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## Conceptualizations of childhood, pedagogy and educational research in the postmodern

### A critical interpretation

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# Conceptualizations of childhood, pedagogy and educational research in the postmodern

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A critical interpretation

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**Abstract**

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<b>Title:</b> Conceptualizations of childhood, pedagogy and educational research in the postmodern: A critical interpretation	
<b>Abstract:</b> Over the last fifty years the debate between modernism and postmodernism has surfaced in the disciplines of social sciences. Epistemologically, there is a shift away from the concept of a “found” world, “out there”, objective, knowable and factual, towards a concept of “constructed” worlds, thus problematizing postulates based on the autonomous, stable, unified, essentialized, coherent and integrated subject capable of rational action, and opening up spaces for a new understanding of subjectivity that is based on provisionality and contingency. From the ashes of these tendencies for fragmentation has arisen what is called the New Sociology of Childhood and the new directions in pedagogy and research creating new spaces for constructing notions of children and childhoods. The emergent child has an active agency making it possible to construct a more dynamic child, located in a multiplicity of domains, thus opening up spaces for more flexible pedagogies and new sensibilities in educational research. I have therefore undertaken a critical reading of texts in the area of childhood, pedagogy and educational research within the modern and the postmodern in order to extract, appropriate and integrate parallel but socially constructed discourses across disciplines such as Sociology of Childhood, Sociology of Knowledge and Sociology of Education. I aim to reconstruct the concept of childhood both historically and within modernist/ postmodernist paradigm. I finally try to sift out and document some of the implications for study of childhood, as well as for pedagogical practices and educational research resulting from the paradigmatic shift from modernity to postmodernity. Finally postmodern constructs are problematized and a critical postmodernist position is invoked in order to straddle progressive aspects of modernity and postmodernity.	
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## **Preface**

This document is an outcome of my personal interest in children and childhoods that 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 school and homes of children belonging to these two communities. In addition to ethnicity (which was my major focus), gender and class were of interest while looking at the socialization of children in a semi-urban and modernizing society (this research remained unfinished and unpublished and was my Ph.D research). 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, which was later to be discovered by me when I attended the World Congress of the Sociology in Bielefeld, where I attended the sessions of different research commissions and accidentally discovered the Research Commission for Sociology of Childhood.

Over the next decade I was to develop an interest in social theories of modernism and postmodernism. In 2007, I submitted a masters (Magister) essay / paper, that discussed the structuring of identities within the modern and the postmodern that had been presented at the proceedings of the World Congress of the International Sociological Association, Sociology of Education RC04 Mid-term Conference, 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 interests 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 an

opportunity to spend six months at the Department of Education at the University of Lund, I decided to explore these new theoretical trends conceptualizing childhood and its 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 research.

Between 2007 and 2011, I got an 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 feed-back 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, and Prof. Anders Persson (in the Chair) and the University of Lund for allowing this document to be submitted for a Phil.Lic degree.

## Introductory

In the wake of developments following the popularization of critical theory in the 60s and the 70s, came the debate between modernism and postmodernism. Oppositions between conflict theorists and consensual theorists shifted to oppositions between structuralism and post structuralism. There is 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, mark 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, multiple readings and multiple uses. All discourses are understood to occur within shifting and dynamic social context in which multiple sets of power relations are inevitable (Foucault, 1980), hence politically not neutral.

Due to postulates based on the autonomous, unified, reified essentialized, coherent, and integrated subject capable of conscious rational action and objectivity were 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).

Out of the scattered discourses emerging from the modernity/post modernity debates has emerged new ways of viewing children and childhood, pedagogy and research - theory and practices. Methodologically, there is a movement away from 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 that used in natural sciences) - Interpretative research /hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism and ethno-methodology, and post-positivism<sup>1</sup> (belief that observations are theory-laden and that scientists are biased by their cultural experiences and world views), critical realism and constructive phenomenology to existential relativism.

The notion of de-centering<sup>2</sup> and Kuhn's study of the history of science and Wittgenstein's notion of language games have strengthened the post-modern relativist positions (Apple, 1991). The break with the mould of traditional research has resulted in the emergence of what is called "dare-devil research", whose grounds for rigor shift from traditions of validity to aesthetics and ethical interests (Jipson & Paley in Bleakley, 2004). Enlightenment ideals that promised a better society were problematized and its key principle "progress" was questioned - progress for whom? And towards what? Enlightenment was seen as a western-European invention that 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 Enlightenment project of the realization of the rational "man" through education was "his" story and not "hers" (Bleakley, 2004). At the same time education that was central to post - Enlightenment, emancipatory, liberal humanist project of modernism, found it difficult as a discipline to accommodate the radical critique of post modernism (Usher & Edwards, 1994).

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<sup>1</sup> The post-positivism subsumes several trends of which two important ones are constructivism and critical realism. **Constructivists** believe that each of us construct our view of the world based on our perceptions of it. **Critical realist** is critical of our ability to know reality with certainty and recognizes that all observations are fallible and has error, 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).

<sup>2</sup> 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, get deconstructed and fall into disrepute.

The ambivalent relationship between modernism, postmodernism and the “Third world” developments have triggered off Postcolonial, Critical School and Subaltern discourses. Texts exploring postmodern discourses in this study emerge from spaces located in the post-industrial, post-capitalist pockets of both the North and the South. Many discourses that spring up from conditions of the capitalist and post-capitalist West have 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” here in this essay in order to establish that postmodern discourses are privy not only to 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 centre-periphery bias of information flow. The “Third World” has a contradictory double function, according to Fredrick Jameson’s (referred in Colás, 1992:1) theory of postmodernism, It is both a) the space which is expected to be eradicated by the logic of capitalist development and consolidate late capitalism - postmodernism being its cultural dominant; b) the space that remains untouched by the processes that struggle against repressive social process, that have homogenized the terrain of the “First World” subjects. Even the “multiple modernities” advocates (who contend the Eurocentricity in Modernization theories) agree that theoretically, the “project of modernity” once taken root in the West, would begin to have global relevance and spread to the rest of the world. Reinhard Bendix (referred in Schmidt, 2004) comments that industrialization need not have exactly the same effects everywhere. But once it has occurred anywhere, 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 discourses in general and particularly that of the child and childhood, pedagogy and research, of the South or the “Third World” is not linear or a straight forward 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-surface in the postmodern condition, and that there is a relationship between postmodernism, tribalism and communalism. The lens of India reveals feudalism and tribalism which in are not completely eliminated by formal modernizing structures of nation-state, citizenship, of public and private. Thus tribalism and communalism surface when the capitalizing and homogenizing modernist forces are on the decline, resulting in the postmodern moments (the postmodern condition). This phenomena 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 would embrace nostalgia and try to re-appropriate the organizational principals 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 the new directions in pedagogy and research creating new spaces for constructing notions of children and childhoods. 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 it's resultant implications for pedagogic and educational research theory and practice, with as much coherence as possible. In selecting the texts I have read, I have been limited by the time span and the literature that was accessible to me related to the purpose of this exploratory essay. Since postmodernist understanding shares boundaries with the previously dominant modernist one, I delimit this literature study mostly to literature published in the 70s, 80s, 90s, 00s and 10s. 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 century (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 conceptualization of child and childhood and open up spaces to



accommodate a more free and 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 and kept me from closing the hermeneutics spiral.

In the process of writing this essay I have grown by leaps and bound (as I should) in 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. 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 it in order to feed and inform the prevailing discourses within the Swedish pedagogical academia (of which I am a part of). I have also attempted to show how the indigenous discourses in the South (particularly those in South Asia) both 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 to 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 concept of childhood is located within the modernity - post modernity debate; c) to explore and constructs new understandings of childhood which frees the child's agency from the constructing structures located in the modern, to one which locates the child within a postmodernist frame of reference. Till recently theories of childhood which located themselves in the modern were understood to being the last words on the subject. With input from Kuhn in the early 70s, one became aware that these self-evident

paradigms were not infallible and permanent, but transient and fleeting. Theories of childhood located in the postmodern open up spaces for multiplicity of childhoods, a more dynamic child, more flexible pedagogy, and more sensitive research perspectives. This is an on-going conversation that will continue to contribute to the understanding of childhood into post-post-structural/post-postmodern paradigm.

## **Structure of the thesis**

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

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 hermeneutical reading of texts help to collect together several strands of discourses located within modernity and post modernity, in order to construct a somewhat cohesive understanding of the concepts related to childhood, pedagogy and research, are documented also in this chapter. This chapter includes also the delimitations 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 projects modernity and post-modernity 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 from the locations of “Third World” and postcolonial discourses.

**Chapter three** develops the historical evolution of the theories on childhood and Education; the construction of the modern, postmodern child and 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 are, for locating the concepts childhood, pedagogy and educational research, in the postmodern. This is followed by ii) problems postmodern constructs pose for education, followed by 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.

## 1. Methodological issues

This essay is an effort in reading text within contemporary discourses related to childhood, pedagogy and educational research as located within the modern and postmodern, and an effort at understanding and interpreting the text. In this chapter I therefore develop the notion of hermeneutic as a research approach, 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 the texts located in the modern and postmodern.

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. Texts are a heuristic (exploratory) device to identify data consisting of words and images that have become recorded (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Texts can be read passively deriving meaning that authors infuse in their texts, or actively interpret what the reader sees, resisting meanings meant by authors and arriving at resistant reading (Bryman, 1984). It is always possible to argue for and against an interpretation, to confront interpretation, to arbitrate between them, and to seek for an agreement. The researcher is always operating within an ever widening circle of socially constructed truth claims which must be negotiated (Kvale, 1987). The researcher positioning himself within this debate becomes a dimension of methodology.

I use a citation from an Stanford Encyclopedia (given below), where Ramberg and Gjesdal (2005) describes how the concept of hermeneutics has shifted over a period from the Middle ages, Renaissance, and to the hermeneutics that has provided the

critical horizon for the discussions of contemporary philosophy, both within an Anglo-American context and within 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 place stress on hermeneutics as the art of interpretation, whose 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 that have different but complementary elements that help resolve the tension that is inherent to understanding (Elliot, 2008). The following discussion on hermeneutic philosopher's 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. Hirsch opposed the relativistic idea that interpretation always is to 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 that is gathered

from the original meaning of the texts i.e. 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 the meaning 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 toward 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 (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 the meaning of the text. For Ricoeur, understanding does not have to appropriate the subject matter naively and that it can stand at a critical distance from it. Through being suspicious one can rid of superstition and false understanding, and that such a hermeneutics can be conducted in the hope of a better and more critical understanding of 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 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).

Hermeneutic (nearly synonymous to *Verstehen*, which the 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, the integration between theory and practice (Alvesson & 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 some 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 isn't possible to really understand any one part of a work until you understand the whole, but it also isn't possible to understand the whole without also understanding all of the part. 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 that 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 its context. The texts are interrogated and themes extracted critically. Qualitative text reading comprises of searching out the underlying themes in the materials being read, and implicitly extracted. The critical hermeneutic approach draws on practice associated with qualitative content analysis, i.e. an emphasis on the point of view of the author and sensitivity to the content. What is critical is the linkage that is made 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 & 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 the interpretative repertoires, claims to “stakes” in an account, and construction of knowing subjects. In placing the text in a wider context, it informs how the text 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 as those 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 to find what people really mean. It concerns with the linguistic feature of the text; the processes relating to the production and consumption of the text, and the wide social practice to which the communicative event belongs (Allan, 2013). 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 analysis with how social and political inequalities are manifested in discourse (Critical Discourse Analysis), and with 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 from 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 what text one reads and participating in a dialogue between oneself and the author. Passive reading allows to take seriously the authors own voice instead of resisting the authors 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.

One chooses to read passively, actively or critically depending on what ones intentions are, and what kind of reading is required to interpret, understand or make



explicit the ideology underlying a given text. One may also construct that all readings are active since reading requires engaging the text we read with an alert active mind. According to Louise Rosenblatt (an American literary critic and an anthropologist) who first advanced the Reader-Response Theory in 1938, and recognized the reader as an active agent, who 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<sup>3</sup> in order to locate my work in conjunction with the new emerging ideas within childhood, pedagogy and research and to evolve a critique of modernity and to 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 to connect them to create cohesion. The text of this research document is indebted to other texts and to discussion with other people.

The essay has evolved according to principles of 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 versa. I have also constantly attempted to locate the meaning of concepts (or texts) that I have explored within cultural and historical contexts. I started with an attempt to identify the characteristics attributed to children and childhoods in differing contemporary cultural epoch - 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 – Post modernity paradigm. According to Kuhn (1970) scientific paradigms are shared commitments to beliefs and values. Thomas Kuhn is one of the initiators of the “New Sociology of Education” (Young, 1971). He was one of the contemporary researchers to document (the Sophists started this discussion in the 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> century AD) that there were no absolute criteria for truth, scientific knowledge, or rationality (Krieitzberg, 1993).

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<sup>3</sup>Hyper- texts are texts displayed on a computer display or other electronic device 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.

Kuhn's influence in the revising of all cultural paradigms of modernity or the program of the Enlightenment should not be underestimated. Kuhn rejected the epistemological "mirror" metaphor (ibid, 1993). 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. The mirror metaphor suggests that our perceptions are a reflection of reality – that it is 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 (referred in Bager, 2003), sees paradigms as being metaphorically equivalent to "architectural foundations" and "myth-stories" in which the individual experiences are embedded and form the larger framework of shared values (and meanings and purposes) that has 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 the 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 emphasizes 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 – one 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 its resultant cultural fallout. Hence it is expected that there are spaces within the countries of developing societies that contain pre-modern, 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, and they get disseminated to nations in the South. Hence discourses in the academia of the South (even the oppositional ones) are informed by Western discourses due to centre-periphery bias. Also it is 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 aims 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 post-modernist 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 discourse. Finally I try to present problems posed by postmodernism for education. In order to reach this goal, text from primary and secondary literature was read, discourses analysed and located in a context, juxtaposed against each other.

The following research questions and issues are addressed in this study:

- a) Discussing the methodological approach called Hermeneutics that has been used to read and interpret text on modernity, postmodernity, construction of knowledge, childhood, pedagogy and educational research.
- b) Exploring the nature and content of discourses that have constructed the continuity-discontinuity paradigm within the projects of modernity and postmodernity?
- c) How the contemporary discourses in the study of childhood has crystallized into what is called the New Sociology of Childhood?
- d) What implications emerge in conceptualizing children and childhood, pedagogy and educational research in the postmodern?
- e) What problems arise from postmodern constructs for education? Resolving the problematic by constructing critical postmodern education.

## **2. Modernism and the postmodern challenge**

This chapter addresses the second research question that of exploring the nature and content of discourses that have constructed the continuity-discontinuity paradigm within the modern and postmodern projects. I further attempt to appropriate discourses within postcolonial studies in order to present a critique of postmodernism. I invoke the Subaltern studies discourse and the discourses of Third Wave feminists in order to present challenges to the Euro-centricity in the dominant Western discourses.

In understanding “post modernity”, it is necessary to clarify the term “modernity”. Modernity was born of the Renaissance - a cultural movement spanning the period from the 14th to the 17th century. Modernity implies the progressive rationalizations of economics and administration, as well as the differentiation of the social world (Sarup, in Salberg et al, 2009). This term emerged in the context of the development of the capitalist state and modern scholarship trends that date back to the Enlightenment period – beginning in 17th- and 18th-century Europe when reason, individualism and knowledge through scientific method were promoted. Modernity typically refers to a post-traditional, post-medieval historical period marked by the move from feudalism (or agrarianism) towards capitalism, industrialization, secularization, rationalization, the nation-state and its institutions.

Berman (referred in Boyne & Rattansi, 1990) attempts to sum up the experience of modernity by saying:

It is a maelstrom that ‘promises adventure, joy and growth, transformation of ourselves and the world’, but also threatens to destroy cherished traditions and

securities; it unites by cutting across class, region and ideology and yet disintegrates through incessant change, contradiction and ambiguity. It is generated by great discoveries in physical sciences, changing our images of the universe and our place in it; the industrialization of production, which transforms scientific knowledge into technology, creates new human environments and destroys old ones, speeds up the whole tempo of life, generate new forms of corporate power and class struggle, immense demographic upheavals, severing millions of people from their ancestral habitats, hurtling them half-way across the world into new lives; rapid and often cataclysmic urban growth; systems of mass communication, dynamic in their development, enveloping and binding together the most diverse people and societies; increasingly powerful nation states, bureaucratically structured and operated, constantly trying to expand their powers; mass social movements of people, and peoples, challenging their political and economic rulers, striving to gain some control over their lives, finally bearing and driving all these people and institutions along an ever expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market (Berman in Boyne & Rattansi, 1990:2-3).

Modernity is a post traditional order having two sides. It partly destroys traditions and security and involves growth and transformation. On the one hand, modernity unites and results in convergence, on the other hand it disintegrates due to constant change. From within “modernism” has emerged a critique of modernity which consolidated with Frankfurt or Critical School theories which developed in Germany in 1930s. It opposes simplistic beliefs in the progressive capacity of science and technology to resolve all problems, and contends positivism and the idea of an integrated individual subject. According to (ibid, 1990), “postmodernism” deepens the critique started by “modernism”.

The condition of post-modernity can be seen as a political and cultural configuration. Sarup (referred in Salberg, et al, 2009) says that if one sees modernism as the culture of modernity then postmodernism is the culture of post-modernity. Postmodernism can be defined as “an element that symbolizes a series of aesthetic projects in a terrain that is rapidly changing”. It blurs the boundaries of demarcations of the past, by attempting to dissolve the borders between high and mass culture; showing concern to merge art and life; eclectically mixing codes and styles; and exploring ethnic minority and feminist perspectives (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990).

Broadly speaking, postmodernism refers to a family of cultural concepts that critically challenge the certainty of objective truths, the relevance of universal or metanarratives, and language as representative of truth (Lyotard, 1984).

Postmodernism is not a meta-narrative (an overarching narrative of narratives), but rather one narrative among numerous others. Inherent in postmodernism is a self-critique of postmodernism in it-self, i.e. it invites and demands continued analysis of its premises and their applications. Social construction, a particular postmodern theory, places emphasis on truth, reality, and knowledge as socially embedded and the role of language - that emerged as a meaningful and useful metaphor, especially in the creation of knowledge.

Faigley (referred in Beckett & Hager, 2002) sorts postmodern discourses into three meta-discourses: a) Aesthetic discussions of postmodernism (literary criticisms of the late 1950s); b) Philosophical discussions of postmodern theory (post-structural critique of the fundamental ideas of Western philosophy); and c) Socio-historical assertions that Western nations have entered an era of post modernity (arrival of the post-industrial information society).

Many socialists and feminist<sup>4</sup> writers find the cultural practice of postmodernism nihilistic, as it appears to them as antithetical (negating) to emancipatory strategies towards socialism and abolition of women`s subordination. According to Lovibond (referred in Meynert, 1996) a theory that undermines a systematic political approach that can question wealth, power, labour and a unequal social order (which distributes its benefits and burdens in a systematically unequal way between sexes) is unacceptable. According to Enlightenment view, Modernity is expected to create a condition of collapse (breakdown) of all fixed, fast frozen (traditional) relations that would open up spaces for a historic opportunity for mankind which would trigger of the formation of a class that would seize control over its own existence (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990). There is a general agreement among theorists that it was the Enlightenment period that laid the foundation for the political and intellectual culture that legitimized the preparation of a rupture with the old world, and lead to scientific, industrial, bourgeois and class revolutions, and the formation of modern democratic (liberal and socialist) state.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Jane Flax (referred in Meynert, 1996), feminists are attracted to an enlightenment world view because they have been treated as incapable of autonomy and rationality and insist on the extension of these powers to themselves and therefore believe in reason as their ally in the struggle.

## The project of modernity

It was during the fifteenth century Italian Renaissance that the cultural condition of modernity came into existence. It was based on a progressive rationalization of society and its economic and administrative structures (Sarup referred in Salberg, et al, 2009). The term “Modernity” emerged in the context of the development of the capitalist state and later the state capitalism in communist countries. According to Bleakley (2004), modernity reached its climax, while industrialization developed. At the height of modernity, the view of the *individual* being perceived as the ownership of ‘the private property of the *self*, developed. Industrialism was followed by the post-industrial, postmodern world. During the climax of modernity, production gives way to consumption that consists largely of information and “signs” and representational symbols such as advertising.

Modernism has been described as a cultural movement that embodies the ideals of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment. Medieval superstition supposedly gets replaced by a new spirit of inquiry informed by the philosophical position of positivism that laid foundation for rational science. Schmidt (2004) argues that without the intellectual revolution that set the stage for epistemological transformation (philosophical positivism that led to the scientific revolution), Western modernity (and European Enlightenment) could not have come into existence.

...before the various revolutions that we associate with the rise of modernity in Europe – the industrial revolution, the urban revolution, the scientific revolution, the political revolution, the educational revolution – could take place, another revolution, the intellectual revolution, had to be accomplished. This intellectual revolution set the stage for a fundamental epistemic transformation that made the modern project possible in the first place. At the core of this epistemic transformation lies the European enlightenment. It questions the given-ness of social order and raises the awareness of its make ability, hence contingency. The concomitant de-legitimation of traditional political and religious authority sets in motion a process which ultimately leads to the establishment of a radically different order, that of political democracy. In addition to the new political order, various other innovations give rise to new institutions which become emblematic of the modern world: the rule of law and a legally protected private sphere, the market economy, civil society, the freedom of thought and science, etc. (ibid, 2005: 4).



In 1603 the word “progress” found its way into the English language. It meant “continual improvement”. In 1627 Francis Bacon (an English philosopher) published parts of the *New Atlantis*, and called for a rational, scientific worldview. This gave rise to the eighteenth-century *Enlightenment project* – Which attempted to create a society that was rational, progressive and cultivated. This society was to be based upon the empirically discovered and logically deduced laws of nature and human nature. It was a critique of accepted values, dynamic in spirit, and a search for truth. In the wake of Enlightenment came oppositions to the movements.

A number of contemporary thinkers argue that the *Enlightenment project* failed because it either naively ignored or deliberately obscured the symbolic or discursive nexus of rationality and social actuality, thereby contributing to economic, cultural and technological domination by particular groups – i.e. males, capitalists and scientific *experts*. To use the language of continental critical theory, the Enlightenment *regressed* into ideology and its cultural vision became so detached from *life-world* as to offer no serious resistance to commodification (Dwyer, 2012:1).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, there arose “The Counter-Enlightenment”, a conservative movement as an opposition to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment. It sought to reverse the religious, social and philosophical changes associated with Enlightenment and the French revolution. The first known use of the term 'counter-enlightenment' in English was in 1949, when Isaiah Berlin (British of Russian-Jewish origin) popularized the concept of a Counter-Enlightenment movement that he characterized as relativist, anti-rationalist, vitalist and organic. The twin pillars of counter-Enlightenment were the “Throne” and the “Alter”. The “Throne” represents the authoritarian rule of the hereditary monarchy which is opposed to liberal democracy. The “Alter” represents the Catholic Church that enjoys the support and endorsement of the state. The King was the defender of the Church and a sacred person himself (Wokler, 2014).

