be actualised at ECE. It is necessary that clear objectives, targets and timelines for implementation are in place. There should be a move from elusiveness to consolidated clear achievable goals.

The classification and framing of play in ECE in line with the UNCRC retain an integrated code which has accommodated the convention in having more influence on the policy texts. It is important that the policy agenda is propelled by the social context with the political influence being curtailed as it tends to distort the education agenda. The insulation between the UNCRC must be balanced with the view of giving priority to the contextual needs. It is important to have an understanding the socio-cultural needs as they affect the way knowledge is constructed. This will bring to the fore the plurality of discourses which could be detrimental to the evident contested narratives within the Zambian ECE policy framework which potentially has a room to improve.

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