It was after the World War II that “the Enlightenment” re-emerged as a key organizing concept in social and political thought and the history of ideas. In its shadow was the resurgence of Counter-Enlightenment literature blaming the 18th century trust in reason for 20th century totalitarianism. This anti-Enlightenment sentiment was located in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

(2002)) first published in 1947, which traces the degeneration of the general concept of enlightenment from ancient Greece (embodied in the cunning “bourgeois” hero Odysseus) to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment (epitomized by Marquis de Sade) and to the 20<sup>th</sup> century fascism (Soviet communism referred to as regressive totalitarian). Many postmodern writers and some feminists have made similar arguments, seeing *the Enlightenment* conception of reason as totalitarian, and as not having been enlightened enough since. For Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) although Enlightenment banishes myths it falls back into a further myth, that of individualism and formal equality under instrumental reason. Isaiah Berlin (referred in Thompson, 2014) claims that Enlightenment favours political authoritarianism, and that the legacy of the Counter-Enlightenment has been pluralism (which he associates with liberalism).

The key words for the Enlightenment project are: progress, truth, certainty and foundationalism (self-justifying basic beliefs), humanism, emancipation, identity (essentialism), ideology, empirical fact and universalism. These concepts located in the modern are problematized later on by the French philosopher and postmodernist Lyotard (1984). There is a “crisis of legitimacy” of these modernist concepts, in the postmodern era. He further comments that the innovative and experimental face of modernism i.e. the *avant garde*<sup>5</sup> is postmodernism.

Modernity is both a historical period and a project. For Bauman (referred in Boyne & Rattansi, 1990) the historical period of modernity started in the seventeenth century and resulted in a series of social and intellectual transformations. The cultural project of Enlightenment resulted in the growth of technology and the industrial society. The project of Modernity came into focus during the eighteenth century, and resulted in the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment thinkers, the development of objective science, universal morality and law and autonomous art (Bleakley, 2004). The Enlightenment project was meant to free mankind from ignorance, prejudice,

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<sup>5</sup> The term *avant-garde* means “advance guard”. or “vanguard”. It refers to people or works that are experimental or innovative, especially with respect to art, culture, and politics. It represents a pushing of boundaries of accepted norms and status quo, in the realm of Culture. *Avant-garde* is a hallmark of modernism (Crystal, 1990).

irrationalities and scarcity, and lead to a society that would be socially and economically equal through accumulation of knowledge, domination of science and the development of rational forms of social organization and modes of thought. The enlightenment project of combining freedom with happiness through progress based on science and technology has lost credibility (trustworthiness) (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990).

According to Habermas (referred in Dahlberg et al, 2007) the project of modernity had ambitious goals: such as: a) linear and continuous progress; b) truth as the revelation of a knowable world; and c) emancipation and social, political and cultural freedom for the individual. A central construct of modernity was the view that: world is knowable and ordered with value free knowledge; and that the individuals had autonomous and stable selves or agencies. Dahlberg et al (2007), further note that connected to the Enlightenment project was the firm beliefs that there was only one answer to any one question; and that individuals were located in an abstract space - unconnected to their culture and history. In addition because of the objective tools and empirical scientific method and positivism, modernity tended to be located a-historically in terms of space and time.

According to Bertens (1995), modernity came under attack since the nineteenth century. Modernity was problematized first within arts. The instrumentalism within modernity was questioned. The concept of the “Rational Man” within economic and political theory was contested. This concept (the rational man) assumed that people were simply self-interested, utility seeking and rational. The dependable objective world that can be measured by the tool of scientific method to establish reliable, value-neutral truths, were also disputed.

Peter Brooker (1992) asserts that Critical School theorists pre-empted postmodern critique of Modernity. According to Jameson<sup>6</sup> (referred in Dino, 2011), the term “late capitalism” originated with the Frankfurt School and refers to the form of capitalism that came to the forefront in the modernist period, which now dominates the

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<sup>6</sup> Jameson dates the emergence of “late capitalism” in the 1950s, so that late capitalism Jameson is ultimately coincident with and even synonymous with postmodernism (Dino, 2011)

postmodern culture. Critical School theorists such as Habermas, Adorno and Horkheimer (referred in Brooker, 1992) saw the logic behind Enlightenment rationality as the logic of domination and oppression, by considering instrumental reason to be more valid than culture and personality. This view was later taken up in the writings of the postmodernists Derrida, Foucault, and Lyotard (referred in Dahlberg *et al*, 2007). They condemned both the scientific method and its lack of reflection and theoretical understanding.

For Lather (1991) reason is limited and modernist categories are becoming obsolete. The Enlightenment project with its positivistic world view and technical rationality led to the instrumentalization of science (see also Habermas, 1984). Furthermore, modernity was unable to achieve the tasks it set for itself – those of absolute truth, pure art, humanity, order, certainty, harmony and the end of history. There is increasing uncertainty about modernity being able to accommodate human diversity, complexity and contingency (Dahlberg *et al*, 2007). Modernity is accused of attempting to order these attributes out of existence.

## **The project of postmodernity**

Since the word “Modernism” originates in the Latin *modo*, meaning “of the moment” or “of the now”, “Postmodernism” then literally means after just now (Appignanesi & Garratt, in Salberg, *et al*, 2009). It refers to the emerging or actual dissolution (ending) of those social forms associated with modernity (Salberg *et al*, 2009). The oppositional discourses arising from within postmodernism are associated with post-colonialism, post-structuralism, and post-processualism<sup>7</sup>.

There seems to be no consensus about the scope of postmodernism. Fredric Jameson (referred in Bleakley, 2004) has contended that the idea that there is such a condition as “post-modernity” that differs radically from modernity. Some theorists see the current cultural condition as a logical development of modernism. It is also referred

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<sup>7</sup> Post-processualists use deconstructionist skeptical arguments to conclude that there is no objective past and that our representations of the past are only texts that we produce on the basis of our socio-political standpoints (Harris, in Salberg *et al*, 2009).

to as ‘high modernism’, ‘late modernism’, and ‘late capitalism’, or as an aspect of modernism’s avant-garde (Jencks, in Bleakley, 2004).

There have been oppositions to the Euro-centricisms found in Modernization Theory of the 50s and 60s. In the 1990s a new paradigm – a concept of *multiple modernities* emerged in order to conceptualize the contemporary world. The main point of contention is over the over-simplified view of the world - that modernization is a homogenizing process, ultimately leading to the convergence of the societies undergoing it. They oppose the hegemony of one variety of modernization - that of “the West” that narrows down to North America – with modernity elevated “to the status of a world historical yardstick” (Björn Wittrock, in Schmidt, 2004: 2). Critics emphasize modern societies’ diversity. Not only are there several paths to modernity, but different historical trajectories and socio-cultural backgrounds also give rise to highly distinct forms of modernity in different parts of the world. Even Europe, where it all began, exhibits a great deal of cultural and institutional diversity. The literature on multiple modernities seems to imply that there are as many “modernities” as there are modern – or modernized – societies (Schmidt, 2004).

There have also been attempts to replace the term *multiple modernities* with the term *varieties of modernities* (which is seen to better able to address the former’s substantive concerns, while at the same time permitting modernity to be spoken in the singular). This alternative concept is inspired by the concept of varieties of capitalism paradigm, viz. *liberal market economies* and *coordinated market economies* in the new political economy literature. According to Schmidt (2004), one of the advantages, the term *varieties of modernities* has over the *multiple modernities* paradigm is its focus on institutions, rather than barely explicated notions of culture and cultural difference. Schmidt writes:

The question is not, at least cannot seriously be, whether there is diversity in the world. There certainly is. But what do we make of it? How *much* diversity is there? What *kinds* of diversity exist between different modern societies? How *profound* are the existing differences? What is their social theoretic *significance*? And what are their future prospects? Are they more likely to persist, to withstand further social change (“globalization”), perhaps even to deepen as a result of (resistance to) it, or do we have reason to expect that they will diminish in the long run? Moreover, if we all live in the modern era now, as in one sense we doubtless

do, does this imply that all societies are equally modern? Or is modernity a matter of degree? What does it mean – or take – to be modern anyway? (ibid, 2004:3).

Friedman (1988) in *Cultural logics of the global system* argues for a more objective understanding of the crisis of modernity which has resulted in the current transformation of world cultures and identities. This cultural phenomenon can be theoretically associated with the transformation of world system, which should not be understood as an “evolutionary totality on its way to socialist or post-industrial world” but a more “cyclical history of civilizational systems”. The politicization of ethnicity due to capital flight and the crisis of modernity are seen as a phenomenon specific to declining centres of world system. Postmodern condition is manifested in the West due to the rapid capitalization and then a decline of modern identity due to capital flight, causing fragmentation of modern identity.

Where such expansions end or turn to decline, modern identity becomes extremely difficult to maintain.... the dissolution of modern identity (-culture, -nature) trifurcates towards traditionalism (+culture) and primitivism (+nature) and true postmodernism (+culture, +nature)....in a certain sense the modernist project itself dissolves the social and cultural fabric to such an extent that it generates postmodernism (Friedman, cited from Meynert, 1996:9).

Postmodernism because of its absolute relativism, values and appropriates culture and nature. The roots of postmodern discourse itself are seen to be part of the fragmentation of the world-system. The social agent becomes plural – the universal agent such as a working class is replaced by multiple agents involved in a variety of struggles and social movements. Identity then gets produced simultaneously in many different locales of activity by different agents, for different purposes. There is a resultant dispersal of the subject or group into multiple overlapping fragments of identity (Marcus, 1986). Subjectivity<sup>8</sup> as in the humanist notion of free, unified, stable and coherent is challenged and a notion of subjectivity that is multiple layered, non-unitary is brought in. Postmodernist emphasis on fragmentation, difference and

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<sup>8</sup> Postmodernist thinking has been strong in the area of the nature of subjectivity. Postmodernism's pluralism intersects with its insight into the fragmentation of subjectivity and individual identity - a consequence of the de-centering and splitting of the individual in poststructuralist social and psychoanalytical theory. It's a way of conceiving identity (Boyne & Rattansi, referred in Meynert, 1996)

plurality, and on the liberation of individuality from the fixity of identity, has relevance to the variegated experience of modern life (Boyne and Rattansi, 1990).

According to Rosenau (referred in Salberg, et al, 2009:2), postmodernists can be divided into two very broad camps: the Skeptics and the Affirmatives. Skeptical Postmodernists are very critical of the modern “subject” who is considered by them as a “linguistic” resolution, and reject the modern understanding of time which is perceived as a construct that oppresses, controls and measures the individuals. No theory is considered more valid than any other. Skeptical postmodernists see Theory as reifying and alienating ground realities and obscures and mystify them. Theories are often incongruent and discordant and are used to exclude and control rival power. Affirmative Postmodernists also reject Theory by denying claims of truth. They do not, however, feel that Theory needs to be abolished but merely transformed. Affirmatives are less rigid than Skeptics. They support movements organized around peace, environment, and feminism. In this essay I do not reject theory per se, but align myself with the affirmative postmodernists because I invoke different theoretical attempts at understanding contemporary realities, in order to gain clarity regarding different concepts, particularly those related to the concept of postmodernism.

Although “postmodernity” implying a critical break with modernity, problematizes modernist education, in the “dual coding” model the educational project<sup>9</sup> ideationally holds promise. There is continuity of certain aspects of modernism, while there is a break with others. Parts of modernism that is retained are incorporated along with

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<sup>9</sup> Education is central to the post-Enlightenment, emancipatory, liberal humanist project of modernity, and there is a deep commitment to the notion of a humanist subject, capable of self-knowing, autonomy and agency that choose education to overcome ignorance and build a better world through progressive accumulation of knowledge and self-development. Hence education as a discipline finds it difficult to accommodate the radical critique of postmodernism. Postmodernism asks awkward questions about the benefits of progress – which is promoted as legitimate, and in turn legitimates knowledge and the assumptions about human agency and the nature of the autonomous-self. This dilemma is resolved by Usher and Edwards (1994) through hybridization of the double coding-model, which involves eclectic activity of bridging the domains of two different codes, viz. of modernism and postmodernism.

emerging postmodern ideal. Postmodernism is therefore considered the innovative and experimental face of the modern. For Lyotard (1984) the theory that postmodernists employ and the theories that collectively may be called 'postmodernism' demand a new literacy (knowledge and understanding) and hence are often complex, and difficult to access. There are two established streams of thought within postmodernism. For many American critics, French post-structuralism and its American deconstructionist offshoots are nearly identical with post-modernism (Bertens, 1995). Deconstruction and post structuralism are the two main theoretical structures of postmodern inquiry. Both schools are beginning to be used in educational inquiry. Within post structuralism there is a particular school of feminism, which also has a unique research agenda. Post-structural feminism<sup>10</sup> uses insights from post-structural thought and emphasizes the contingent and discursive nature of all identities.

According to Bleakley (2004), the deconstructive postmodernism argues that there is a radical rupture between modernity and post-modernity, based on the "linguistic turn"<sup>11</sup> which originated with Bergmann and popularized by Rorty in 1967 in book *The Linguistic Turn – Essays in Philosophical Methods* (1967). In other words, modernism sees meaning in the object itself (identity and essence), postmodernism sees meaning arising from difference between linguistic terms. Postmodernists argue that "reality" is grounded in language and that the "natural" world that is taken for granted by empirical science as an object for study is in fact the object of construction through language and discourse. This phenomenon is referred to as "the crisis of representation" (Baudrillard's, 1981). The world is never known directly, but is constructed, or given meaning through discourse. Such meanings are historically and

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<sup>10</sup> Some post-structural feminists are Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva.

<sup>11</sup> The *linguistic turn* (turn towards linguistic philosophy), was an important major development in the Western philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on the relationship between language and philosophy. It is a notion that language "constitutes" reality as opposed to words functioning as labels attached to concepts (as in the Western tradition of philosophy). Saussure (the founder of structuralism) held the view that definitions of concepts cannot exist independently from a linguistic system of defined by difference - differences between meanings structure our perception (Bleakly, 2004).



culturally contingent, and depend upon the legitimating process of dominant discourses embodied (alive) in differing communities of practice (Dahlberg et al, 2007). Deleuze (1994) (a French philosopher) sees the modern world as one of simulacra,<sup>12</sup> where modern thought, is born due to the failure of representation (symbolism), the loss of identities, and the “discovery of all the forces that act under the representation of the identical”. This is true both for the representation of political subjects and scientific objects.

In his *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1969), a French philosopher and historian, suggests that one should understand the formation of objects by bringing about their “de-representification” (the *opposite* of representing them). French intellectual ethics before 1966 allowed writers to represent the world and history in a straightforward manner speaking on behalf of it, on the basis of their research - this was no longer possible (in those circles) after 1968. By then any claim to be speaking “the truth” was distrusted. Postmodern writing expresses a commitment to the spirit of 1968. It proposes an intellectual style that remains in opposition to certain ways of “thinking correctly”. The writer must continuously undermine the tendency to read a text as a representation, as something other than a simulacrum, as something that is speaking for something or someone else.

According to Baudrillard (1981) a French sociologist and philosopher, in postmodern culture, society becomes so reliant on “models and maps” that contact with the real world that preceded the map becomes lost. Reality begins to imitate the model, which determines the real world. There is no longer any distinction between reality and its representation. There is only the “simulacrum”. For Baudrillard, simulation and simulacra is no longer a question of imitation, duplication or parody, but a question of substituting the signs of the real. The ability to make sense of the distinction between nature and artifice becomes lost.

For many British critics, there is a marked difference between Foucauldian post-structuralism, which is considered as radical and politically constructive, and

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<sup>12</sup> A simulacrum is a copy of the original. A simulacrum is a copy of a copy, where the original has now been lost.

postmodernism which is scorned as reactionary or nihilistic (Bertens, 1995).

According to Bleakley (2004) the second stream of postmodernism is interested less in language and more in general cultural and historical phenomena such as art, politics, religion, science studies and ecology. This school draws heavily upon the ideas of “new Science” such as complexity and chaos theory, emergence of form, and principles of uncertainty and indeterminacy. They do not see a single rupture between modernism and postmodernism, but a double coding in which both rupture and continuity coincide (Jencks, in Bleakley, 2004). They see deconstruction not as a form of postmodernism but as part of the avant-garde of modernism. They disagree with Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism as “incredulity towards grand narratives”. They see rather the emergence of a new, inclusive grand narrative that is holistic, and that based on the convergence of science, the humanities, the ecological movement, radical feminism and new religious movements. Bleakley (2004) asserts that this postmodernism sees “tolerance of difference and pluralism” as core values in a developing grand-narrative that borrows from the new science<sup>13</sup> notions of ambiguity, paradox, indeterminacy and uncertainty. Within this new grand narrative, epistemology and local narratives are honoured.

Jencks (ibid, 2004) calls for a new counter - Reformation of complexity and “sensuousness to challenge” to what he sees as modernism’s brutal and reductive abstractions. This school of postmodernism calls itself “reconstructive”, often shortened to “restructive” or “constructive” and is sometimes referred to as “affirmative” (as opposed to sceptical) postmodernism. Jencks calls for a return to public concerns, to postmodernism and a return to a “messy democracy”, in which populism replaces elitism, and tolerance of difference is an asset. Reconstructive postmodernism sees deconstructive, sceptical postmodernism as nihilistic and reductive and offers abstract intellectual approaches to concrete problems. Deconstructive postmodernism focuses too much on language and discourse. It is

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<sup>13</sup> The new science provides a fundamental understanding of reality in general and of our known universe in particular. It advances a unified concept that governs our awareness of reality, explains how this reality is generated, and describes the factors which mold it into various forms.

seen as narrow and pessimistic in focus, at the expense of material phenomena, and neglects the contribution of the new sciences.

According to Slattery (ibid, 2004), while the deconstructionists and poststructuralists' views have come to dominate educational research in the postmodern, reconstructive voices are present in the literature, mainly concentrated in the area of curricular studies. To categories like deconstructive and reconstructive postmodernisms<sup>14</sup>, Bleakley (2004) adds "cynical" and "celebratory" schools. The cynical schools are described by Jean Baudrillard in his essay *Modernity* (1987), where postmodern world is seen as a swirl of virtuality (a confusion of signs) where individuals gain identity through over consumption of fashion and information. For Baudrillard (1984) the world of reality has imploded (collapsed) into a world of representation, of hyper-reality (more real than reality), of pornography (more erotic than sex), of an obesity of information (more information than can be read), of simulation (more true than the truth), of terrorism (more violent than war) and of catastrophe (more eventful than events) (Bleakley, 2004).

"Celebratory" postmodernism is also called "post-humanism". Post humanism is different from classical humanism in that it places humanity as one of many natural species. According to this claim, humans have no inherent rights to destroy nature or set themselves above it ethically. Human knowledge is reduced to a less controlling position. The limitations and fallibility of human intelligence are admitted, but does not abandon the rational tradition of humanism. It is a cultural state which strives to develop "human nature" which constantly adapt to contemporary techno-scientific. Here science fiction festival of futurism (in which there are possibilities of human-machine interactivity and bio-engineered futures) are not seen as a technological nightmare denying human spirit, but as an inevitable and welcome transformation of humanity.

According to Badminton (ibid, 2004), the "cyborg" or cybernetic organism (an organism that has both artificial and natural systems) is celebrated for its "hybrid

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<sup>14</sup> There are differing conventions for spelling "postmodernism". Deconstructive postmodernism tends to use lower case, and elided (postmodern), where reconstructive Post-Modernists tend to use upper case, and hyphenated (Post-Modernism) (Bleakley, 2004).

status”, and is proof of the death of the Aristotelian world of logic which is based on oppositional (either/or) thinking. Disaster and ecological catastrophe are to be solved through imaginative science. Although the current educational research has not yet made use of this model totally, post-humanists see many elements of future in the present cultural condition in the West. Some of these are simultaneous existence of increasing and rapid development of information and communication technologies, while concurrently being dated. Here learning and research are focused on cyberspace. The ‘information revolution’ has helped us to cross cultural boundaries with ease, borrow ideas from different epochs and cultures, and to discuss the nature of the world without leaving our homes (Poster, 1990).

The word “postmodernism” was used as early as 1870, and the word “postmodernism” appeared in the title of a book in 1926 (Bernard – Iddings Bell’s *Postmodernism and other essays*, 1926, in Bertens, 1995), yet debate on postmodernism started only approximately in the early 1950s with the anti-modernist cultural revolt. This was a revolt against obsessive intellectualizing of all human experience. There was an attempt to part radically from controlling humanism (locked in rationality) and reach beyond the Greek system to the pre-rationalist (utopian) space in order to retrieve a more authentic humanism from subjectivist humanist tradition. In 1970s a distinctly Heideggerian postmodernism – existentialist in nature - was reconstructed from this anti-modern movement. According to (Bertens, 1995) this was an incoherent movement born from the anti - modern movement of 1960s, and is composed of numerous strains: a) Kuhn’s deconstruction of scientific “progress” in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*; b) Foucault’s emphasis on discontinuity and difference in history; c) Jane Jacobs and Robert Venturi’s attack on modernist architecture and urban planning; d) The rise of Derridean deconstruction etc.

Bertens (1995) further documents that Habermas distinguishes between three different conservative positions: a) the “pre-modern” of the “old conservatives” (e.g.

F. R. Leavis), b) the “anti-modernism” of the “young conservatives” (Foucault<sup>15</sup> and Derrida), and c) the postmodernism of the neo-conservatives (Daniell Bell).

According to Habermas (1987), these neo-conservatives have given up the project of modernity and moved beyond it – hence they are the only true postmodernists. The young conservatives (Foucault and Derrida) have by contrast not moved beyond modernity. They summarize Nietzsche’s experience of aesthetic modernity, claiming a de-centred subjectivity (Bertens, 1995).

For Dahlberg, *et al* (2007), postmodernism is the emancipation from the modern urge to overcome ambivalence and reverses the values central to modernity, i.e. uniformity and universalism. If modernity stood for liberty, equality and brother- hood, then post-modernity (re-appropriating values from Renaissance humanism) stands for liberty, diversity and tolerance. This diversity is a result of the emerging condition of the postmodern moment that occurs due to the fragmentation of modern identity (see Friedman, 1988) and gets appropriated as an ideology. If the project of modernity offered progress through scientific knowledge, the project of post-modernity offered an opportunity to appreciate social and individual diversity. After 1960s modernity and the Enlightenment project were challenged by post-modernity. The project of postmodernity recognizes uncertainty, complexity, diversity, non-linearity, subjectivity, multiple perspectives, temporality and specificities (ibid, 2007).

Lather (1991) has expressed this sentiment much earlier and says that the interactions in the world are complex and non-linear. The dualism dominant in Western thought is not adequate to understand a world of multiple causes and effect. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) add a constructionist angle to this discourse and write that truth and knowledge is textual and socially constructed. Social constructionism is a social process involving humans, and is both understood and constructed by them.

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<sup>15</sup> According to Frazer (1985), When Habermas referred to Foucault as a young conservative, he was alluding to the “conservative revolutionaries” of the inter-war Weimar Germany. These revolutionaries were a group of anti-modernist intellectuals (Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt and Hans Freyer). In calling Foucault a young conservative, Habermas was accusing him of elaborating a “total critique of modernity”, which for Habermas was theoretically, paradoxically and politically suspect because it aims less at a dialectical resolution of the problems of the modern societies rather than a radical rejection of modernity. Habermas locates his own stance in the tradition of the dialectical social criticism that runs from Marx to Frankfurt School (Frazer, 1985).

Knowledge is constructed always in ways that are context-specific, historically embedded, value-laden and hence provisional and open-ended. Human beings actively participate in meaning making rather than finding truth. From the perspective of postmodernism, there is no absolute knowledge, no external position of certainty, no universal understanding that exists outside history or society that can provide foundations for truth, knowledge and ethics. Such a view challenges the notion of universal truth and scientific neutrality found in modernist belief (Lyotard, 1984). According to Dahlberg *et al* (2007) the postmodern project itself is constituted and reconstituted relationally and historically and de-centred, in contrast to the autonomous, unified, stable, free and self-determining subject with an essential human nature, independent of context. The unified monolithic, reified, essentialized subject, coherent and integrated, capable of fully conscious, fully rational action is replaced by a provisional, contingent, constructed subject engaged in the process of meaning making (see also Meynert, 2000).

Lyotard (1984) in his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* asks for a re-examination of the modern idea of history as a linear progress that is seen as moving towards a predetermined culmination. Postmodernism rejects universalizing theories – which Lyotard terms “grand narratives” and other sources of authoritarianism and paves the way for “little narratives”, which are forms of local knowledge internal to the communities in which they occur. Lyotard considers “little narratives” as a most inventive way of creating knowledge, and help to break down modernity’s grand narratives. Little narratives refer to micro-political alliances – temporary, loose coalitions of people over single issues. Dahlberg *et al* (2007) add that these little narratives legitimate themselves by determining their own criteria of competence that is sensitive and tolerant to difference.

There is a crisis of knowledge due to post-modernism that questions the modernist idea of knowledge as being objective truth and a product of abstract disinterested scientific enquiry. From the Postmodernist point of view, knowledge is seen as embedded in power relations that determine what the socially constructed “truth” is (Foucault, 1980). According to Lather (1991) postmodernism also creates a crisis of representation - an uncertainty about what constitutes “social reality”. For Dahlberg

*et al* (2007), construction replaces representation because claims to representation can be understood as tools that project power by privileging one particular construction or perspective over others. Man (the human) is seen as not a transcendental being that is able to stand outside time, place or relationships to produce true representations of what is real but as a social, historical or linguistic artefact. Postmodernism problematize dualistic thinking and rejects total discontinuity between modernism and postmodernism. Science is not to be totally rejected but is no longer understood as the only source of knowledge in understanding the complex, multiple and ambivalent world. Post modernity can be seen as modernity admitting the non-feasibility of its original project (See also Bleakley, 2004).

Jürgen Habermas (1987) condemns postmodernism for betraying the Enlightenment ideals, such as objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art. For Habermas, modernity is an unfinished project and retains a belief in the emancipatory potential of reason and science. Somewhere between modernity and post-modernity exists what Giddens (referred in Dahlberg et al, 2007) calls “late” or reflexive” modernity. In spite of their critique of Enlightenment, Critical School theorists argue that social freedom is inseparable from enlightenment thought, and that in order to avoid self-destruction and its deterioration to detrimental exercise of power, Enlightenment must accommodate reflection - the willingness to think critically about itself.

## **Construction of knowledge within the modern and postmodern**

The shift in locations from the modern to the postmodern has implications for the way knowledge is understood. In the following paragraphs I develop different ways of conceptualizing notions of knowledge within the modern, and how constructions about knowledge are located within the postmodern. Within postmodernism are located social constructionism, deconstruction and post-structural discourses that generate new ways of looking at the world and state of the art ways of generating knowledge.

There are two major conceptions of knowledge popular in the Western tradition that informs educational practices of modernity. These are closely related systems of belief and are problematic, both in terms of their epistemological and ideological commitments. Gergen (2001) in his book *Social Construction in Context*, discusses the two longstanding orientations to knowledge are: exogenic (or world centred) and endogenic (or mind centred). The exogenic tradition in education can be traced to empiricist philosophies of knowledge (from Locke to logical positivism), while the endogenic tradition largely owes its intelligibility to the rationalist tradition (from Descartes and Kant through Fodor and the AI movement).

Both orientations embrace a mind/world dualism in which the existence of an external world (a material reality) is set against the existence of a psychological world (cognitive, subjective, and symbolic). From the exogenic point of view, knowledge is achieved when the individual reflects or accurately represents (or mirrors) the existing states of the external world. For the exogenicists, the world is a primary given, and the mind operates best when reflecting it accurately. Both the traditions are similar in their dualist foundations and their emphasis on value neutrality.

In debates on the influences of nurture versus nature (environmentalism versus nativism) the exogenic favour the effects of nurture on the individual. In contrast, the endogenicist will call attention to the inherent or natural capacities and development of the individual mind. Each of these orientations to knowledge serves to justify or rationalize certain forms of educational practice. While knowledge is acquired through careful observation of the world and the focuses is on the arrangement of environmental inputs to build up accurate representation in the exogenic tradition, the chief emphasis is on the powers of individual reason and human being's intrinsic capacities for insight, logic or conceptual development in the endogenic tradition. By and large the exogenic orientation is subject matter or curriculum centred and the student is largely viewed as a tabula rasa upon which the educational process should inscribe the essential features of the world. In contrast, the endogenic perspective is child or student centred. Endogenic curricula place the major emphasis on the rational capacities of the individual. It is not so much the amount of information in one's



mind that is important as the ways one deliberates about it. Here evaluation is ideally tuned to quality rather than quantity.

There have been attempts to unite the two traditions. According to Gergen, (2001), Piaget posits two opposing processes of cognitive development, cognitive accommodation (exogenic tradition) to real world objects and cognitive assimilation of the world to cognitive structures (sustaining endogenic tradition). The fundamental question of epistemology – how the mind acquires knowledge of the world external to it, has yet to be solved by the philosophers of these two perspectives. Rorty (ibid, 2001) in his *Philosophy and the mirror of nature* notes that the problem of knowledge is inherently insoluble. The dualistic distinction between what is outside and inside mind of the individual is inherently problematic, while determining how the former is accurately registered in the latter. This problematic has been raised by critiques variously labelled post-empiricist, post-foundational, post-Enlightenment, post-structural and postmodern.

### **Social construction of knowledge**

From the critique offered against the ideology of self-contained individualism that is connected to endogenic and exogenic, has arisen the need to explore social constructionist point of view. For Gergen (2001) both exogenic and endogenic traditions are connected to rational knowledge and locate knowledge within the minds of single individuals - it is the individual who observes and thinks, and who is challenged to acquire knowledge, and who by virtue of possessing knowledge, survives in a complex world. .

The alternative conception to these two traditions is the one issuing from social constructionist standpoint. Social construction is a particular postmodern theory that places emphasis on truth, reality, and knowledge as socially embedded and the role that language plays in the creation of these products. The term social construction is drawn from sociology of knowledge that considers how social phenomena develop in social contexts. A social construct is a concept or practice that is a creation or artefact of a particular group. Social constructs are understood to be the by-products of human

choices rather than laws resulting from divine will or nature. Gergen (2001) notes that although it is not taken to imply anti-determinism, social constructionism is opposed to essentialism.

A major focus of social constructionism is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate to create their perceived social reality. It involves looking at how social phenomena are created, institutionalized, and made into tradition by humans. A socially constructed reality is one that is seen as an ongoing dynamic process. It is reproduced by people acting on their interpretations and their knowledge of it. There is a need to make a distinction between “social constructionism” and “social constructivism”. Although social constructionism and social constructivism deal with the ways in which social phenomena develop, they are distinct. Social constructionism refers to the development of phenomena relative to social contexts while social constructivism refers to individuals making meaning of knowledge within a social context (Vygotsky, 1978). For this reason social constructionism is described as a social construct where as social constructivism is described typically as a psychological construct. Within the social constructionist strand of postmodernism, the concept of socially constructed reality stresses the ongoing mass building of world views by individuals in dialectical interaction within society at a time.

The genesis of knowledge is traced to communal life and the sciences cease to arbitrate reality. Knowledge gets “de-naturalized” and “re-enculturated”. The taken for granted body of knowledge accumulating since the Enlightenment are open to reassessment. This discontent in social sciences has stirred controversy concerning concepts such as truth, objectivity, knowledge, reason, authority and progress. They have fuelled “the culture wars” and “the science wars” (Popkewitz, *et al*, 2001).

Constructionism became prominent with phenomenologically informed Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality*. They reinvented and applied much more closely to everyday life in the 1960s and are central for methods dealing with qualitative understanding of human society. Berger and Luckmann argue that all knowledge, including taken for granted common sense knowledge of everyday reality is derived from and maintained by social interactions. When people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective

perceptions of reality are related. As they act upon this understanding their common knowledge of reality become reinforced, and come to be presented as an objective reality. In this sense reality is socially constructed. Berger and Luckmann's social constructionism has its roots in phenomenology. It is linked to Heidegger and Husserl through the teachings of the phenomenologist Alfred Schütz. In the 1970s and 1980s the theory underwent a transformation as a “narrative” turn<sup>16</sup> as they engaged with the works of Michel Foucault (Gergen, 2001).

The “narrative” turn occurred as part of a broader movement within philosophy, the humanities and the social sciences – the linguistic turn (Rorty, 1967). There was an agreement among philosophers to shift discussion to a meta-level, to study the language of representation rather than the referents or objects themselves. The turn to narrative can also be seen as a response to the formalism of structuralism by poststructuralist thinkers. Language not only influences how we frame our notions of “self and identity” but also the sense of meaning of the world we live in. Social constructionism acknowledges the problem of individual minds – as the locus of origin, comprehension, or storage of narrative. The initial focus, then, is on narrative as a linguistic phenomenon - typically spoken or written text. Social constructionism was then used to relate that objective facts are imposed upon by human subjectivity (Gergen, 1998).

Within social constructionist strand of postmodern, the concept of socially constructed reality is built by the on-going building of world views by individuals, in dialectical interaction with society at the time. The numerous realities that are considered the imagined worlds of human social existence and activity get gradually crystallized by habits into institutions. These realities (supported by language conventions) are given legitimacy by mythology, religion and philosophy and are

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<sup>16</sup> Narrative is a multifaceted object of inquiry. The ‘narrative turn’, gained impetus from the development of structuralist (Saussure's structural linguistics) theories of narrative in France in the mid to late 1960s. Noting that narratives can be presented in a variety of formats and genres, structuralists such as Barthes argued explicitly for a cross-disciplinary approach to the analysis of stories - an approach in which stories can be viewed as supporting a variety of cognitive and communicative activities, from spontaneous conversations and courtroom testimony to visual art, dance, and mythic and literary traditions (Herman *et al*, 2005).

maintained by socialization. They are internalized by the subject through upbringing and education and become part of the identity of social citizens (Gergen, 2001).

The new developments in ethnomethodology, feminist social sciences, ethogenic psychology, labelling theory, symbolic anthropology, critical theory, dialectical psychology, power/knowledge theory, and historical psychology, are highly disparate in their specific concerns and at the same time have an underlying unity (Popkewitz, *et al*, 2001). Here foundationalism is replaced by historical and social accounts of knowledge. These post-foundational critiques restore the notion that truth is created in community by social construction rather than declared as natural. Knowledge is therefore, viewed as a by-product not of individual minds but of communal relationships.

Social constructionist dialogues function in three significant ways: as meta-theory, as social theory and as societal practice. As meta-theory (theory about theory), social constructionism challenges empiricist account of knowledge and stands as an impediment to all first philosophies of knowledge. For the constructionist, all claims to knowledge, truth, objectivity and insight are founded within communities of meaning making, including the claims of constructionists themselves. Constructionist meta-theory contains no specific requirements for theory, method and practice, but asks a new set of questions – often evaluative, political, and pragmatic. Many social scientists have expanded social constructionism as an empirically viable theory of social life. Social constructionism affects both the focus on research and methodological tools (Gergen, 2001). Research into discourse practices, rhetorical efficacy, popular culture, ideological nuances, colonialist influences and media representation, tend to manifest constructionist assumptions. Constructionist dialogues have given rise to dramatic development in methodology – called “the revolution in qualitative research” such as narrative methods, collaborative methods, auto-ethnography and performance methods.

Critics of constructionism find that as it gets consolidated, it gets rigid, and counter-productive to the development of constructionism itself. Many scientists and scholars have come to see constructionist ideas as dangerous because constructionism

undermines warrants for truth claims. They reduce science equivalent to myths which have led to science wars. Others find constructionism's moral and political relativism unacceptable. Still others find that constructionism has been preoccupied with critique and its substantive contribution to social understanding is too narrow (ibid, 2001). For Searle (1995), weak social constructionists ascribe to notions such as ontologically subjective and epistemologically objective. This implies that "Social facts" are temporally, ontologically, and logically dependent on "brute facts". Searle argues against universal constructionism. The label social constructionism is a code of every Leftist, Marxist, Freudian and Feminist Postmodernist to question moral, sex, gender, power and deviant claim as just another essentialist claim – including the claim that members of the male and female sex are inherently different, rather than historically and socially constructed. Social constructs require human practices to sustain their existence.

Postmodern social construction of nature is a continental philosophy that poses an alternative critique of previous mainstream dialogue about environmental sustainability and eco-politics. Whereas traditional criticisms of environmentalism come from the more conservative "right" of politics, leftist critiques of nature initiated by postmodernist constructionism highlight the need to recognize the "other". This is a new response to eco-criticism that requires critics to acknowledge the ways in which they themselves silence nature and then to respect the sheer otherness of the nonhuman world (Wapner, 1996). According to Wapner, postmodernism criticizes the urge towards mastery that characterizes modernity, yet it exerts mastery itself, when it tries to capture the non-human world within its conceptual domain, when it asserts that there is no such thing as nature. The issue becomes an existential query about whether we can discern the "others" views in relation to our action on their behalf - referred to as Wapner Paradox.

Constructionist arguments have too often functioned to eliminate empirical study, ethical foundationalism, realism etc. from research. There are major tensions between constructionist ideas and realism and the empiricist tradition. Realists to the left join constructionists in their critique of traditional empiricism but resist constructionist relativism on political issues. According to Gergen (2001) constructionism is not as

nihilistic as it is made out to be. The arguments have too often been overdrawn and inadequate attention has been given to intersecting and overlapping investments. Constructionist's self-reflection has encouraged the antagonists to free up the voices of doubt, as well as attempts have been made to cross pollinate constructionism with other positions that have resulted in substantive conceptualization and practice. Boundaries blur as social constructionist ideas and useful practices get readily appropriated by others. These inquiries do not lead to establish new foundation of reason but to invoke dialogue on the contemporary condition and to open up spaces for new forms of coordinated action. There are both affinity and tension between these movements and social constructionism. In the case of identity politics, the focus shifts to moving beyond political affiliations aligned with one's social identity to a more viable form of political engagement.

### **Knowledge, power and control**

The concept of power is an essentially contested domain. Discourses on power are broadly confined to the two right hand side quadrants of Burrell and Morgan's (referred in Kearns, 1996) framework: the functionalist and radical structuralist paradigms. A Foucauldian perspective is more radical humanist. Subscribing to Berger and Luckmann's (1976) view that reality is socially constructed, reference to power is understood to be context specific and historically located. While mainstream interest in studying power relations is an interest in securing compliance by overcoming opposition, a Foucauldian study has its roots in radical change and is interested in how power is exercised and how the exercise of power is averted or resisted (an exercise of power in itself), and how new forms of organizations emerge. In Foucauldian terms, all are enmeshed in a web of power relations - relations which are neither fixed, nor necessarily top-down. Power and discourse are interrelated constructs that teacher uses to dominate for social reproduction, hence Foucault's radical reconceptualization of the concept of power have implications for the everyday functioning and effects of relations of power, forms of knowledge and ways of relating ethically to oneself and others.

Construction of knowledge is associated with the constructs power and control.

Power may be seen to be exercised over others through a range of tactics. The five primary bases of power - coercive, reward, legitimate, expert and referent power have been identified by French and Raven (referred in Kearins, 1996). Power is defined as a capacity to control or influence others. The terms “influence” and “control” are close synonyms for power. For Cherryholmes (1988), power can be understood as relationship based on social, political, material asymmetries, by which some people are indulged and rewarded and others negatively sanctioned or deprived. Effects of power are as important as the exercise of power itself.

Social control is inherent in all social interactions, although the degree of resistance, to demands and expectations of others has been underestimated. In a situation when ideology and power couple together, it creates a situation where individuals accept and internalize the explanations and justifications for asymmetries in the world around them. When ideology and power arrangements infiltrate ones thinking and actions, they shape one’s subjectivities – since social practices and persons continually create and recreate each other. One tends to internalize appropriate rules and ideologies and accommodate oneself to dominate power relationships (see also Gramsci, 1971).

In 1971, Michael Young’s edited book called *Knowledge and Control: New Directions for the Sociology of Education* steered in an approach to the sociology of education that connected kinds of knowledge that was preserved in school curricula and vested power interests. He proposed the idea that knowledge is largely socially and historically constructed. Young problematizes what counts as educational knowledge and the ways it gets transmitted. For Young, educational knowledge is strongly influenced or determined by the necessity for cultural and social reproduction, by the hegemony of the dominant groups of societies. There are tensions in modern sociology due to the opposing problems of order and control. The major task for contemporary sociology is the exploration of meanings which all participants attach to situations, and the development of an action oriented frame of reference.

Bates (1980) lists four issues that stand out in the New Sociology of Education. These are: a) nature of the epistemological foundations of the New Sociology of Education, b) the adequacy of phenomenology as a basis for structural analysis, c) the stratification of knowledge and power of elites in determining the curriculum, d) the nature of the political action implied by the New Sociology of Education. Young (1971) rejects the traditional epistemology and defines knowledge as “forms of thought that promotes of human betterment and liberation”.

This view of knowledge is at variance with the technical scientific definition of knowledge, where ideas of truth and validity are treated by critical discourse as one that serves the course of human betterment. Young resonates Habermas and Bernstein in his opposition to a purely technical rationality and forms of thought and life and its resultant rationality. Such a view of knowledge is foreign to the Anglo-Saxon tradition of philosophy but is familiar to critical social theory and Frankfurt School tradition. According to Clark & Freeman (referred in Bates, 1980), Young is not denying the validity of scientific rational knowledge, but is asserting its inadequacy within the context of moral, social and political dilemmas and that it is not sufficient criteria for a theory to be “good”.

The epistemological claims of the New Sociology of Education have been attacked since the publication of *Knowledge and Control*. According to Bates (1980), the substance of these attacks by both educationists and philosophers is that the language of the New Sociology of Education is incoherent. It adopts a relativism that is in contradiction to its claim that the “autonomy of rationality and logic deny the idea that social power determines truth”. There is an over-emphasis on the notion that reality is socially constructed, and a neglect of how and why reality comes to be constructed in particular ways and how and why particular constructions of reality seem to have the power to resist subversion. For Bates, the criterion of “human betterment” is inadequate in determining the worth of any epistemology.

Bates (1980) also contends the notion of phenomenological relativism and notes that it cannot by definition penetrate beyond the immediately present conditions and wider social factors are excluded. The subject’s perceptions or “construction of



reality” cannot be the only factor determining the different status accorded to various types of knowledge. For Bates, a viable theory of knowledge needs to take account of the historical character of objectified knowledge, and the nature of social relations that determine a given stratification. Further phenomenology is theoretically incapable of making judgments about the value of social constructions (ibid, 1980).

Today, Young has taken a step back, and in his new book *Bringing knowledge back* (2008) stresses that the extreme relativist views that have emerged since 1970s have caused academics to avoid facing difficult questions about knowledge and truth.

Young notes today that it is the social character of knowledge that enables it to have a claim to truth and objectivity, and gives a basis for choosing particular educational and curricular principles over others.

Apple (referred in Cherryholms, 1988) argues that phenomenology is neutral and its relativism is ambivalent. Hence both are unhelpful in understanding the dialectical relationship between access to power and opportunity to legitimate dominant categories and processes, which enables certain groups to assert power and control over the others. He adds that any society which increases the relative gap between, rich and poor in the control and access to cultural and economic “capital” needs to be questioned - questions such as how inequality is made legitimate? Why inequality is accepted? How hegemony is maintained?

The New Sociology of Education and, radical critics and researchers assert that inequalities are justified and hegemony continued through procedures which are closely connected with economic and political stratification. Education and schooling are seen as pervasive cultural mechanisms that contribute in the “internalization of the principles of ideological stability which govern the social order that support these inequalities”. Such processes rely heavily upon the concept of authority which is inherent in the stratification of knowledge and embodied in the curriculum.

According to Bertens (1995), postmodernists, particularly Jacques Derrida (earlier deconstructionist postmodernist) in 1970s and Michel Foucault (later poststructuralist postmodernists) in 1980s have explored the importance of “power” and asked if the meaning of the word is fixed. From the perspective of Derridean postmodernism

attack on representation is an important political act and celebrates the so-called death of the subject. Foucauldian postmodernism (which equates knowledge with power, reducing it to the effect of a social relation or structure) acknowledges that knowledge and language have become inseparable from power.

Furthermore, Foucauldian postmodernism emphasizes the workings of power, and constitution of the subject. Knowledge which was once viewed as neutral and objective to the positivists, and politically emancipatory to the left, is inevitably bound up with power within Foucauldian postmodernism. This postmodernism questions the power that is inherent in the discourses that we are located in. It is being continually reproduced by these discourses, and questions the institutions that support these discourses, and are in turn supported by them (Foucault, 1980). Especially important are its interest in those who from the point of view of the liberal humanist subject (white, male, heterosexual and rational), construct the “other” (women, people of colour, non-hetero-sexual, children) – the collective of people who are excluded from the privileges accorded by that subject to itself, and its interest in the role of representations in the constitution of “Otherness”. The later (constructionist) Foucault’s interest in the subject, inquires the ways by which human beings are constituted and reconstituted by discourses, by language, and recognize themselves as subjects. By advocating difference, pluri-formity and multiplicity, Foucault tries to undo institutionalized hierarchies and makes visible the politics that is at work in representation. This works against the hegemony of any single discursive system which would have victimized other discourses (Bertens, 1995).

In *Cultural Politics and Education*, Michael W. Apple (1996) asserts that it is important to see schooling rationally, and to see it connected to the relations of domination and exploitation of the larger society, and to the struggles against them. Apple stresses that the relations of power are complex and that we need to take seriously the postmodern focus on the local and on the multiplicity of the forms of struggle that are need to be engaged in. It is important to recognize the changes that are occurring in many societies and to see the complexity of the “power/knowledge” nexus. Apple (referred in Meynert, 1998) does not want us to act as though capitalism has disappeared, when we are trying to avoid and navigate the dangers that

accompany some aspects of previous “grand-narratives”. Political constructs like class relations exist and count, even though theories have become more complex.

### **Post-structuralism**

Two opposing theoretical positions found within modernism and postmodernism are structuralism and post-structuralism respectively. Post-structuralism is the theory of knowledge associated with the work of Jacques Derrida. Jacques Derrida developed deconstruction as a technique for uncovering the multiple interpretations of texts. Derrida (1978) suggests that all text have ambiguity and because of this the possibility of a final and complete interpretation is impossible.

Structuralism has been the alternative school of thought in the post war era to the dominant view of empirical essentialism. Essentialism (drawing on Aristotelian tradition), suggests that objects and phenomena have essence or identity - that they are things in their own right. For the essentialist tradition, what is real is that which is present to itself. Essential phenomena are free from contradiction – they are either one thing or another. Aristotelian position gives no ground from which one can value things which are both “this” and “that”, or “neither one thing nor another”.

Ambiguity, paradox, contradiction, hybrid, transgressions and indeterminacies have no place in essentialist conceptualization. Post structural thinking following in the wake of structuralism, challenges both these positions. Since Freud, it is found useful to posit an “absent” reality such as an “unconscious” (Bleakley, 2004).

There is a need to describe the difference between structuralism and post-structuralism at this point of the essay. Structuralism suggests that language gives us grounds for describing, giving meaning to, and communicating meanings about the world. This is referred to as the “linguist turn” in contemporary thought. In postmodernism, the paradigms of “language” and “discourse” have replaced the modernist paradigm of “consciousness”. However as Saussure suggested, words do not have meaning in their own right (essence or identity), but gain meaning only in difference from other words in a total pattern or “structure” of relationships. Hence concepts are understood not from the intrinsic quality of the words, but from the

difference between the terms. While modernism sees meaning in the object itself (identity and essence), post-modernism sees meaning arising from difference between linguistic terms.

Language is the medium through which the world is given meaning and such meanings are both interpretive and relative (Cherryholmes, 1988). Signs operate as oppositional pairs. There is no essential or intrinsic “thing” as gender, but the difference between the oppositional descriptors man - woman reveals gender. Anthropologist Claud Levi-Strauss in 1978 analyzed the structures of myths worldwide to discover a linguistic pattern: all myths can be reduced to a fundamental set of oppositional structures of which raw – cooked; nature – culture; savage – civilized; is primary. Noam Chomsky (referred in Stark, 1998), suggested that language use is based on an invariant (unchanging) generative “deep” structure of grammatical rules, from which all “surface” expressions or cultural variants arise. Jean Piaget (1960) suggested that psychological development passes through an invariant, universal set of stages. Prior stages must unfold as a basis to the emergence of new structures. Kohlberg (referred in Cherry, 2014) extended this model to invariant stages of moral development. Carl Jung (referred in Cloosterman, 2014) described an invariant set of collective mental structures, or archetypes, from which all behaviour and experience is derived. According to Bleakley (2004) structuralism attempts to encompass all phenomena in a single theory. In this respect, it offers a new “grand narrative” following Darwinism, Marxism or Freudianism. Cherryholmes (1988) notes that structuralism is a rational system working largely to oppress the very indeterminacy that it describes in the relationship between signifier and signified. It is in this sense, also a masculine system.

Post-structuralism is a new school of thought developed in the 1960s in France, which challenges the basis to these structuralist ideas. They point out that while agreeing that “meaning” emerges from differences between signs, why pair these as oppositional structures? The pairing produces a new “violent” hierarchy, where one pole of the opposition is privileged over the other and comes to repress its opposite. Thus “civilized” oppresses the “uncivilized”, “masculine” oppresses “feminine”, “white” oppresses “black”, “human” oppresses “animal” etc. The most significant

voices to emerge in post-structural thinking have been Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Derrida (referred in Bertens, 1995) first coined the French equivalent of the term “de-structuralism” or “de-structuration” to describe his challenge to structuralism and this later transformed into “deconstruction”. Deconstruction is different from usual argument or critique that offers a view from the outside of the logical or propositional limitations of an argument or practice, and then proceeds to displace this argument or practice with an alternative. Derrida’s project never says that one thing is exposed as “wrong” and can be replaced with its critique that claims “insight”, “truth” or “fact” (Bleakley, 2004).

The mandate of enlightened science (a species of modernity) has been to generate knowledge. It also promised to create a “better” society. Theorists widely varying in their ideology have asserted that science rests on an epistemological foundation, stronger than any other belief system. Democracy and unrestrained opportunities were required for “good science” to flourish. In 1990, Giddens stated in the *Consequence of Modernity*, that the “good society” remains far from being realized. McLaren (2000) points out that as modernity has progressed, the numbers of people living in abject poverty has also increased. Postmodernists maintain that science considered to ultimately generating truth and a better world was an illusion. They assert that far from achieving Enlightenment’s philosophical goals, science has sustained a long-standing project to exploit people.

Enlightenment was seen as a western European invention that is permeated by a variety of important biases such as Euro-centricism, patriarchy, racism, class, uncontrolled industrialization, etc. In response to modernist excesses and biases, postmodernists have called for a “humanization” (Anyon, 1994). Modernity has been challenged by postmodernists when they reject the assertion that knowledge or truth is generalizable. In removing “truth” as a universal concept, the justification for superimposing the violence of Western values and interests, is questioned. This orientation to the philosophy of knowledge, the elimination of “learned dialogues” are likely to be populated by a great number and diversity of voices (Lemert, 1999), hence voices of the oppressed would expose and challenge the negative fallout of modernity.

Modernist mainstream view of theory – practice relationship has been that these are separate and distinct phenomena - theory being philosophical and practice behavioural. Postmodern and post-structural theorists (see Rorty, 1980) maintain that while there are differences between theory and practice, the two are integrated in that they inform each other in basic ways. According to Anyon, (1994), theory illustrates a kind of practice, and practice always contains a particular theory. Postmodern and post-structural approaches to the relationship between theory and practice valorise the connection between the two and attempt to integrate theory and practice in research and education.

While, Post-structuralism is directly connected to scholarly work that opposes Structuralists as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ferdinand de Saussure (referred in Cherryholmes, 1988), postmodernism is diffused and involves a more general attitude that pervades many disciplines and artistic endeavours. The two kinds of theories overlap in many cases. They are often subsumed in, and by each other. According to Anyon (1994), one can identify three analytical heuristics on which postmodern and post-structural theorists generally agree. These are: a) the importance of the local, b) the validity of deconstruction, and c) the centrality of discourse.

Informed by the writings of Michel Foucault (1980) and Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984) postmodern/post-structural approaches attempt to assess local power relations rather than large abstract structures. As opposed to meta-narratives of Enlightenment thinkers who locate themselves in categories and explanations that were supposed to apply across cultures and epochs, postmodern/post-structural theorists argue that ad hoc local narratives that avoid meta-theorizing produce truths that are more likely to capture the complexity of situations. That large-scale analysis was deterministic and reductive of complexity.

According to Anyon (1994) modernist (Enlightenment) meta-narratives (of progress through science) are suspect because they are supposed to be privileged normative discourses, capable of legitimating other discourses but not themselves. Postmodern / universal and Postmodern / post-structural approaches to meaning valorize the local, as opposed to the universal. Because there is no universal “Truths” to which meaning

can be assigned. While each discourse produces its own “truth”, the actual meaning of this truth is said to be uncertain (called the dual crisis of representation and validity) (Bleakley, 2004).

### **Knowledge acquisition through deconstruction**

One of the methodologies of learning in Postmodern/post-structural theories is deconstruction – an approach to critical analysis based on the work by Jacques Derrida (ibid, 2004). It involves identifying rhetorical operations in which arguments are grounded and then demonstrate its contradiction or philosophical instability. One of the goals of deconstruction is to show that many of the oppositional categories used in traditional social analysis are socially constructed. Deconstruction argues that the mainstream opposition between theory and practice is based on false premises. According to Derrida the third construct in postmodern / post-structural theory is the argument that discourse (language) does not reflect human consciousness or an external reality (ibid, 2004).

Anyon (1994) notes that some postmodern and post-structural writers emphasize the political nature of discourse. A discourse is seen to be a political apparatus, a community and power to assign legitimacy. Discourses set conditions of what kind of talk occurs, and which talkers speak. This implies that human subjectivity is not at the centre of meaning rather subjectivity is constructed by the discourses that construct it (Foucault, 1980). According to Anyon (1994), the use of post-structural ideas avoids the limitations seen in Enlightenment thinking. Post-structural understanding brings with it the promise of increased freedom and power – freedom from the existing social structures and power to create new ones.

### **Intersections between the two - post-structuralism and feminism**

The discourses of feminism arise out of, and are made possible by those of the enlightened modernity and its models of reason, justice and autonomous subjectivity as universal categories. Feminist discourses, however, have been powerful forces in exposing some of the entrenched and disguised contradictions and limitations of Enlightenment thought. In articulating issues of sexual difference, the existence of

feminist discourses weakens the rootedness of Enlightenment thought in the principle of sameness. Hutcheon (1990) explores the convergences between feminism and postmodernism. Both feminism and postmodernism assault Enlightenment discourses which universalize white, Western, middle-class male experience. Both recognize the need for a new ethics, responsive to technological changes and shifts in knowledge and power. In exposing the public/private split which assigns women to the “private” realm of feeling, domesticity, the body, and “public” realm of reason as masculine, feminism can be seen as “postmodern” discourse. Postmodern and post-structural discourses have got incorporated into feminist theory.

Post-structural feminism is a branch of feminism that emphasizes the contingent and discursive nature of all identities, while criticizing patriarchy. The feminist branch of post-structuralism is promoted by Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva (referred in Butler, 1990). They deconstruct the Oedipal Complex and the significance of the real, imaginary and symbolic phallus and reformulate Freud’s theories.

Postmodern feminism started in the 1980s when the term post-feminism was coined. Post-feminism is a position that critiques the previous feminist theories, especially those of the second wave of feminism and implies that the fight for women’s equal rights is over. It coincides with the third wave<sup>17</sup> feminism that began in the mid-1980s. It is a point of departure from modernism feminism that sex is itself constructed through language. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1990) influenced by Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, criticizes the distinction made by previous feminisms between (biological) sex and (socially constructed) gender. For her, body (material) can be subjected to social construction in order to incorporate a critique of essentialism. If gender is a social construct then its construction varies over time, history, culture and ideology. Women’s subordination has no single cause

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<sup>17</sup> The Third-wave feminism began in mid-1980s, when Second wave feminists (who stressed fundamental rights program) called for a new subjectivity in feminist voice. They asked for space within feminist thought for race-related subjectivities – an intersection between race and gender. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge any universal definition of femininity.



or single solution. For Butler, postmodernism offers not clear path of action. The term postmodernism is rejected by her as being too vague to be meaningful.

Postmodern feminism tries to break away from the thinking which over emphasize the experience of upper middle-class white women in America. According to postmodern feminism, “Woman” becomes a debatable category, complicated by class, ethnicity, sexuality and other facets of identity. Therefore gender is performative, based on our natural heterosexuality rather than socially or culturally constructed. Hence there is no single cause for women’s subordination and no single approach towards dealing with the issue. Postmodern thought addresses a broad range of issues related to gender bias and discriminations. It focusses on global issues like rape, incest, prostitution, female genital mutation in Africa, infanticides in Asia, and practices that impede women’s advancement in developing countries. Postmodern feminism tries to understand how gender inequality interacts with issues like racism, homophobia, classism and colonialization to produce a “matrix” of domination by the patriarchal society (ibid, 1990).

The French feminists, and psychoanalytic female theorists like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray (see Jea Suk Oh, 2014) have constructed their brand of postmodern feminism and in feminist psychoanalysis. There are certain characterizations that postmodern feminist share; a) that human experience is located inevitably within language. Power is exercised not only through direct coercion, but through the way in which language shapes and restricts reality. Since language is open to reinterpretation, it can also be used to resist the shaping and restriction and hence is potent. b) Sex is not something natural, nor complete or definable. Sex is a part of a system of meaning, produced by language. Cultural mechanisms encode the female body with meaning, and explain these meanings by an appeal to the “natural” differences between sexes, differences that the rules help to produce. Rejection of the idea of a natural basis to sexual difference allows for new interpretations of the concept (Butler, 1990).

### **Emancipatory potential of post modernism**

Anyon (1994) lifts up some recent scholarship represents emancipatory postmodern and post-structural theories, such as those of Cleo Cherryholmes, Patti Lather, Elizabeth Ellsworth, Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren. Patti Lather's (1991) work exhibits the attempt to use postmodern theories to enhance the emancipatory potential of research and teaching. She argues that positivist and orthodox methodologies erroneously promise value-neutral social science, and that postmodern strategy of self-reflexivity keeps the researchers from imposing their own point of view in research. Lather (1991) argues that the postmodern sensitivity to "Otherness" insists that emancipatory pedagogy have no prescription, rather it should depend on the voices and interests of the clients and respondents. Furthermore, the "transformatory intellectual" of critical pedagogy must be de-centered as the "master of truth and justice" in order that the voices of students and research subjects are heard (Anyon, 1994).

Elizabeth Ellsworth's (ibid, 1994) work demonstrates how a focus on the immediate environment can be used to initiate direct political interventions that may not be encouraged by abstract theorizing. While a focus on the local makes postmodernism a politically useful characteristic, Ellsworth goes beyond "staying local" and connects her local narrative to macro theory. Anyon points out that it would enhance the utility of the study, if attempts are made to transcend oppositions and redefine labels such as micro/macro, and focus on the relationship between the two.

Examination of Henry Giroux's work demonstrates the social consequences of the disjuncture between theory and practice. Giroux proposes emancipation through the infusion of postmodern theories. He is suspicious of meta-narratives and argues that the educational scholars should attend to the contingent, the specific, and the historical (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991). Critical pedagogy involves letting students speak, as well as attend to the voices of the "marginalized others" (Giroux, 1991). According to Anyon (1994), the paradox in the proposal by postmodern scholars to place "Others" at the centre of their talk would mean giving up authority in one's own text. Texts written alluding to emancipatory "struggles", legitimate the

production of theoretical discourse as a “struggle” and this can be seen in Giroux’s and McLaren’s (1991) works.

Works of Lather, Giroux, McLaren and Ellsworth (referred in Anyon, 1994) are examples of critical postmodernist positions. Critical postmodernism is the nexus of critical theory, post-colonialism, critical pedagogy and postmodern theory. According to Agger (1992), it is a field moving beyond the “radical postmodern” positions of Lyotard and Baudrillard by recognizing the interplay of grand-narratives of modernity with the virtuality and hyper-competitiveness found in late modernism and post-modern capitalism. In “Critical Postmodern Manifesto” Boje et al, (1996) argue that critical postmodern theory is about the play of differences of micro-political movements and impulses of ecology, feminism, multiculturalism, and spirituality without any unifying demand for theoretical integration or methodological consistency. It is a mid-range theory exploring the intersection between epoch postmodernism, epistemological postmodernism and critical modernism. Agger (1992) adds that the critical postmodern approaches incorporate a concern with how systems of ideas affect the material condition. Critical postmodern theory is a rich variety of perspectives that do not accept the total rejection of the grand narrative such as in the work of Lyotard (ibid, 1992), nor do they abandon material condition by getting caught up in the vortex of hyper-real as in the work of Baudrillard (1981).

Critical postmodern manifesto resists the reduction of all postmodern theories into the camp of naive interpretative-ness or relativistic social constructionism. A dismissal of all grand-narratives is not advocated, and ethical standards can be worked out in the network of local discourse. It is a radical disjunction from the systemic modernism discourse. Critical postmodernism is located at the middle of critical modern, critical pedagogy, critical feminism, critical hermeneutics, critical ethno-methodology, critical ecology and post-colonial theories. In praxis it means, pursuit of non-violent alternatives to the violence of destructive capitalism, deconstructing manifestations, and resisting pre-modern fundamentalism (Boje, et al, 1996).

## **Convergence between postmodernism and post-colonialism**

In attempting to find a critique of postmodernism from the point of view of postcolonial discourses I came across texts that brought to light the connections between postmodernity and post-colonialism which I want to discuss in this essay. Both emerged as criticisms of modernity and its manifestations. Postcolonial theory is in reality a postmodern intellectual discourse that consists of a set of theories that are reaction to the cultural legacy of colonialism, and have been strengthened since the continental discourses of the “other” and Foucauldian arguments entered oppositional discourses.

The term postcolonial is semantically uncomplicated and is reducible to “after colonialism”. A distinction is to be made between the terms post-colonialism and anti-colonialism. While anti-colonialism implies reductively that there is only one struggle to be waged i.e. against colonialism, post-colonialism subsumes anti-colonialism and is multifaceted and heterogeneous, and is associated to notions of culture and synthesis (Appiah, 1995). It is seen as a positive term that is not wholly concerned with destruction of colonial ideology and influence, but in moving beyond them.

The terms “postcolonial/post-colonial” incorporates an unsettled disagreement between those who see the post-colonial as set of discursive (open to discussion) practices, similar to postmodernism, and those who see it as a more specific and “historically” located set of cultural strategies. The term “Post-colonial” resonates of ambiguity and complexity located in many different cultural experiences. According to Aschroft *et al* (1995), theorists such as Foucault, Derrida, Terdiman, Gramsci, Althusser etc. among others have influenced the construction of many post-colonial critical accounts.

Postcolonial theory is a post-modern intellectual discourse that consists of a set of theories found among the texts (and subtexts) of philosophy, film, political science and literature. These theories are reaction to the cultural legacy of colonialism. Post colonialism deals with cultural identity in colonized societies and with the predicaments (dilemmas) of developing a national identity after colonial rule. It also deals with the way in which the knowledge of the colonized (subordinated) people has

been generated and used to serve the interest of the colonizer's interests. It exposes how knowledge about the world is generated between the powerful and the powerless continually. It promotes ideas that imperial interests are served when knowledge produced under colonial conditions is legitimated.

Postcolonial thought show how colonial literature justifies colonialism through images of the colonized as a perpetually inferior people society and culture (see Said, 1978; Nandy, 1983; Said, 1993). It refuses to accept the colonized being depicted as passive recipients of power. It further promotes ideas about the colonized's creative resistance to the colonizer. Furthermore it encourages ideas about how postcolonial resistance gives texture to European imperial colonial projects that in turn use anti-conquest narratives to legitimize their dominance.

All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or the other to overt or subtle forms of neo-colonial domination.

The development of new elites within independent societies, often buttressed by neo-colonial institutions; the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations; the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invaded societies – all these testify to the fact that post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. ...Post-colonial theory involves discussion about experiences of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these is “essentially” postcolonial, but together they form the complex fabric of the field (Ashcroft, *et al*, 1995: 2).

The term “post-colonial” is used to represent the continuing process of imperial suppressions and exchanges throughout a diverse range of institutions and societies. “Post-colonial” implies a series of linkages that are not directly oppositional, and may even be in collusion with the imperial enterprise. The concept of resistance gets problematized, as not a simple binary (such as self - other, civilized – native, us – them) but is ambivalent and complex in nature.

*The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1995) suggests that education is a modernist project, but claims that colonists implement education which can be seen as “domination by consent” and the subsequent employment of the educated subject, as a part of the continuing imperial apparatus (ibid, 1995). Education then becomes the ideological

apparatus of the colonist power - which is maintained through legal and administrative apparatuses (See Gramsci, 1971; Foucault, 1980). Even in a postcolonial environment, the educated receive rewards, while the uneducated suffer economically and authoritatively.

Subsequent to Foucauldian argument postcolonial scholars such as Spivak (1988) and specifically the Subaltern<sup>18</sup> Studies collective, asserts that anti-colonial resistance accompanies every deployment of power. Spivak's recent work *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (referred in Ashcroft, *et al*, 1995), explores how major works of European metaphysicians viz. Kant and Hegel, exclude the subaltern (person of a lower rank) from their discussions and actively prevent non-Europeans from occupying positions as fully human subjects. Universities are seen as post-colonial structures of power where these inward struggles of identity, history and future possibilities take place. Ashcroft *et al* (1995) note that the creation of binary oppositions structure the way we view others viz. the emotional decadent Orient vs the principled progressive Occident, justified "the white man's burden", and the colonizer's self-perceived "destiny to rule" subordinate peoples. According to During (1995), the concept of post modernity has been constructed in terms that intentionally wipe out the possibility of postcolonial identity. During asserts that the conceptual annihilation of the postcolonial condition is necessary to show that "we" now live in post modernity.

Both postmodernism and post-colonialism have often contradictory and always plural ways of characterizing the contemporary cultures. There are tensions between both the strands of Emergence - the postcolonial and the postmodern. The post-colonials suggest that the post-moderns are Eurocentric theorists, out of touch with issues of the geographical South especially those related to Africa, Asia and Latin America. According to Richards (referred in McInnis, 2002), postcolonial studies contend that

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<sup>18</sup> "Subaltern" means that of "inferior rank". In post-colonialism and related fields, *subaltern* refers to persons socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure. It is used in a general sense to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes — a person rendered without agency by his or her social status.

such an activity is contradicted or appropriated by the postmodernist obsession with contemporary theory (the various post-structuralisms and cultural studies), where local traditions or contexts of cultural representation are appropriated depending on their aesthetic, populist or political rhetoric of the image.

### **A postmodernist locus for postcolonial criticism**

Post-colonialism as seen to function like postmodernism (and modernism), often in contradictory ways as a metaphoric (symbolic) locus of cultural criticism - that integrates sexual, racial, class, economic and even stylistic differences, and gets reduced to the spatial metaphor of a centre-margins opposition. According to McInnis (2002), an important reference for both loci is the European Enlightenment with its models of progress, imperialism etc. There is a blurring of the distinction between regressive postmodernist national identities (tribalism, communalism, primitivism etc.) and a social imperative of local autonomy.

There is a distinct difference between the two oppositional practices. While postmodernism is seen as a location – as a spatial, a-historical route of global cultural autonomy, post-colonialism is seen as a geographical route that is grounded in history, in local, specific contexts of cultural transformation. The metaphor of post-colonialism assumes that the corresponding trajectories of colonizer and colonized are not symmetrical. Postcolonial writers and other cultural producers in settler societies refer to a local social context which has been displaced both geographically and historically.

Roger Berger (ibid, 2002) suggests that there is a convergence and overlap between postmodernism and post-colonialism. They are both a “textual practice” and the two movements examine an “emergent or dominant global culture”. They differ in that postcolonial novels are geographically located while expressing an existential condition. Both explore the idea of authority (dominant global culture) and that is why there is no definite “boundary” drawn between the two movements. Richards attempts to draw a clearer line between the two in terms of the idea of authority. Both movements investigate the ideas of “control” in different settings. While postcolonial

writers attempt to “unmask European authority”, postmodernists attempt to “unmask authority” in general.

According to McInnis (2002), post-colonialist works are about local/traditional community; whose predicament of “alienation or exile” is represented as permanent state; and remain privileged writers who merely translate their own personal dilemmas as complicit or oppositional post-colonialism. On the other hand, postmodern works are primarily about western individualism/modern society, their predicament of “alienation or exile” is represented as a provisional state; their writer’s attempt to transform their social contexts; and their audience is one of western critics applying euro-centric contemporary theory.

Some authors suggest that postmodern and postcolonial are two sides of the same coin. During (1995) claims that postmodernism represents the divide which separates post-colonized and post-colonizer, and that much postcolonial criticism is “neo-imperialist” and that there are more parallels between postmodern and postcolonial thinking in aspects such as plurality, marginality, ambiguity, inter-textuality. Postmodernism is about language - about how it controls, how it determines meaning, and how we try to exert control through language. It is about race, class, gender, erotic identity and practice, nationality, age, ethnicity. It's about difference. It's about power and powerlessness, about empowerment, and about all the stages in between and beyond. Postmodernism is about history.

According to Marshall (2004), history in the postmodern moment becomes histories and questions. It asks: Whose history gets told? In whose name? For what purpose? Postmodernism is about histories not told, retold, untold. History as it never was. Histories forgotten, hidden, invisible, considered unimportant, changed, eradicated. Because postcolonial writers are located in the polyglot (using several different languages), multicultural and disruptive aspects, their writings give expression to theories of the “open” indeterminate text, or of transgressive (law breaking) non-authoritative reading. Postcolonial writers operate from a stock of cultural knowledge that European readers will never fully share. Both postcolonial and postmodern



literature stresses the provisional and fragmentary aspects of signification, the constructed nature of identity.

McInnis (2002) argues that postmodern criticism reads postcolonial texts as suggestive of the centrifugal (or moving away from the) pull of history. These texts demonstrate the vulnerability of “grand narratives”; the erosion of transcendent (superior) authority; and the collapse of authoritarian explanations of the world. These texts are concerned with plurality (multiplicity), marginality (peripheralization), ambiguity (uncertainty), parody (caricature), mimicry (simulation) and possession (control and ownership). In Europe and America, postmodernism is an expression of the disintegration and collapse of “all linguistic, cultural, political or theological authority”. Similarly post-colonialism is rooted in the falling apart of “Western imperial authority” - the questioning of assumptions respected in former times. Simultaneously postcolonial texts are also a manifestation of local culture and history in their own right.

Commonalities between the postmodern and the post-colonial are that they both are looking past the old and towards the new, they are both in a process of emergence.

Choon and Patke (2002) have pointed out several kinds of tension and overlap between the two:

their resistance to the mono-logic meta-narratives of modernism and realism (in the arts), and orientalism (in cultural anthropology), colonialism and racism (in geo-political history), fundamentalism and nativism (in terms of collective identity), and patriarchy (in gender relations); their celebration of dialogic marginality and inter-textuality; their recuperation of the mixed modes of hybridity, parody, fantasy and allegory; their convergence and collision over poststructuralist themes; and their self-definition through nomadic, the diasporic (spreading of one people to different countries), and the exile (ibid, 2000: 1).

McInnis (2002) suggests that postcolonial concepts reflect ideas of postmodernism because the two movements are not so different in their aims.

Postmodernists require that language is one means by which authority obtains control. In exploring implications of European authority on “post-colonials”, postcolonial writers are faced with the problem of how language can be manipulated for the purpose of European control. Tiffin (ibid, 2002) argues that the dialectic of the self and the other, indigene and exile, language and place, slave and free – the matrix of post-

European literatures, is also an essential part of an inherited understanding of the way in which language and power operate in the World. According to Tiffin “power” remains power by its ability to control public and private language. In an attempt for linguistic control, Rushdie (ibid, 2002), a postmodern writer, has re-appropriated the postcolonial predicament. For him to conquer English (the dominant and language of the Imperials) is a process making oneself free for the colonized and post-colonized. Post-colonial writers use language to deconstruct European identity and to re-establish their own unique identity.

Post-colonialist who are “oppositional” in the sense of asserting the need for local cultural autonomy are considered retrogressive because of their nostalgia for mythic origins by Europeans. Dismantling and demystifying the European identity has been an essential political and cultural strategy in order to decolonize and retrieve and create an independent identity. The history of postcolonial territories were until recently constructed by the narratives of the colonizers (a means of cultural control). Although both movements accept the relationship between power and language, postmodernists wish to deconstruct the “centre” of authority in general, while post-colonialists wish to de-centre the European authority.

Both postmodernism and post-colonialism share strategies but have different motives. Tiffin documents these strategies as:

the move away from realist representation, the refusal of closure, the exposure of the politics of metaphor, the interrogation of forms, the rehabilitation of allegory and the attack on binary structuration of concept and language, are characteristics of both the generally postcolonial and the European postmodern, but they are energized by different theoretical assumptions and by vastly different political motivations (McInnis, 2002:2)

Since postmodernist focuses on aesthetics and authority in general, and a post-colonialist explores the implications of European authority, post-colonialism is more of a political movement in contrast to the cultural postmodern movement,

An intersection happens between postmodernism and post-colonialism, when they both desire to bring the “the marginal” to the “centre”. The marginal are those who have been left out of literature in the past and history in general. Postmodernism brings the marginal to the centre by rewriting history in favour of those who have been excluded from power – women, homosexuals, blacks, Native Americans, and other

victims of oppression. Post-colonialists adopt positions of those already written out of, or marginalized by, the western record of historical materialism, oppressed or annihilated peoples, and women.

### **Challenges to Euro-centricity in dominant discourses from the Margins**

“Third World” scholarship show signs of hybridization (eclecticism) - moving back and forth through several discourses including those located in postmodernism, to challenge Euro-centricity in both colonial and postcolonial discourses. In his book titled *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983), Ashis Nandy (an Indian political psychologist) raises the psychological problems posed at a personal level by colonialism, for both colonizer and colonized. He focuses on the second form of colonization (which the Third World has begun to view as a prerequisite for their liberation), that colonizes the mind in addition to bodies and releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities. He converts the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category when he alludes to the subtler and more sophisticated means of acculturation, where the West not only produces models of conformity but also models of “official” dissent that remains predictable and controlled. For Nandy (1983), the West has not merely produced colonialism but also informs most interpretations of colonialism.

The rhetoric of progress focus on the fact of internal colonialism in order to undermine the cultures of societies subject to external colonialism, and where the internal colonialism in turn uses the fact of external threat to legitimize and perpetuate itself (ibid, 1983). Even though Nandy is hostile to the excesses of modernity, he argues for not giving up the theory of progress, but to go beyond the old universalism within which the earlier critique of colonialism were offered and to combine fundamental social criticism with a defence of non-modern cultures and traditions - and that it is possible to speak of the plurality of critical traditions and of human rationality.

### **Subaltern discourse – Inversion of dominant mainstream discourses**

At this juncture I invoke the subaltern discourse in order to recover an influential oppositional theory that developed in India in the 1980s, that goes by the name of “Subaltern Studies”. In 1970s the term “Subaltern” began to be used as a reference to colonized people in South Asia and to marginalized social status. Literally, it refers to groups of inferior rank and station because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion (*see* Guha, 1980). Subaltern and marginalized people are different in different places and in different historical contexts. This “school” has gained a world-wide reputation, and “Subaltern Studies” has begun to influence Latin American Studies, African Studies, “cultural studies”, and other arenas. Where previously the history of modern India, and particularly of the nationalist movement, was stamped as a history of Indian “elites”, this history is now being construed primarily as a history of “subaltern groups”.

In India women, Dalit, rural, tribal, migrant labourers are part of subaltern. In post-colonialism subaltern refers to persons socially, politically and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure. For Spivak (1988) an Indian scholar, the term subaltern is not only used for the oppressed or the “Other” but everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is Subaltern - it is a space of difference. For Owen Alik Shahadah (2004) an African scholar, the Eurocentric discourses on Africa are erroneous because these paradigms re-affirm the European self and denies African agency. The terms like black people and sub-Saharan Africans are products of racism. Other forms of knowing are marginalized by Western thinkers by calling them myth and folklore, rendering the true voice of subaltern reasoning (and forms of knowledge or logic) from being heard - Subalterns get heard only through the oppressor’s language and logic (Shahadah, 2004).

Postcolonial theory tries to understand the power and continued dominance of Western ways of knowing. Edward Said’s work on Orientalism (1978) relates to the idea of the subaltern and shows how Orientalism produced the justification for the domination of the “Other” through colonialism. Europeans, according to Said (*ibid*, 1978), created an imagined geography of the Orient before European exploration through predefined images of savage who lived outside the known world. The idea of difference and

strangeness of the Orient continued to be perpetuated through media and discourse creating an “Us” and “Them” binary through which Europeans defined themselves, through the differences of the Orient. The foundation for colonialism was laid by presenting the Orient as backward and irrational and therefore in need of help to become modern in the European sense. The discourse of Orientalism is Eurocentric and does not seek to include the voices of the Oriental themselves. The importance of the power of discourse is to be noted - by producing a discourse of difference Europe was able to maintain its dominance over the “other” thereby creating a Subaltern by excluding the “Other” from the production of the discourse (ibid, 1978).

There are multiple layers of meaning to consider when engaging the voice of the Subaltern. Spivak (1988) advocates academics to de-centre themselves in order to truly engage with the subaltern, or there is a risk of further subjugating and further complicating the voice of the Subaltern. Through the little narratives of the Subaltern can be build larger histories. It allows a revealing look at societies from the perspective of the most powerless individuals that live within its confines. Mainstream development discourse (modernization theory), are critiqued as recreating the Subaltern. Although Subalterns by definition are groups who have had their voices silenced, they speak through their actions as a way to protest against mainstream development and create their own visions for development. Homi Bhabha (1996) an Indian postcolonial thinker, emphasizes the importance of social power relations in his understanding of subaltern groups, because the presence of oppressed, minority groups was crucial to the self-definition of the majority group. For Bhabha (1996) subaltern social groups are in a position to subvert the authority of those who had hegemonic power. Subaltern groups are creating social movements which contest and disassemble Western claims to power. These groups use local knowledge and struggle to create new spaces of opposition and alternative futures.

The historiographical effort of Subaltern Studies has been described as “history as critique”, and imperialism and imperialist knowledge are seen as the subjects of this critique. Here History is approached from below focusing on the masses (Subalterns) rather than the elites - as agents of political and social change. Discourses and rhetoric of emerging political and social movements are of particular interest, as opposed to

only highly visible actions like uprisings. Their narrative strategy is inspired by the writings of Gramsci (1971), and was explicated in the writings of Ranjit Guha (1983) an Indian Historian, in his Subaltern Studies I and his classic monograph *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* in colonial India (1983), who aims to make a breach in the meta-narrative of the modern state that was shared both by nationalist as well as imperial account of British India.

Examining more than a hundred documented instances of peasant rebellion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century India, Guha (1983) establishes that nationalist historiography was an act of appropriation of the diverse historical struggles of the “subaltern” classes, by the elite Indians on behalf of their project of building Indian state. The colonized were brought to the centre in the narrative of colonization. It went beyond the Marxian category “proletariat” (seen as a Eurocentric view of the globe). It soon became a vigorous postcolonial critique (Chakrabarty, 1991). Guha’s methodological innovations are seen not so much as renovating history, as critiquing the hermeneutic aspect of practices that constitute “writing history”. Here History is seen as a renaissance account of the past where nationalist History of India shares the metanarrative (of the modern state) embedded in the imperialist account of British India. According to Said (ibid,1991) the *Subaltern Studies project* is one which began as an intervention in post-colonial debates in Indian history, and is potentially capable of transforming the very idea of ‘history’ itself.

Dipesh Chakrabarty (1991) an Indian historian, shows the intersections between history and postcolonial theory and contributes to the debate of how postcolonial discourses engage in the writing of history. For him historicism is intimately related to the West’s notion of linear time. Chakrabarty (1991) argues that Western historiography universalizes liberalism that is being propagated to “all ends of the map”. He invokes Grossberg’s (ibid, 1991) account of the “First-World” postmodern world as the place where “history” is dead.<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Francis Fukuyama (1989) argues in his essay “The End of History?”, that the advent of Western liberal democracy may signal the end point of humanity’s socio-cultural evolution and the final form of human government. According to Fukuyama, what may be witnessed is not just the end of the Cold war, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such - the end

Homi Bhabha's (Chatterjee, 1994) work in postcolonial theory owes much Derrida, Lacan and Foucault. One of his central ideas is that of "hybridisation" (see also Lacan). As some other postcolonial theorists, Bhabha (1996) argues that studying dominant knowledge sets and marginalized ones as binary opposites perpetuate their existence as homogenous entities. He feels that the postcolonial world should support spaces of mixing: spaces where truth and authenticity move aside for ambiguity. The space of hybridity offers challenges to colonialism. He invokes Edward Said's work (see Said 1978; 1993), which describes the emergence of new cultural forms of multiculturalism. Refusing to see colonialism as something locked in the past, Bhabha (1996) shows how its histories and cultures constantly intrude on the present, demanding and transforming our understanding of cross-cultural relations. His work transformed the study of colonialism by applying post-structuralist methodologies to colonial texts. Bhabha is located in Lacanian imaginary societies discourse and invokes Andersson's historical materialist approach in constructing the emergence of nationalism, where a nation is an imagined political community that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign (Chatterjee, 1994).

There have been dissenters within the *Subaltern Studies group* due to the post-modern turn that the group has taken. Sumit Sarkar (ibid, 1994) an Indian historian, in his essay "Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies" laments the corrosion of the socialist inspired works of Subaltern studies by the latter hybridization of its writings with Foucauldian discourses of power-knowledge leading to a reification of the Subaltern-colonizer divide. However, this has resulted in the ascendance of Subaltern studies in the Western academia. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is known for the essay "Can the Subaltern speak?" in 1988, calls herself a "practical Marxist-feminist-deconstructionist". She recovers female and subaltern 'others' in the Indian context against the grain of colonialism and metanarrative discourses.

Spivak (referred in Lather, 1991) in *Post-structuralism and the question of history*, remains ambivalent to postmodern thought and practice. She recommends moving

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point of mankind's ideological evolution - the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the ultimate form of human government.

back and forth among the discourses of neo-Marxism, feminisms, “minoritarianism”, and post structuralism in order to interrogate the limits and power of postmodern discourse. Spivak (referred in Lather, 1991) supports recovering the emancipatory project by displacing essentialisms like the universal, the necessary, the obligatory with the singular, the contingent and the strategic - work done at the intersection of knowledge, power and ethics. Since postmodernism denies the growing global mal-distribution of power and resources, positively valorised marginality deteriorates into first-world appropriation of third world differences. Spivak (ibid, 1991) cautions against postcolonial writers packaging cultural differences “for transnational consumption” in ways that totalize and deny complexity.

Subaltern history has not always had an easy relationship with feminism. Feminist historiography, more than anything else, has brought questions of voice, agency, and resistance to the fore. Feminist scholars applauded the advent of subaltern studies - the challenge to elitist colonialist, nationalist and Marxist historiography by Ranjit Guha. The subaltern group neglected gender issues till Gayatri Spivak from the interventionist cultural studies joined the group. In “Can the Subaltern Speak”, Spivak (1988) addressed the problem of writing the history of the colonized women, who suffered the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy in their own time, and the oppression of Western scholarship on historicized subjects. Kamela Viswawaran (referred in Forbes, 2005) in her article “Small Speeches: Subaltern Gender: National Ideology and Historiography” suggests that it is possible to rescue the female subaltern for history by looking at the “point of erasure”. The inclusion of gender/women is part of the subaltern mission today (Forbes, 2005). This period saw scholars using the new historiography to reread and recast existing sources. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita (1995) edited *Women Writing in India: from 600 BCE*. This and other works<sup>20</sup> retrieved women’s writings and encouraged reflection on issues of agency, victimhood and cultural differences. In 1990, historians turned their attention to the nation including examination of its origins in relation to gender and women. Scholars of Indian women’s history have found the writings of Edward Said, Michel Foucault, Roland

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<sup>20</sup> Works of Shudha Majumdar, Manmohini Zutshi Sahgal, Haimabati Sen.



Barthes, Judith Butler and others, instructive in their efforts to rethink the past. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (1990) compiled a collection called *Recasting Women: essays in Indian history*, filling a need for inter-disciplinary scholarship that addresses the questions concerning the nature and resilience of patriarchal systems in a transitional and post-colonial society. This is an attempt to dismantle gender neutral ideologies.

### **Epistemological Challenges from Postcolonial/Third-Wave Feminism**

Postcolonial feminism<sup>21</sup> emerged from the gendered history of colonialism and is also referred to as third World feminism. It is a location where the “third-world” feminism links with aims of white feminism, studies of race, ethnicity and marginality and postmodern theories of culture as they intersect and join together in new relationships through shared comprehension of an emerging theory and method of oppositional consciousness. Postcolonial feminists can be described as feminists who have reacted both against the universalizing tendencies in Western feminist thought, as well as in mainstream postcolonial thought. Contemporary postcolonial feminist theory examines the theoretical definitions and lived experiences by looking at history of the feminist movement, the processes of colonization and other forms of oppression, the definition of the “Third World” or “colonized”, and the experience of women of colour the world over.

These experiences, and our understanding of them, are tinted by many illusory borders, from the delineations created by definitions of group labels to the arbitrary boundaries between the First and the Third Worlds. These borders also include the margins between forces such as tradition and globalization, which often act in opposition to each other, and forces like racism and exoticism, which closely looked at prove to be two sides of the same coin (De Leon, 2010:1).

Feminists of colour have brought up hermeneutic and epistemological issues. In *Feminism without Borders*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (ibid, 2010) calls for a revision of earlier versions of feminism in order to redefine concepts of traditional feminist theory in the light of “Third World” women's experiences. Issues such as: a) “the

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<sup>21</sup> Some postcolonial/Third Wave feminists are Arundhati Roy, Gayatri Spivak, Giannina Braschi, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Uma Narayan, Kwok Pui-lan, Sara Suleri, Lata Mani, Kumkum Sangari, Anne McClintock, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.

personal is political”; b) “private versus public spheres”, c) “multiplicity of voices” etc. According to Mohanty (ibid, 2010) the proletarianization of “Third World” women has blurred the traditional lines of men outside in the public sphere and women inside in the personal sphere in many regions of the world. Many political issues have a direct impact in the lives of many Third World women - making the political personal, and many aspects of their personal lives are politicized. She points out that the issue of multiple voices, unique experiences, and “infinitely sub-dividable groups” has resulted in internal division and the loss of focus and power-in-numbers. She stresses the need to maintain unity while appreciating diversity (De Leon, 2010).

Mulinary (1995) in her *Motherwork and politics in revolutionary Nicaragua* says that while producing a sociological text about Nicaraguan women, she had to struggle with two discourses that through oppressive forms of representation deny them visibility:

on the one hand the gender blindness of political sociology that ignores them, and on the other the Eurocentric feminist representation of “Third World Women” which in their efforts to expose conditions of oppression have legitimated stereotypes of “Third World Women” as passive, powerless victims (ibid, 1995: 18).

Mohanty extends the definition of “Third World women” to include the coloured or minority in the “first World”, stressing a politically loaded point that some people in the “First World” live under “Third World” circumstances, thus fracturing the concept of an idealized “First World”. De Leon comments:

What type of political struggles are shared by women in India, Africa, and Latino America, as well as African-American or Native-American women in the U.S., and immigrant women in Europe? If we are to consider women from Third World countries as well as minority women in First World countries as a single group in contrast to white middle and upper class women in the First World, we most clearly distinguish what sort of oppression do the former groups of women suffer that the latter don't? .... Therefore, the oppression colonized peoples suffer in the Third World itself are a direct result of First World policies, and the oppression and challenges colonized people suffer as immigrants or minorities in the First World are parallel to those Third Nations face in the world (De Leon,2010:2).

Postcolonial feminism centres around the idea that racism, colonialism, and the economic, political and cultural effects of colonialism in postcolonial settings is inevitably bound up with unique gendered realities of non-white, non-Western women. Part of the work taken up by third wave feminists has to do with reclaiming and redefining terminology as actions of resistance capable of eliciting change. Third wave

feminists re-write the definition of “to colonize” from “to create a settlement” into “to strip a people of their culture, language, land, family structure, who they are as a person and as a people” (Rehman & Hernandez, referred in De leon, 2010). They critique Western feminisms for the Euro-centrism that universalizes women’s issues and for ignoring their voices. Postcolonial feminists see parallels between the decolonized nations and the status of women within patriarchy – both take the perspective of socially marginalized subgroups in their relationship to the dominant culture. They also share ties with black feminists because colonialism contains themes of racism – both groups have struggled for recognition, not only by men in their own culture but by Western feminists.

In the previous paragraphs, I have tried to appropriate discourses that construct the convergence and divergence between post-colonial and postmodern discourses. Subsequently I invoked critique of the Euro-centricity of Western colonial and postcolonial discourses by oppositional scholars called *the Subaltern Studies Group* from the “Third-World” and the postcolonial /Third Wave feminist discourses in order to challenge hegemonic discourses arising from the West. These critiques are informed by hybridized discourses that have been constructed by “Third World” radicals, who appropriate and deconstruct modern and postmodern constructs in order to challenge the Euro-centricity of the dominant discourses. In doing so I demonstrate the fact that discourses emerging from late- and post- capitalist locations are filtering into the consciousness of Scholars in the Third World, and into their oppositional discourses. In order to destabilize the mainstream discourses that tends to universalize and ignore the voices of those marginalized.

### **3. Conceptualizations of children and childhood**

This chapter introduces the concept of childhood and its politics in the current times. The historical and evolutionary conceptualization of how children and childhood is recovered in order to construct the child in the modern and postmodern. I suggest here that this is an open discourse. Sociology of Childhood has evolved from deterministic models of children and childhood in the 50's and 60's to a stress on agency in children in the late 80's and 90's. In this chapter I try to go beyond the new Sociology of Childhood with an active and participatory view of the child and locate childhood in the postmodern (the 90s onwards).

A child is defined as any human being below the age of eighteen years. Childhood is considered to be either a natural biological stage of development or a modern idea or invention. The concept of childhood, like any invention, was created from a relationship between ideas and knowledge that emerged from a frame of social, political, and economic needs. Theories of childhood as a concept are subjective and contradictory and reveal the development over the significance of childhood as viewed by adults. Up until the 1990's, theories of childhood tended to be determined in a "top-down" approach which some have described as "imperialistic". This is true of theories about the medieval child as much as the modern child. Children themselves have not been considered as having a legitimate voice in influencing the production of childhood theories.

The "new social studies of childhood" that gained momentum in the 1980's and 1990's, pays attention to children as social actors with varied lives and experiences. Scholarly attention to women and people of colour, helped inspired calls for research that would bring children more fully into knowledge. The field of childhood has

increasingly been re-evaluated as inter-, multi-, trans- and cross-disciplinary in the 2010 special issue of *Children's Geographies*. Although still a young discipline, constructive engagements are questioning past paradigms. Theoretical approach of *social constructionism* resulting from the critical examination of childhood and categories such as child and adult, involved digging beneath taken for granted categories and examining the varied ways in which they have been organized and given meaning.

The immaturity of childhood is a biological fact of life but the ways in which this immaturity is understood and made meaningful, is a fact of culture (La Fontaine, in James & Prout, 2007). In this sense one can talk of social constructions of childhood. Gergen (referred in Bleakley, 2004) notes that the social constructionist<sup>22</sup> view suggests that every phenomena including the “natural world”, as well as the social world, is given meaning through human conversation and cultural processes, or (in other words) is “constructed”.

Although sociologists have directed little attention to childhood as a topic of interest, it is misleading to suggest that childhood has been absent from the discourses of social scientists. On the contrary, according to James and Prout (2007), “the century of childhood” is characterized by the massive corpus of knowledge built up by psychologists and other social scientists through the systematic study of children. Although the concept of childhood as a distinct stage in the human life cycle, crystallized in the nineteenth century western thought, it was in the twentieth century that theoretical spaces developed and became filled by empirical findings.

Childhood in the twentieth century is regarded as being separated from adulthood. The instrumental values of children have been largely replaced by their expressive value. According to Scheper-Hughes (ibid, 2007), children have become relatively worthless economically to their parents but priceless in terms of their psychological worth. Priorities, social and cultural life of Anglo-European and American countries have

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<sup>22</sup> Social constructionism and social constructivism are sociological theories of knowledge that consider how social phenomena develop in particular social contexts. Within constructionist thought, a social construct is a concept or practice which may appear to be natural and obvious to those who accept it, but in reality is an invention of a particular culture or society.

dominated the construction of childhood where norms and values are associated with the ideal of a safe, happy, protected childhood. Cheper- Hughes notes that the dominant model of childhood has resulted from the historical interplay of the Judeo-Christian belief system and changes in the productive and demographic base of the society as capitalist development progressed. During the religious reformation, childhood became a matter of concern, when moralists and evangelists began to indoctrinate and train children, in order to convert them to the Christian faith. It was Rousseau, who first associated the qualities of innocence and nobility with children, and the need for conscious parenting desired to foster these qualities, during the eighteenth century (James & Prout, 2007).

The different perspectives in childhood including the new sociology of childhood are the points of departure, from which this essay constructs conceptualizations of childhood and children as located in the postmodern, are developed. I briefly mention here the past perspectives (Corasaro, 2005; James & Prout, 2007) in childhood studies (developed in more detail in later paragraphs) which are divided into different focuses, viz.

- a) ***The child's bodily and cognitive development*** - where the child has been seen as an isolated individual, more internal than external – with focus more on nature than nurture, e.g. 1880's, *child and evolutionary perspectives* - where the focus is on the adaptive significance and evolutionary trajectories of the stages of human child growth and differentiation; 1920's onwards we find *Piaget & growth of developmental psychology*.
- b) ***Socialization practices*** – which stressed more the external than internal, nurture is seen as more dominant than nature and where children's active agency was ignored. Here we find the 1930's – 50's anthropological *studies of culture and personality* (e.g. Margret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Ruth Benedict etc. in Jacknis, 1988); 1950's – 2000's *child rearing and culture* (e.g. LeVine *et al.* in Grusec and Hastings, 2007).

More recently, between 1960's to 1980's can be seen the *interpretative sociological studies* of childhood (Denzin, 1989) and *ethnography of schooling* (Eriksen, 1984). In

1970's to 1980's come together scholars from sociology, anthropology, psychology history, law, health in general, and childhood came to be studied from an *interdisciplinary perspective*. In 1979 the onset of the international year of the child brought in *global perspectives on children's rights*. Finally in the 1990's emerged the *new paradigm within childhood*, where childhood came to be seen as a social construction and children seen as social actors. Some recent studies in the 2000's have started recognizing the modernity-postmodernity debate, with relation to childhood research, and have inquired into changing nature of childhood perspectives within the modern and the postmodern, e.g. Dahlberg *et al* (2007); James and Prout (2007).

## **Cultural Politics of Childhood**

The United Nations brought children to the fore front of international politics when the General Assembly declared 1979 the Year of the Child, followed in 1989, by the adoption of the *UN convention on the rights of the child* (CRC). CRC was a by-product of international commitments to human rights, but its history lies in the complex and contradictory developments of the twentieth century, when elevated expectations regarding the welfare of children confronted the realities of war. In the late nineteenth century, material conditions and reform efforts redefined the lives of children in the Western world and created new sentiments about childhood and investments in children's progress. Throughout this period, the involvement of women, a new Swedish presence in international diplomacy, and the growing role of nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) affected what would become a re-articulation of child welfare and protection and a more active commitment to children's rights (United Nations, 1992).

Today hundreds of children all over the world, live on streets, work in hazardous places, are abused on a daily basis and often don't have the most fundamental human rights

Over half-a-billion children in developing countries are struggling to survive on less than \$1 per day. About 2 million children in developing countries die every year from a lack of access to safe drinking water and adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities. Over 110 million primary school age children worldwide are not enrolled in school. 500,000 children under 15 years of age died from AIDS in 1999, and 3.8 million died

since the beginning of the epidemic. 11 million children die each year from largely preventable causes. More than 33 million children suffer from vitamin A deficiency, placing them at risk of blindness and death from such common diseases as measles and diarrhoea. An estimated 250 million children aged 5 to 14 are working around the world. Close to 2 million children have been killed in armed conflicts during the past decade (*Teaching about human rights*, United Nations, 1992)

It was to protect the rights of such children that the United Nations in 1989 adopted a historic agreement: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). In general, the Convention calls for:

- Freedom from violence, abuse, hazardous employment, exploitation, abduction or sale
- Adequate nutrition
- Free compulsory primary education
- Adequate health care
- Equal treatment regardless of gender, race, or cultural background
- The right to express opinions and freedom of thought in matters affecting them
- Safe exposure/access to leisure, play, culture, and art.

Recognizing the special vulnerability of children, all of these goals are expressed with respect to a child's age and evolving capacities. The Convention also emphasizes the primacy and importance of the role, authority and responsibility of parents and family. It is neutral on abortion; and is consistent with the principles contained in the Bill of Rights (UNICEF, 2013).

Children's rights are defined in different ways, including a wide spectrum of civil, cultural, economic, social and political rights. Rights tend to be of two general types - those advocating for children as autonomous persons under the law and those placing a claim on society for protection from harms perpetrated on children because of their dependency. These have been labelled as the *right of empowerment* and as the *right to protection*. Three categories of children's rights are given below

- **Provision** – children's right to adequate standard of living and shelter, health care, balanced diet, access to schooling and education and services, and to play and recreation.



- **Protection** – Children’s right to protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation and discriminations. Rights to safe play spaces, constructive child rearing behaviour.
- **Participation**- Children’s rights to decision making and to participate in communities and have programs and services for themselves, including libraries, community programs (UN, 1996: chapter 5).

CRC has led to Amnesty international advocating end to juvenile incarceration without parole; an end to the recruitment of military use of children; ending death penalty for less than 21 years of age, and raising awareness of human rights in the classroom.

Human rights Watch have advocated an end to child labour and corporal punishment, and promotion of juvenile justice, and social care of orphans and abandoned children as well as refugees, street children. Other issues affecting children’s rights focus on prevention of military use of children, sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Scholarly studies identify children’s individual rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom from fear, freedom of choice and rights to make decision’ s and ownership over one’s body.

The convention is organized around four core principles: a) non - discrimination; b) the best interests of the child; c) the rights to survival and development; and d) attention to the views of the child. Critics have argued that UN Convention assumes and imposes Western ideas about childhood, family, and individual rights, and that it is insensitive to other cultural understandings of children and morality. It was felt however, that ethical action needs to be forged between the two extremes of universal claims about individual rights and cultural relativism (UNICEF, 2013).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has arisen parallel to the emergence of the “New Sociology of Childhood” that brought childhood onto the International stage and into the academic debate, which created an environment for a focus on listening to the views of the child and the “Children’s Rights” to express, in general. This has led some scholars like Gray and Winter, and Lewis and Porter (referred in Spandagou, 2013) to explore allowing children themselves to reflect upon their own experience of childhood, resulting in the use of inclusive research methodologies and more democratic frameworks for dissemination. Advocates of the new sociology of

childhood have identified a plurality of “childhoods” rather than childhood seen as one structural condition.

Following CRC there is a growing body of research on children living in extreme poverty, forced migration, and war has extended the study of childhoods beyond the world of families, neighbourhoods, and schools, situating children within the processes of political and economic change. Three central theoretical approaches to the new social studies of childhood are: a) comparative analysis of the political economy and social structuring of particular childhoods; b) the study of symbolic or discursive constructions of children and childhoods; and c) attention to children as social actors and as creators and interpreters of culture.

On the one hand, Globalization and consumptions of signs and symbols through mass media have led to global images of childhood being disseminated through UN policies and due to economic interests of Multinational Corporations and the World Systems, and on the other hand, ethnographic studies and postmodern emphasis on local narratives are localizing childhood discourses. There are attempts to synthesize the global and the local forces affecting childhood discourses through *Global Studies of Childhood* , which is a space for research and discussion about issues that pertain to children in a world context, and in contemporary times the significant impact of global imperatives on the lives of children (Fleer *et al*, 2009) . Experiences of childhood that take place within the situated spaces of geographic locales and culturally specific frames of reference are subject to global forces that complicate, disrupt and reconfigure the meanings associated with childhood/s on the local and global stage. Here childhood is referred to a socially constructed category whose parameters are not necessarily fixed by factors such as biological development or chronological age. Global Studies of Childhood (GSC) is therefore interested in issues that pertain to childhood, broadly conceived, and the challenges pose to children’s lives and futures in an increasingly complex world. GSC argues that issues around what constitutes childhood are fundamental to discussions, just as the need to ensure that all children have basic human rights and are protected from exploitation.

There are dangers located within the concept of Globalization (Eriksen, 2003). Globalization or the spread of ideas from one part of the world (typically conceived as the United States or Western Europe) to the rest of the world, is a process of economic, ideological or educational colonization. Global hegemonic ideas about childhood and child development are exported from a dominant group of people within the World system to other marginalized parts of the world (the periphery) in a form of active processes of colonization or by creating the conditions under which local groups or the periphery come to value the yard stick of the dominant groups as their own. Culture is so heavily implicated in developmental processes that it is imperative to consider local considerations about what should be viewed as optimal in children's development (Fleer *et al.*, 2009).

## **Historical overview of childhood and children**

The history of childhood is matter of controversy. There is little evidence of what childhood was like in the past hence it is difficult for historians to reconstruct the life of a child, or the experience of being a child. This history of childhood is open to differing interpretations. Since serious historical investigation began into this area in the late 1960s historians are divided between two contrasting camps of opinion – those advocating “continuity” in child rearing practices and those emphasizing “change”. The first major works in the history of childhood were those of Phillippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), and Lloyd de Mause, *The history of childhood* (1974). Both historians construct negative images of childhood and family life in the past, which improve as centuries developed. The further one goes back into history, the lower the level of child care, and the likelihood of children being killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized and sexually abused, more.

Philippe Ariès (1962) in his *Centuries of Childhood*, documents that the idea of childhood with a particular nature of childhood where distinction between the child and the adult was lacking in medieval society. As soon as the child could live without constant attention of adults, the child became part of the adult society. Ariès draws evidence from medieval art, in which children were almost totally absent or were

depicted as miniature adults. Ariès constructs a progression “from no conception of childhood” to coddling in the 13th century, and then to the moralistic period in the 16th century, in which childhood was seen as a time for discipline and preparation for adulthood. This is seen to have given rise to the development of child psychology and conceptions of childhood and childrearing. For Ariès, the child is removed from adult society in the modern world, hence deprived of the freedom he enjoyed in the adult world. Ariès sees the progressive separation of children and adults as a part of more general cultural changes that have resulted in the separations by social class and race in modern society.

Ariès concluded that there was no concept of childhood as a state different to adulthood in the past centuries. Ariès work led to evolutionary theories of family and conceptions of childhood, which in turn initiated heated debates about the historical evidence of such assertions. Ariès offers a constructivist argument about institutional change and their effects on conceptions of children. These changes were seen by him as phases of the unique history of Europe, which involved shifting configurations in the family and educational institutions. The conceptions of childhood and the lives of children were greatly influenced by the social change where the extended family disintegrates into the isolated nuclear family. According to Greene and Hill (referred in Bisht, 2008), developing this theme of childhood as a social construct led to the new sub-discipline referred to as the ‘Sociology of Childhood’ or the ‘New Social Studies of Childhood’.

Other theorists such as deMause, Shorter, Stone and Hendrick (referred in Corsaro, 2005) developed Ariès thesis and proposed the “Grand-Stage Theories of Family”. According to Corsaro (2005), Mause and his associates have developed a distinctive and controversial theory of childhood. These theories hold that there are specific, universal and predestined stages in the evolution of the family, children and childhood. This position establishes from empirical evidence that childhood, while seemingly held by society to be a time of freedom and innocence, has been for the majority of children a time of oppression and abuse. DeMause (1974) has argued that the parental response to the infant or child has evolved over time from one which was generally abusive and cruel to one which became nurturing and affectionate. Such a

development, according to this theory, not only reflected social, technological, and cultural change but indeed generated those changes. The development or evolution of conscious parenting is the focus of *psychohistory*, which developed after the work of Lloyd deMause (Burke, 2008). Although a number of elements of Ariès' position are now considered untenable, his work generated a great deal of interest in the history of childhood. He argued that childhood was a social construction and that historians should take children and their lives seriously. This has resulted in an increasing number of historians adopting children's perspectives in their studies of childhood, and allowing the voices of children to be heard in historical accounts. Studies of Barbara A. Hanawalt's, *Growing up in medieval London* (1993) and Marilyn Irwin West's *Children on the plains* (2003) are examples of such accounts.

A number of historians such as Garnsey, Hanawalt, Pollock and Shahar (referred in Corsaro, 2005) have criticized the grand-stage theorists such as de Mause (1974), drawing upon impressive historical evidence to support their critique. The best known of these critiques is Linda Pollock in her book *Forgotten Children* (1983), where she challenges the historical conceptions of childhood in the works of Ariès (1962) and grand-stage theorists such as deMause (1974). Pollack (1983) is critical of the use of indirect evidence such as paintings, philosophical and religious tracts, advice literature and letters, on which much of the earlier work on history of childhood is based. She advocates a more direct primary source - like diaries, autobiographies and newspapers of court cases regarding child abuse. Using direct sources as research data have resulted in a much less negative picture of childhood. Selective and anecdotal selection of direct sources has led to a distortion of how children have been viewed and treated in the past. Pollock undertook an analysis of 500 British and American diaries, autobiographies and related sources and found little support for Ariès (1962) thesis that there was a constant indifference to children and to de Mause's (1974) contention of widespread mistreatment and abuse of children in the enlightenment of the 18th and 19th centuries.

Pollock (1983) discovered that nearly all children were wanted. Stages such as weaning and teething aroused interest and concern in adults, and parents showed anxiety and distress at the illness and death of their children. There is evidence that

cruelty to children was not widespread, and that parent-child relationship was reciprocal. Children and parents were close to each other and influenced by one another. Pollock (1983) provides support for the idea of parental care and the need for care such as protection, love and socialization for human survival. She argues that the concept and quality of care must always be culturally constructed through the collective action of adults and children. Pollock has been criticized for overstating her case (Corsaro, 2005). Although her data was found to be limited to the literary upper classes, she is well received for her scholarship.

The new history of childhood like the new sociology of childhood focuses directly on the collective actions of children with adults and with each other. It addresses a long ignored defect in the historical records where the focus remains on adult conceptions of childhood (Ariès, 1962; deMause, 1974; Pollock, 1983), their sentiments towards children and their methods of childrearing. Children and adolescents had been left out as actors in the accounts of past societies. The New history of childhood, include Hanawalt's (2003) study *Growing up in medieval London*, the research of Alston (1992) and Wiggins (1985) *The play of slave children in the plantation communities of the old South, 1820-60* on Slave children in the pre-Civil War South, West's (2003), *Children on the plains frontier* study of Pioneer children on the American Great Plains in the 1880's, and Nasaw's (1985) *Children of the city* - depiction of children in American cities at the turn of the 20th century. These historical narratives bring children to life and attribute agency to them, and show that they were influential actors in societies of the past.

These studies are important for childhood research, because they document children's contribution to the historical record, as well as for seeing children as actively contributing to societal production and change while simultaneously creating their own child cultures. They help to understand the notion of interpretive reproduction that stress the importance and complexity of children's collective actions, in both the adult world and in their own peer cultures.

## **The evolution of childhood theories**

The history of the study of childhood in the social sciences has been marked not by an absence of interest in children but by the silence of sociological texts about children. Till two decades ago, children were marginalized in sociology because of their subordinate position in society. This reflected in the theoretical conceptualizations of childhood and socialization. Since the 90s the new theoretical and empirical work advocates conceptual autonomy of children and childhood (James and Prout, 2007). Children and childhood has become the centre of analysis without being linked to categories such as families or schools. Children are seen as active, creative social agents who produce their own unique (children's) cultures while simultaneously contributing to adult societies. In the modernist perspective, childhood is seen as a structural form or part of society like social class, gender and age groups, and therefore both macro (structural) as well as micro (social psychological) approaches is seen to be important in producing a comprehensive and holistic picture. New ways of conceptualizing children in sociology have arisen from the development of constructivist and interpretive theoretical perspectives in sociology (Corsaro, 2005; James, & Prout, 2007).

## **Socialization Theories**

Corsaro (2005) in *The Sociology of Children* suggests that that the traditional theories of socialization and child development are now being questioned. Theoretical work on socialization (the process by which children adapt and internalize society) is now seen as “traditional thinking” about children and childhood. Early socialization studies of family view the child as internalizing society. There is a dualistic relationship between the child and society, where the child is seen as something apart from society that must be shaped and guided by external forces in order to become a fully functioning member. In this deterministic model, the child plays a basically passive role. The child is seen as a social threat needing to be controlled by training, as well as a novice or an apprentice with potential to learn and contribute to the maintenance of society. Here the child is appropriated by society, trained and finally becomes a competent and contributing member of society (Dahlberg, 2007).

The deterministic model subsumes two subsidiary models – the functionalist and the reproductive. The functionalist model was popular in the 1950s and 60s, focused on the superficial aspects of socialization. Society was seen to have order and balance and functionalists stressed the importance of training and preparing children to fit and contribute to society. The reproductive model focused on conflicts and inequalities in society and argued that children have differential access to training and societal resources. It paid little attention to why and how children become integrated into society. The reproductive theory overtook the functionalist view of socialization. Bernstein (referred in Corsaro, 2005) and Bordieu & Passeron (1977) argued that the internalization of the functional requirements of society could be seen as a mechanism of social control that leads to the social reproduction or maintenance of class inequalities.

Reproduction theorists point out the differential treatment of individuals in social institutions that reflect and support the prevailing class system, and focused on the advantages enjoyed by those with greater access to cultural resources. Reproductive theorists were acclaimed by left radicals because they acknowledge the effect of social conflict and inequality on the socialization of children. However, both functionalist and reproductive theories concentrated on the deterministic outcomes of socialization. They underestimated the active and innovative capacities of children to break out of the mould imposed on them by the structural constraints of society. Here the historical and contingent natures of social action are neglected. Highly complex processes were simplified and the importance of children and childhood in society was overlooked. Children's activities were treated as inconsequential and non-functional. Critics see reproductive theories as more creative than functionalist theories in their view of socialization. Although Bourdieu provides a more active role for the child, this conceptualization limits children's involvement to cultural participation and reproduction and ignores children's contribution to society and change.

### **The New Sociology of Childhood**

According to the new sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2005; James & Prout, 2007), constructivism is seen as the model that incorporates an active child. In the



constructivist model, the child appropriates society – the child actively appropriates information from the environment and uses the information to organize and construct the child's own interpretation of the world. Here developmental psychologists are seen to have played a crucial role. The best representative of the constructivist approach is Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget who studied the evolution of knowledge in children – integrating biology and epistemology. Piaget believed that children from the first days of infancy interpret, organize and use information from the environment to construct conceptions (known as mental structures) of their physical and social worlds. Piaget attributed agency to children. Another important constructivist theorist is the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (referred in James & Prout, 2007), who like Piaget, stressed children's active role in human development – children's social development was seen as a result of their collective actions (interaction and practical activities with others) that lead to their acquisition of new skills and knowledge. According to Vygotsky (ibid, 2007), children internalize and appropriate culture through language which both encodes culture and is a tool for participating in culture – here language is seen as a cultural tool.

It is acknowledged that the weakness of constructivist model is that its main focus remains on individual development (references to child's activity, child's development, child becoming an adult). It offers an active but lonely view of children – the focus remains on the effects of various interpersonal experiences on the individual development. Corsaro (2005) argues that there is little consideration of how interpersonal relations reflect cultural systems, or how children through their participation in communicative events, become part of these interpersonal relations and cultural patterns and reproduce them collectively. Secondly there is too much concern with the endpoint of development and on the appropriation of culture seen as internalization (movement from external to internal). This marginalizes children's collective actions with others and implies that an individual actor's participation in society occurs only after such individual internalization (ibid, 2005).

The new sociology of childhood demands that sociological theories break free from individualistic doctrines that regard children's social development solely as the child's private internalization of adult skills and knowledge. To incorporate the new

sociological perspectives, socialization is not only a matter of adaptation and internalization but also a process of appropriation, reinvention and reproduction. This perspective appreciates the importance of collective, communal activity – here children negotiate, share and create culture with adults and each other (ibid, 2005). In this new approach the focus is on the childhood as a social construction resulting from the collective actions of children with adults and each other. Childhood is recognized as a structural (macro-institutional) form and children as social agents who contribute to the reproduction of childhood and society through their negotiations with adults and through their creative production of a series of peer cultures with other children.

The key features of the emerging paradigm have been documented by Prout and James (2007) in *A new paradigm for sociology of childhood?*

- a) Childhood is understood as a social construction. Childhood as distinct from biological immaturity is neither natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies
- b) Childhood is a variable of social analysis. It can never be divorced from other variables such as class, gender or ethnicity. Comparative and cross cultural analyses reveal a variety of childhoods rather than a single and universal phenomenon.
- c) Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of perspectives and concerns of adults
- d) Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, and the lives of those around them and of societies in which they live. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes.
- e) Ethnography is a useful methodology for the study of child. It allows children a more direct voice and participation of the production of sociological data.
- f) Childhood is a phenomenon in relation to which the double hermeneutics of social sciences is present. To proclaim a new paradigm of childhood sociology is also to engage in and respond to the processes of reconstructing childhood in society (ibid, 2007:8).

This new view of childhood as a social phenomenon replaces the traditional notion of socialization with the concept of interpretive reproduction. Interpretive reproduction

brings to light children's evolving membership in their culture, which begins in the family and moves outwards as children create a series of embedded peer cultures that are based on the institutional structures of the adult culture. The term reproduction captures the idea that children are not simply internalizing society and culture, but are actively contributing to cultural production and change. The term also implies that children are constrained by the existing social structure and by societal reproduction. Children and their childhoods are affected by societies and cultures in which they are situated – these societies themselves having been shaped and affected by processes of historical change.

Interpretive reproduction is seen to provide a basis for a new sociology of childhood by replacing linear models of children's individual and social development with collective and productive models - reproductive view. Here children participate as active members of both childhood and adult cultures. Children affect, and are affected by society. On the whole, the notion of interpretive reproduction challenges sociology to take children seriously and to appreciate children's contribution to social phenomenon and change. Alanen (referred in Corsaro, 2005) advocate the examination of childhood from a structural perspective in order to capture the nature of their activities, power and rights in relation to their role as a generational group. In a series of theoretical papers stemming from his work on the international project "Childhood as a Social Phenomenon", the Danish sociologist, Jens Qvortrup (1994) has outlined a structural perspective to the study of childhood.

The approach is based on three central assumptions: (1) childhood constitutes a particular structural form; (2) childhood is exposed to the same societal forces as adulthood; and (3) children are themselves co-constructors of childhood and society.

Qvortrup's approach to childhood as a social phenomenon and his emphasis on children as active co-constructors of their social worlds reflect an important shift away from individualistic views of socialization in which the individual child internalizes adult skills and knowledge. His view leads one to a better understanding of children's place, stake and importance in both cultural production and maintenance (Corsaro, 2005). Children contribute actively to the adult and childhood cultures by creatively appropriating information from the adult world to produce their own, unique peer

cultures. Conceptualization of interpretive reproduction enables children to become a part of adult culture – to contribute to its reproduction and extension – through their negotiations with adults and their creative production of a series of peer cultures with other children.

### **Postmodernist Theories of Childhood**

The idea of a universal state of childhood was challenged towards the end of the twentieth century through an increasingly globalized perspective and scholarly ethnographic, cultural and anthropological studies. The shift towards a recognition and acceptance of children's voices in determining their own world-view led to a fragmentation of views that questioned the structural norm of childhood and brought about a theoretical position about pluralities of childhoods. Jenks (1992) and Qvortrup (1994) found it more accurate and helpful to talk of many childhoods or a plurality of experiences both across and within cultures. "Diversity of experience according to class, ethnicity, gender, culture, place of residence, health, or disability rather than one common childhood is emphasized, in spite of growing recognition of the universalizing effects of Globalization" (Burke, 2008).

The traditional Western notion of childhood held up till 1950s was seen to recede and notions such as "the disappearing childhood" and David Elkind's "The Hurried Child" (referred in Burke, 2008) emerged. Childhood innocence and dependency on adults could not be sustained in the context of children's access to, and use of new media technologies. The notion of apprenticeship period for adulthood gave way to the notion *Kinderculture* (see Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2004), where children were intensely exposed to child-focussed popular entertainment. This posed problems for the existing theories of childhood. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2004) suggested the notion called the "dilemma of the postmodern child", where the family got democratized and challenged many established institutions such as the traditional family and the authoritarian school. This has occurred simultaneous to the new vision of "Children's Rights".

In *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*, Kincheloe and Steinberg (2004) have constructed a critical theory of childhood which they label “kinderculture”. Based on a multi-perspectival inquiry, Kincheloe and Steinberg (2004) contend that the new times have ushered in a new era of childhood. In the domain of psychology, education, sociology and cultural studies, few observers before “kinderculture” have studied the ways that the information explosion, characteristic of contemporary era (hyperreality) had operated to undermine traditional notions of childhood and change the terrain of childhood education. The central purpose of “kinderculture” is to socially, culturally, politically, and economically situate the changing historical status of childhood. “Kinderculture” understands that childhood is an ever-changing social and historical artefact—not simply a biological entity. In opposition to psychologists who have argued that childhood is a natural phase of growing up, of becoming an adult, Kincheloe and Steinberg (2004) coming from an educational context see “kinderculture” as a corrective to such “psychologization” of childhood.

*Kinderculture* documents the increasing importance, insidious and complex role that corporations play in socializing children in contemporary childhood. Corporations systematically target children to shape compliant consumers and sell products. This is called consumer socialization which shapes children’s values, identities and behaviours that have serious consequences for children, family and society. King (2006) comments that the early and intense promotion of greed and materialism among even very young children is designed to establish brand loyalty; to tap into a lucrative market with sizable discretionary income, and to produce lifelong hedonistic consumers (ibid, 2006).

Children are immersed, from the earliest age, in a commercial universe which tells them that individual worth is measured by what one has. Advertisement promotes insecurity about one’s self worth and sense of belonging, through degrading insinuations and offering a route to salvation through products offered. All of this is at the cost of emotional and financial losses.

Dahlberg *et al* (2007) in their book *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood and Care – Languages of Evaluation*, deconstruct the socially constructed understanding of the “child” and “childhood” found in modernist discourses of childhood. Modernist perspectives locate themselves in the dualistic and either/or approach, while post-modernist perspectives locate themselves in valuing diversity and both /and approach. The modernist understanding of the child is essentialist where the subject is seen as unified and reified. This essentialized subject is placed at the centre of the world, and viewed and treated apart from the contexts the child is located in. From a postmodernist and social constructionist perspective, there is no such thing as “the child” or “childhood” that is an essentialized being - waiting to be discovered, defined and realized. According to Dahlberg *et al* (2007) there are many children and many childhoods, each constructed by our understanding of childhood, what children are and should be?

### **Conceptualizing the child**

Towards the turn of twentieth century, the idea of a universal state of childhood due to an increasingly globalized perspective was challenged by scholarly questioning through ethnographic, cultural, and anthropological studies. The theoretical position about the pluralities of childhood emerged due to the shift toward a recognition and acceptance of children's voices in determining their own world-view, brought about a fragmented view which questioned the structural norms of childhood. Theorists as Chris Jenks and Jens Qvortrup (referred in James & Prout, 2007) have asserted that it is more accurate and helpful to talk of many childhoods or a plurality of experience both across cultures and within them. Diversity of experience according to class, ethnicity, gender and culture, place of residence, health, or disability rather than one common childhood is emphasised, in spite of growing recognition of the universalizing effects of globalization.

Popular writing and scholarship on childhood in the last decades of the twentieth century reflected on a changed state of being. The traditional Western notion of childhood, which held from about the 1850's to the 1950's, was implied in its absence

by notions such as "the disappearance of childhood" or "the hurried"<sup>23</sup>. The emerging consensus was that notions of childhood innocence and dependency on adults could no longer be sustained in the context of children's access to and use of new media technologies. The notion of childhood as an apprenticeship period for adulthood was fundamentally challenged by the use of such technologies, particularly in the home. Such a material change, coupled with an intensification of child-focused popular entertainment (sometimes called *kinderculture*) that began in the second half of the twentieth century, came to place strains on existing contemporary theories of childhood. What has been called by Shirley Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe (2004) "the dilemma of postmodern childhood" was characterized by a democratization in family life which placed the expectations of children and the concept of childhood itself in conflict with many of its established institutions such as the traditional family or the authoritarian school. This has also been accompanied by a new vision of "*Childrens rights*" apart from and even in opposition to their parents.

All neo-Enlightenment histories of childhood and maturation regard the archaeology of child rearing as something from the past. The brevity, ignorance, brutality and ugliness of ancient parenting have been replaced by a vision and attitude which has crystallized into the form of a "rational machine" for nurture, the family and the state (James & Prout, 2007). Philippe Ariès 's (1962) concept of the medieval child and the absence of childhood has now been contested. Linda Pollock (1983) in her book *Forgotten Children*, challenges the conceptions of history of childhood in the works of Ariès (1962) and grand - stage theorists such as deMause (1974). More direct sources of evidence or data have resulted in a much less negative picture of childhood. Children in all periods were mostly wanted, and parents mourned death of their children. Cruelty to children was not widespread. Continuous parental care, qualitative aspects of care such as protection, love and socialization were found to be essential for human survival and culturally constructed.

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<sup>23</sup> Dr. David Elkind in his book *The Hurried Child: Growing up Too Fast Too Soon* (2007) warned about asking children to grow up too fast and dangers of exposing our children to overwhelming pressures, pressures that can lead to a wide range of childhood and teenage crises.

The social construction of childhood with its complexity, that evolved during modernity is now fracturing and reforming. James and Prout (2007) comment in their book *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood –Contemporary Issues in the sociological Study of Childhood*, that the utopian ideals of modernity and enlightenment that consisted of freedom, equality, goodwill, peace, prosperity, dreams of “futurity” through children and their childhood, are now been treated as unattainable in their ideological content. There is a return to a pragmatic state of disenchantment. Instead of pursuing “utopias”, the late modern condition is one of avoidance or minimization of “dystopias”. Transition from a state of modernity into that of postmodernity has developed two models or visions of childhood. These two visions are of “futurity” and “nostalgia” respectively. In modernity is seen the distillation of the “principle” of care underlying the relationship between adults and children. There is an inauguration of the powerful commitment to childhood, in western society. This commitment to childhood is attached to the adult’s concern about the future. Jenks (ibid, 2007), asserts that children have become the principle concern - the primary love objects, the human capital and the future, while adults have become their protectors and nurturers

Late-modern modes of rationality have outgrown the mid twentieth century nuclear family. Several sociologists such as Wallerstein and Blakeslee, Giddens, Beck, Stacey, and Lasch (ibid, 2007) have noted that both families and relationships contained by them have changed. It is within this context a new vision of childhood has arisen. The neo-Conservative theorists, Bell and Touraine (ibid, 2007) were the first to note that the alteration in the traditional fabric of relationships and the taken for granted categories of community membership no longer prevailed. The previous points of attachment of the individual with the collective life, like social class, work group, local community and family were seen to be losing their adhesion compatible with the demands of a post-Fordist mode of production, global economies and networks of communication” (Jencks, 1992). The social spaces occupied by adults and children have changed – in place and in character. The spaces previously allocated to fixed identities of adults, children and families have changed completely and has a new found versatility. Its pacing in terms of time has altered drastically our relationship to a



whole set of cultural configuration established under modernity. This affects the vision of the child.

According to Jencks (1992), late or post-modernity has readopted the child. The child in the setting of what is now conceptualized as postmodern cultural configuration has become the site or the relocation of discourses concerning stability, integration and social bond. The child is now envisioned as a form of “nostalgia” – a longing for past times, not as “futurity”. Children earlier seen as promise are now seen as primary and unequivocal objects for love, and as partners in the most fundamental, un-negotiated form of relationship. The trust that was previously anticipated from marriage, partnership, friendship, class solidarity, is now invested in the child. This can be seen in the affectual prolongation of adolescence; the uprating of children’s status through the advances in children’s rights; the disputed territory that children constitute during parental divorce; the iconography of the child in the Third World aid politics; in western campaign against addiction and criminality, the enhanced interest of men in children etc. (James & Prout, 2007).

Modernist pedagogy is child-centred. It understands the child as a unified, reified and essentialized subject – at the centre of the world – is one that can be viewed and treated apart from relationships and context. For Dahlberg *et al*, (2007), Child-centeredness is an abstract and problematic concept, where the child exists through its relations with others and always in a particular context. From postmodernist perspective, there is no such thing as “the child” or “childhood”, an essentialized agent who can be defined and realized. Instead there are many children and many childhoods, each constructed by our understanding of childhood and what children are and should be. Postmodern perspective allows choices and freedom to construct what we think the child is. These choices are important since they determine how we organize the world for children and the pedagogical work adults and children undertake.

A critique of interrelated constructions of the young child – how children have been understood and conceptualized, would show that these constructions are themselves produced within dominant discourses, which are located within the project of

modernity, in which parents, researchers, politicians and practitioners are situated (Dahlberg, et al., 2007) . These dominant discourses have influenced the relationships between children, parents, pedagogues and how institutions organized for children are ordered and designed in time and space, and what kind of meaning we give to them.

### **Educational Philosophers and concepts of the child**

This paragraph has been introduced because educational philosophers, who although may overlap with sociological and childhood theorists are different actors having different focus. I wish to develop the notion that modernist educational theories although comparatively progressive, when looked at, through the new sociology of childhood and the postmodern lens are situated in instrumental and deterministic locations. Human agency that was weak in the early modernist educational philosophers has evolved into fully active subjects who are located in diverse and indeterminate spaces, in the latter existential and postmodern theories.

Twentieth century psychological explanations of child development have until recently dominated childhood studies that both supported and were supported by child-rearing / training practices. It is predominantly development psychology which provided a framework of explanation of the child's nature and justified the concept of the naturalness of childhood itself. According to James and Prout (2007) alternative voices have been raised from changing paradigms within the social sciences. But for a long time these have gone unremarked and unheard or have been silenced. In the 1990s this silencing was questioned and a reconstituted sociology of childhood emerged as a sub-discipline.

“Development” has been one of the key concepts in the dominant framework surrounding the study of children and childhood. Within the concept of “development” are linked the biological facts of immaturity (such as dependence) to the social aspects of childhood. This dominant developmental approach to childhood, provided by psychology, is based on the idea of natural growth - a self-sustaining model whose features can be described as: rationality. Through apprenticeship the childhood gives

way to adulthood. James and Prout (2007) find that there is a mutually depended relationship between the naturalness of children and their universality.

The universality of social practices surrounding childhood was regarded as relatively unproblematic until 1970s. The model of child development which had come to dominate western thought connects biological with social development. It was essentially an evolutionary model - the child developing into an adult representing a progression from simplicity to complexity of thought, and from irrational to rational behaviour. This model had been inspired by the nineteenth century western sociological theorists who represented the notion of “rationality”. Such a model saw other cultures as primitive forms of human condition. Other cultures were regarded as childish in their simplicity and irrational in their belief. Comte’s theory of social evolution the “savage” draw a parallel between the “savage” as being the precursor of civilized man, and the way that the child prefigured adult life. Tylor (ibid, 2007) in 1871 argued that he could apply “the comparison of savages to children as fairly to their moral as to their intellectual condition”. According to James and Prout (2007) the proximity of the savage to the natural world made Rousseau’s child of nature an apt metaphor for social evolution during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These lines of rational thinking have structured a mode of thought which have gone beyond the disciplinary boundaries of psychology, and have influenced sociological approaches to child study and the socio-political context of childhood itself. The assumed naturalness of childhood gave little theoretical space within which to explore alternatives

Children’s activities – their language, play, interaction – were seen as symbolic markers of developmental progress and were seen to facilitate the child’s future participation in the adult world. As the child matured, the child’s play was seen as decreasing in its “irrationality” and implied the evolution of “rationality” of thought. “Primitive” concepts were seen to be replaced by sophisticated ideas. James and Prout (2007) document that Jean Piaget’s work on child development shows persistent influence of this explanatory framework. Piagetian approaches have dominated work on cognition during the last quarter of the century and have eclipsed earlier theoretical

positions that attempted to ground an account of cognitive development in the child's social experiences.

### **Educational Theories**

Educational theorists have been categorized chronologically in terms of their locations in educational and philosophical ideologies as: modernist idealism, modernist realism, pragmatism, behaviourism, existentialism and western Marxism and critical theory and postmodern theory, by Ozmon and Craver (2003) in their book *Philosophical Foundations of Education*.

Development of **modern idealism** began in the modern period in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Theorists such as Rene Descartes, George Berkley, Immanuel Kant, George W.F. Hegel and Josiah Royce were located in this ideology. Idealism is criticized for being elitist where liberal studies were seen as suitable for the elite by them, while vocational and technical studies seen as adequate for the masses. Rorty (1980) criticizes the Cartesian and Kantian traditions that tend to see mind as mirrors, knowledge as accurate representations of objective reality, and philosophy as the tool to get more accurate representations. For Pragmatics children must be understood in terms of mental physical and emotional development and in the light of social and cultural factors.

**Modern Realism** (in the nineteenth century) received its major thrust from the industrial and technological age and attempted to develop an adequate method of inductive thinking. Francis Bacon and John Locke were two outstanding realist thinkers. Realism is viewed as short-sighted and dehumanizing because of its materialist conception of human nature. Critiques of existential and postmodern orientation attack realism because it advocates the idea of a fixed and intelligible universe capable of being perceived objectively by the observing intellect. It reifies reason as the expense of emotions and feelings, and advocates elitism by sorting intellectually superior students and slower students instrumentally into different streams within education.

Although **pragmatism** (eighteenth and nineteenth century) is viewed primarily as a contemporary American philosophy, its roots can be traced back to British, European,

and ancient Greek philosophical traditions. Pragmatism was grounded by Francis Bacon, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Charles Darwin. Locke's notion of *tabula rasa* established mind as a passive, malleable instrument and an uncertain reality and separation of mind from body emerged as a logical conclusion to Locke's view. For Dahlberg *et al.*, (2004), Locke's child is seen as a potential human capital that can be appropriated through the child being given appropriate skills. The metaphor "climbing the ladder" is used, where children are seen instrumentally by the state and entrepreneurs and childhood used at the first stage in the production of a stable workforce in the competitive global market. Knowledge and skills reproduce the dominant values of consumption, capitalism, individualism, competitiveness, flexibility and importance of paid work (ibid 2004). Rousseau's major contribution to pragmatism was not the "Noble Savage" theory but the educational connection he made between nature and experience. Rousseau's child is perceived as primitive innocent, chaotic, asocial and uncontrollable – a utopian vision. In order to protect the child and allow for continuity and security, adults are impelled by this image of the child to construct an environment to keep the child away from a violent, oppressive, commercialized and exploitative world (ibid, 2007). They further comment that Dewey is criticized as being too materialistic and oriented to industrial capitalism. Without regard for cultural pluralism he attempts to use education to shape a pluralistic society. In being too grounded in Enlightenment concepts, Dewey is considered not radical enough because he sees education as a cure for all structural ailments of society. Dewey's is also critiqued for being relativist and situational and the child-centeredness of progressivism has contributed to the loss of academic direction in schools.

**Behaviourism** (Nineteenth to twentieth century) has its roots in several philosophical traditions and is related to realism, materialism and their advocacy of science. Its advocates are Ivan Pavlov, John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner. Behaviourism is criticized as being unable to deal with individual consciousness. Individuals can go beyond responding to a stimulus in a pre-established and can examine alternatives and create new ones. Skinner is critiqued for belittling and limiting humanity. Skinner's

work is criticized by liberals to be conducive to justifying totalitarianism – a single totalitarian world state, serving the survival of a single culture.

**Marxism** (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) - Marxism is grounded in materialist ideas and draws on Bacon and his science as a tool. Like the lockean tradition, Marx held that human nature was malleable and that it was possible to bring about social progress through changes in the material world. New perspectives in education have arisen from Neo-Marxist theories. Frankfurt School criticized the Marxist-Leninist ossified view of material dialectics as being the answer to all needs of philosophizing. Frankfurt school focused on critical analysis of education from an interdisciplinary (history, sociology, economics and feminist studies) basis. Michael Apple (1996) used neo-Marxist analysis to school curriculum to show the ways school reproduces social class, capital accumulation, gender stratification, privileges of culturally dominant groups, and the limitations imposed by the structure of the state. The critical postmodernist Giroux (1984) has noted that Marxism has been dealt a fatal blow because the existing socialism has failed to elevate the working class to assume their envisioned role.

Roots of **existentialism** (twentieth century) can be traced back to Sophists, Sören Kierkegaard, Freidrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, Martin Büber, Jean-Paul Sarte, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleu-Ponty among others. Existentialism is considered the antidote to an over organized and bureaucratized education and over technologization. It has led to resistance to manipulative structures like religion and advertisement. Schooling is seen as a dehumanizing force that indoctrinates and steals initiative and. Some new directions like the methodological rigor of phenomenology have emerged because of the criticism of individualistic, nihilistic character of existential thought. Philosophies of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger played a crucial role in the development of existentialism, hermeneutics, deconstruction, and postmodernism. There is a stress on the lonely subjective individual man, freedom of choices and critique of modernity and its instrumentalism. Sartre the most individualistic existentialist came to align himself with Marxist theory and humanize existentialism. People need to explore their own feelings and relate ideas to their own life. A good education encourages an individual to ask questions about their existence.

Education was to lead to action and to liberation (Shor & Friere, 1986). Critics have pointed out that existentialism lacks adequate theory to deal with education and schooling. They abstract and glorify the individual out of the real life needs of individuals and the concrete lives of children which has led to the rejection of order, discipline and study.

**Postmodernism** rests on the philosophical underpinnings of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francis Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Richard Rorty and Jacques Lacan (20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries) – It's a rejection of the Enlightenment that is concerned with objective science and claims to universal values. They oppose the excesses of modernity; show concern for diversity and pluralism and interest in social movements; and have gone beyond to post-Marxian categories such as sexual, racial, class, and ethnic divisions of modern Western society. Postmodernism is seen as an incoherent philosophy consisting of diverse strains of thought. While Marxism envisions utopia; the new socialist and a more democratic society, postmodernism has no comparable vision. According to Ozmon and Craver (2003), contrary to its anti-realism claims, postmodernism embraces changes in the socioeconomic world and moves away from industrial mass production towards a post-industrial system. Radicals, who are disillusioned by the fact that socialist revolution had bypassed them, have turned to nihilism of postmodernism. Postmodernists are criticized for the jargon they use, that confuses both academics and public. They are more conscious of what they oppose than what they promote. Schooling gets politicized within postmodern critical theory. They show the same ethnocentricity as Marxists when they view all viewpoints other than their own as ideologies. Rorty (1980) argues that postmodernist leftists are afraid of complicity with bourgeois liberalism, and that they have forgotten to fear political impotence. Postmodern concern with class, gender and race is important, but their "politics of difference" and fear of liberalism has lead them to avoid the world of real politics (where the war against strong and the rich oppressing the weak and the poor are fought). In giving up democratic politics postmodern leftists run the risk of becoming cynical critics.

### **Reconsidering of the nature of human agency**

In certain philosophical traditions such as those propounded by Hegel and Marx, human agency is both a collective, historical dynamic, as well refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices, while structure refer to factors such as social class as well as religion, gender, ethnicity, sub-culture etc. that limit or influence the opportunities that individuals have. In some theories agents aim to maximize the satisfaction of their desires. Such a theory of prospective rationality underlies economics and the notion of the rational choice.

Agency is a term that refers to the role of the human actor as individual or group in directing or effectively intervening in the course of history. Liberal humanism sees the individual or subject as unified and self-determining. It therefore ascribes agency to this subject as a more or less unrestricted actor in shaping her/his own life and a more general social destiny. Marxism and other theories recognize the influence of social and economic determinants beyond the individual, offer a more qualified and complex view. “Men make their own history, but do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves” (Brooker, 1999: 1). For Marx the working class was denied agency and would only assume its role as actor in the world through the revolutionary transformation of economic and social relations inspired by class consciousness.

Non-humanist positions developed by Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, appear to deny agency. For Foucault “power” is omnipresent. Poststructuralist arguments have challenged traditional Marxist emphasis upon class as agencies of radical change, and have proved relevant to feminists and other oppositional theories interested in the strategies which render women and other subjugated peoples as “subjects” ( or agents) of their own rather than the “objects” of an imposed history.

Historically human agency has been short (minimal) and weak where action was perceived as being constrained within societal structures. However with the advent of industrial capitalism, human agency has been extended in the realm of human activity. Yet the universalizing laws of nature and society that evolved from totalizing theories of modern science has reduced human agency to passivity (Rosenau, in Young, 1992). Elitist philosophies of idealism (Aquinas, Bacon, Newton, Comte, Laplace, in Young,



1992) take precedence to volition (the power of making one's own choices).

Structuralism has brought about a quest for deep and enduring structures which pre-form natural and social behaviour. During Enlightenment, modern science was represented by rationality and freedom, which were limited to the use of theory and to design society. In order to be a fully active subject, one had to confine one's action to that which was compatible with natural structures revealed by universal law. The Newtonian world view that underlies traditional science is called "mechanistic" and is based on reductionism, determinism, materialism and a reflection-correspondence view of knowledge. It is simple, coherent and intuitive, but ignores human agency, values, creativity and evolution.

Lévi Strauss (1967) postulated deep structures in mind and society which pre-organized thought and action. Husserl also postulated deep structures which constitute and pre-shape human understanding of natural and social facts, although human beings had a creative role (Carr, 1987). Deep structures if linear in their geometry are hostile to human agency. Linearity implies that present fully determines the future. Chaos theory delegitimizes that view. In Chaos theory, nonlinear dynamics produce natural structures, the fractal geometry of which varies, depending upon their dynamical state.

Young (1992) writes that the theory of human agency can be advanced through Chaos theory that emerged in the 70s:

Chaos theory is not about disorder but about very complicated systems of order - study of complex non-linear dynamic systems of social order. It sets forth the delicate and shifting geometry of order and disorder and signals the fractal boundaries between the realm of necessity and that of agency....it identifies the limits of human agency in differing regions of a causal basin (ibid, 1992: 1).

In a world of actual, living, thinking and acting human beings, chaos theory opens up spaces for human agency in a way not possible in clock-like models of social life (Thompson, 1967). It provides empirical groundings for an exercise of human agency which locates infinite variety, plurality of centres, and the variability of postmodern sensibility – some of the emancipatory uses of postmodern knowledge processes. Rosenau (referred in Young, 1992) reminds us that postmodern critique questions the grounds for grand unified theory. Given the validity of that critique, Young wants to help design a postmodern social science in human science which affirms the

possibility of human intervention in social process but recognizes its politics and its many uncertainties and its limits.

### **Children as social actors**

Anthropology and sociology share a theoretical interest in the relationship between structure and agency. Marx in 1853 observed that people make their own history, but under circumstances shaped and transmitted from the past (Brooker, 1999:1).

Structural theories emphasize external circumstances such as economic forces, institutional arrangements, systems of belief that shape the lives of children in particular times and places. Like socialization theories these assumptions imply that their lives are moulded from outside and project passivity on the part of children. In order to modify this image, the new social studies of childhood emphasize children's agency – their capacity to help shape the circumstances in which they live. There is a fairly large body of research on children's everyday lives that emphasize their capacity as experiencing subjects who are capable of autonomous action and cultural creation. William Corsaro (2005) coined the term *interpretative reproduction* that emphasizes children's participation in cultural production and change. That children have agency in the sense of the capacity to experience, interact and make "meaning" is no longer questioned.

From the philosophical traditions have emerged differing constructions of the child (Dahlberg *et al*, 2007: 48-52).

- a) *Within the earlier childhood pedagogy* – the construction of the child produced from within the project of modernity, sharing modernity's belief in the "autonomous, stable, centred subject, who's inherent and preordained human nature is revealed through processes of development and maturity" (p 48).

*The child as knowledge, identity and culture reproducer* – This is Locke's child – the empty vessel that needs to be filled with knowledge, skills and cultural values.

*The child as innocent, in the golden age of life* – this is Rousseau's child – childhood reflected as the innocent period, in need of protection and security

*The child as labour market supply factor* – the child is seen instrumentally and childhood seen as the stage where future human resource is produced.

Investments in child-care are seen in terms of cost-effective approach for maintaining a stable, well prepared workforce.

*b) Within the new construction of childhood*

*The child as a co-constructer of knowledge, identity and culture* – emerging from social constructionist and postmodernist perspectives; the problematizing of developmental psychology, increasing rethinking of children and childhood. Children are simultaneously part of, and separate from family. Children recognized as having independent agency, their own rights as human beings and members of society.

*Children are social actors*, a social construct, constructed both for and by children; childhood as a social construction contextualized in relation to time, place, culture, and varies according to class, gender and other socio-economic conditions; children worthy of study in their own right; children having their own voices; recognition of children's resilience and resistance to power in adult-child relationship (ibid, 2007:49).

### **The modern child**

The construction of the child as produced within the project of modernity shares modernity's belief in autonomous, stable, centred, essentialized subject, whose inherent and preordained human nature is revealed through processes of development and maturity and one who can be described in terms of scientific concepts and classifications (ibid, 2007). Modernist conception atomizes and underestimates the active, innovative capacities of the child (John Locke).

Traditional modernist construction of the child has also neglected the historical and contingent nature of social action and reproduction, and has simplified a highly complex process. Here the child is peripheralized and treated as non-functional, inconsequential and a creature of habits in need of reinforcement and controlled by training. The child is appropriated by society, where the child's determined function is to be prepared to fit and contribute to an ordered, balanced society. Even Pierre Bourdieu (see Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), whose child is more active, limits children's participation and reproduction and ignores children's contributions to society.

According to Dahlberg *et al* (2007), the modernist child is socialized to internalize instrumental values. Modernist construction therefore produces both a poor, weak and passive child (as in John Locke's theory), incapable, under-developed, dependent (as in Jean Piaget's theory) and isolated (Piaget, Montessori and Rousseau) as well as one who internalizes rationality, logic, unilateral progress and one-dimensional truth found in the Enlightenment model, where the concept of emancipation is dictated by the uncomplicated notions and a dominant, privileged group.

### **The postmodern child**

Alternatively, the postmodern child and the New Sociology of Childhood breaks from individualistic doctrines and sees children's social development more than just the child's private internalization of adult skills and knowledge. There is no consolidated paradigm but an open-mindedness that looks for new theoretical and methodological developments, with the understanding that a theory is fruitful only as long as it is contested. Although considered autonomous, the child is no longer considered isolated and egocentric. As an agency, they interact with object and subject (subject—object; subject—subject relationship), and both their cognitive, affective and intuitive aspects are emphasized. For Jencks (referred in James & Prout, 2007), in the postmodern era there is a decline in commitment and trust previously generated through stable marriage and parental partnership, which in turn has changed adult relationship to children. Children have now become sites of discourses concerning stability, integration and the social bond, and are now envisioned as a form of nostalgia – a longing for past time the earlier construction which placed emphasis on the child becoming, growing and maturing – a child of promise, when futures were more predictable.

Both Jencks and Zelitzer (*ibid*, 2007) argue that children have become economically useless but emotionally priceless. The postmodern perception of a child is dynamic, rich in potential, straddling several identities and cultures. The child is strong, powerful, and competent; both fragmented and connected to adults and other children. Several newer trends have contributed to the construction of the postmodern child. Social constructionist and postmodernist perspectives within philosophy, sociology

and psychology; the problematizing of developmental psychology; the work of individual researchers; and of a number of specific childhood as a social phenomenon projects<sup>24</sup> between 1987 – 1992, at the European centre in Vienna (Qvortrup *et al.*, 1994) and the study of the everyday life of the young child - BASUN (Childhood, Society and Development) project undertaken in 1980's for the Nordic Council (Dencik, 1997) have contributed to the newer conception of the child (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 2007).

This rethinking of children and childhood has taken place in Europe, particularly Scandinavia, possibly because of the socio-economic developments (like the welfare state) and government policy initiatives in northern Europe. Scandinavian experiments in changing children's childhood has promoted rethinking inter-relationships between parents, children and the state while traditional formulations have constructed childhood in relationship to their interactions with parents. In Scandinavia today children and parents are treated as independent subjects with separate legal rights. Hence the children are ready to be extracted from the family conceptually and be constructed as individuals and as a social group.

According to James and Prout (2007), one of the features of the new paradigm of the Sociology of Childhood, is that children are both part of, but also separate from, the family, with their own interests that may be apart from those of parents and adults. Furthermore within this notion children have a recognized and independent place in society, with their own rights as individual human beings and complete members of society. Psychological individualism has given way to seeing children as a sociological group, influenced by sociological factors. Childhood is understood not as a preparatory or marginal state but as a component of the structure of society.

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<sup>24</sup> The Childhood Project was an integral part of the European Centre's *Programme on Childhood*, which was triggered off by an expert meeting on *Trends in Child Welfare: Experiences with and Alternatives to Compulsory Custodial Care* (Sätra Bruk, Sweden, 1986). The Childhood Project was initiated in 1987 which laid the foundation for a seminar on *Childhood Implications for Child Care Policies*, (Hepworth, H. Ph (ed) (1989), *Canadian Seminar on Childhood Implications for Child Care Policies*, Vienna: European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research) took place in Gananoque, Canada in June, 1988. The childhood project officially ended in September 1992 with an International conference titled: *Childhood as a Social Phenomena – Lessons from an International Research Project* (Eurosocal Report 47.) in Billind-Denmark. (cited from Qvortrup, J. *et al.*, 1994, *Childhood Matters – Social Theory, Practice and Politics*, European Centre Vienna, Avebury).

Some of the other features of the new paradigm recognize that: a) childhood is a social construction, constructed both for and by children – while childhood is a biological fact, the way in which it is understood is socially determined; b) childhood as a social construction is always contextualized in relation to time, place and culture, and varies according to class, gender and other socio-political-economic-cultural conditions; c) there is neither a natural nor universal childhood nor a natural universal child, but many childhoods and children; children as social actors have agency and participate in constructing and determining their own lives and lives of those around them and societies in which they live, and contribute to learning as agents building on experiential knowledge; d) children's social relationships and culture are worthy of study in their own right; children have their own voice and should be listened to in order to involve them in democratic dialogue, decision making and understanding childhood; e) in the exercise of power and love between parents and children, it is important to account for how power is maintained and used, as well as children's resilience and resistance to that power (Dahlberg, *et al*, 2007; James & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, J. *et al.*, 1994).

Within this paradigm children emerge as co-constructors. The young child is understood as a unique complex and individual subject, rather than an object that can be reduced to separate measurable categories, and isolated from processes that are very complex and interrelated. Malaguzzi (1994) and Rinaldi (2013) comment that this construction creates a child who is rich in potential, strong, powerful and competent. In this construction of the rich child, learning is not an individual cognitive act undertaken almost in isolation within the head of the child. Learning is a cooperative and communicative activity, in which children construct knowledge, make meaning of the world, together with adults and other children – hence an active co-constructor (Vygotsky in Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007). Learning is not the transmission of knowledge towards preordained outcomes, nor is the child a passive receiver and reproducer. Children learn all knowledge known to them in the process of self and social construction and are active agents in their socialization, co-constructed with their peers. Hence the child is active, competent with ideas and theories worth listening to and merit scrutiny, questioning and challenge. The child exists not only in the family,

but also in the world outside as a citizen with citizen's rights and responsibilities (Dahlberg, *et al.*, 2007).

This paradigmatic shift from modernist to postmodernist conception of children, has resulted in no longer viewing the child determined by its environment as an essentialized subject but as a dynamic subject whose identity is constructed in a plethora of locales, who is a social actor having agency, and who participates in constructing and determining his/her own life, while contributing to learning as an active agent.

Simultaneous to our construction of the dynamic child of postmodernity contributing to learning as an active subject, Kincheloe and Steinberg (2004) poses other side of the coin, by problematizing what they call *The Dilemma of the Postmodern Child*. In the world of reality which has collapsed into a world of representation (Baudrillard, 1984) - of hyper-reality, children are exposed and enveloped in a commercial universe that is sexually explicit which has adult content. There is an apparent empowerment of children as all knowing subjects. This leads to the subversion, simultaneously of contemporary children's consciousness of themselves as incompetent and dependent entities, as well as, nurture a new breed of – kids with adult-knowledge. The backlash reflects in horror movies where independent and self-sufficient youths with inappropriate insight into adult world are depicted as evil monsters that must be destroyed; or comedies that offer a more subtle and nuanced but equally hostile portrayal of contemporary children as unwanted, alienating, and guilt-producing problems for adults.

Kincheloe (referred in King, 2006) locates the parental ambivalence and children's alienation in the context of complex social forces that need to be recognized and addressed in order to heal the breach. The traditional notions of “protecting” children on the one hand and “controlling” them on the other must make way for new ways of parenting, teaching, and mentoring children that will provide both children and adults with the necessary skills to make *critical reflective* sense, of the overflow of information and advertising submerging them. *Media literacy* becomes fundamental

for negotiating what Steinberg and Kincheloe (2004) see as an irreversible postmodern social reality.

Henry Giroux (referred in King, 2006) comments that the Disney cultural productions have a 'hidden curriculum' that promotes racist and sexist stereotypes. In addition they create cultural commodities that revise history to obscure imperialism and promote conformity while they discourage democratic political activity. These cultural commodities erase "boundaries between entertainment, education, and commercialization" in order to sell more products.

### **Construction of globalized views of childhood, child development and learning, and its politicization**

Traditional critiques have foregrounded the problems with uniformity and coherence in relation to the concept of childhood. It was not until early 1900s that childhood was conceptualized as universal - when the middle class communities determined an identity for children, thus constructing a "modern view of childhood". Childhood became constructed and reconstructed into age-periods and took on a public identity (Hendricks, in Fleer *et al*, 2009).

Construction of "childhood" evolved over time from Naturalism, Romanticism and Evangelicalism. Wage-earning labour got transformed into a period of "childhood", the term "juvenile delinquent" was created, a "child study" movement was founded, "children of the nation" was conceived as a public phrase, and finally "children of the welfare state" was invented. According to Henricks (*ibid*, 2009), modern childhood was "legally, legislatively, socially, medically, psychologically, educationally and politically institutionalized. Kincheloe (*ibid*, 2009) argues that along with the institutionalization of childhood came a way for describing children in universal terms.

By undermining an appreciation of the diversity and complexity of childhood, such viewpoints have often equated difference with deficiency, and sociocultural construction with the natural. (Kincheloe, cited from Fleer *et al*, 2009:4).

Child study, child psychology, social work for children and childhood education evolved and demanded rigorous forms of analysis. Today each of these disciplines criticizes the way children and childhood has been positioned within their field. The



critique emerged across early childhood education, developmental psychology, history, and cultural studies that suggest that “childhood” is a cultural construction. Cannella (referred in Fleer *et al*, 2009) notes that much of this literature states that the “child” as a construct is reified as the “other” and is seen as innocent, dependent (needy, unable to speak for themselves, vulnerable, victims), and cute (objects, play-things, to be watched and discussed).

More recent postmodern studies of childhood by Cannella and Kincheloe (ibid, 2009) take an interdisciplinary, critical and international view of “childhood”, where children have been positioned as central agents within the studies. Cultural studies scholars suggest that the discourses can be used to generate childhood studies that critiques itself, attempt to decolonize, and struggle to construct partnerships with those who are younger. Others have argued that critical cultural studies seek to emphasize the political dimensions of culture and society and to examine the relationship among culture, knowledge and power relations to children (Fleer *et al*, 2009). Postmodern critiques of “childhood” in putting forward the notion of “postmodern childhood studies” emphasize the need for the disruption of the adult-child dualisms that predetermine people and generate power for one group over the other. This line of critique moves beyond simply rejecting dualisms, but constructs the child as a political agent. In challenging universalism, postmodern childhood studies attempt to generate new possibilities for children. According to Fleer *et al*, (2009), researchers have critiqued “children” and “childhood” in relation to policy development, the children’s rights movement, representations in art and popular print such as cards, magazines, education, entertainment and advertising.

Simultaneous to the scholarly critique of the cultural construction of “children” and “childhood”, the corporate world has actively used the construct of “childhood” to create, sustain, and legitimate a type of consumer ethics that has come to dominate the world of childhood. Steinberg and Kincheloe (ibid, 2009) call this phenomena “the corporate construction of childhood”. The corporate world has redefined childhood in relation to marketing criteria. Market research by the corporate world has shown that in Western and Asian communities, children are enjoying a “kidworld” or what Steinberg and Kincheloe (2002) call “Kinder-culture” that covertly run parallel to the

“adult world”. Kincheloe argues that children turn their technology-enhanced isolation into a form of power, where they soon learn to know more than their parents about different corporate brands. Children are enjoying the power of generating their own discourse, and technological knowledge expertise – thus problematizing the traditional beliefs of “childhood” as innocent, cute or in need of protection. Kincheloe (2002) argues that the traditional notions of childhood as a time of innocence and adult dependency have been challenged by children’s access to corporate-produced popular culture. Corporatization of childhood had led children of the South and East to be located both in the modern and the traditional ethnic space. A hybridity of cultures (a form of colonization) prevails where dualities such as “galabiyya vs jeans” or “sermon vs TV is replaced by “the sheikh with a cell phone”

The global-local nexus ensures corporate hegemony. Children’s games are influenced by their economic and cultural context. Decreasing frequency of games and children’s reliance on readymade toys revealed that the local meaning of childhood is being replaced by that which is introduced through free market economy and globalization. Nsamenang (referred in Fler *et al*, 2009) mentions the global impact of poor country world views of childhood, particularly child development. He suggests that there is a need to recognize cultural conceptualizations of “childhood” and “child development theories” and the practices that flow from these views. Nsamenang further states that human rights and development community are not aware that many Majority World children “hide” their true identity because contemporary “early childhood care and education” (ECCE) services instil shame in them for being different from the normative Western child. He further suggests that global childhood should be characterized by diversity. The image of the “global child” is Western-derived that pathologizes all “other” images of childhood. The development community is promoting in the majority World, a product of European and North American culture, which represents only a minority of the world’s early childhoods in a multicultural universe.

Childhood labour is another contested area. While scholars (Goncu, Ozer and Ahioğlu, in Fler *et al*, 2009) from Western cultural contexts actively question such practices, other scholars suggest that views of “childhood” and “childhood labour” are framed

within local communities. These scholars assert that Eurocentric or middle-class views of what constitutes work should be culturally located and not globalized. They further want to promote locally relevant models, and critique the assumptions about how “childhood” that is conceptualized in discussions about “child labour”. They argue that economic interdependence is common in low-income households, and this influences values about family and children’s and women’s places in specific terms.

Globalizing pressures that try to ensure that all children around the world are raised in similar ways stem from the idea that local practices are counter-productive if they do not fit well with a supposedly universal set of markers for good development.

Criticisms arising from “deconstruction of psychology” by Erica Burman (2007) or “the interpretative reproduction” approach formulated by William Corsaro (2005) see diversity in societal practices and traditions as central. They all oppose the prevailing Eurocentric and North-American notion of “childhood” and development.

### **Intersections between Western and Indian Childhood discourses**

In the following paragraphs I develop some of the intersections between discourses on children from India and those found in the West in order to show that both in India and the West children have been marginalized in sociological discourses up to now.

In both the West and in India plurality of childhoods have been acknowledged in discourses on childhood. Indian sociological studies (details of authors given in the next paragraph) document multiplicity of childhoods which in turn depends on varying factors such as region, religion, caste, social class, gender, family structure, etc.

Although childhood in India is located in various domains, identity per se is perceived as a more stable and unified construct, and not yet been deconstructed as provisional or contingent as in the postmodern discourses located in the West. In Western discourses, the essentialism found in the modernist structuralist understanding of the child, and the Universalist construction of “childhood” has recently been deconstructed by social constructionists. The modernist notions of the “child” and “childhood” are being substituted by and the notion of “many childhoods”. Children are seen in Western social constructionist’s discourses as located in several realms and

in an array of communities. Here the notion of identities of children, as stable and unified is shifting to being viewed as contingent and provisional.

Banerjee (2003) documents the trend in scholarship with regard to children and childhoods. Recent scholarship on South Asian history addressed the themes of rearing and socialization of children in the context of the role of the “ideal” mother and the “good” wife (Borthwick; Chakrabarty; Forbes; Sarkar, in Banerjee, 2003). The existing literature on children and childhood in India has focused on issues of child labour and state policies (Burra ; Weiner, in Banerjee, 2003). There is a path breaking psychoanalytic study of the history of growing up as a child that locates the Indian Hindu childhood in indigenous discourses of mythology and tradition (Kakar, 1981). Recently historians have produced important works on children’s literature and colonialism (Bandyopadhyay in Banerjee, 2003) on rearing of sons and the discourse of the “new” family (Bose in Chatterjee, 1995); on socialization and bringing up of the girl child (Bagchi, 1998). Banerjee (2003) notes that unlike the Western historical literature (Aries; Cunningham; De Mause; Hendrick; Galbraith; Sommerville; Steedman; Wishy, in Banerjee, 2003), South Asia still does not have a social or cultural history of family life with children as its primary focus

Bisht (2008) in her article *Who is A Child? The Adults’ Perspective within Adult-Child Relationship in India* problematizes ‘naturally occurring’ power dynamics within adult-child relationships, within the discourses she has located her study in. She writes that while in the West, the feminist gender-relations theory has been in currency the last three decades, the power relations in adult-child relations are being systematically explored only recently. Educational literature in India shows similar concerns about marginalization and subordination of the child (Raman, 2000).

Bisht (2008) shows the similarities between Western and Indian understandings of agency in the child, with children in both communities being seen largely as immature, incompetent, dependent and passive, occupying a subordinate position with respect to the adults (John Locke - 1631-1704). The dominant culture in India is that born of Hinduism into which the minorities have got acculturated and assimilated to various degrees. Ideologically children were being perceived as dependent and incompetent

and were marginalized within adult-child relationship. The child is attributed ignorance and passivity by the teacher. While there is a growing concern for children's rights, Indian children occupy a subordinate position in the traditional hierarchical Indian society.

In the recent discourses in both Western and India, childhood experiences have been problematized (see Bisht, 2008; and Brannen & O'Brien, 1996). In Indian discourses, children are simultaneously perceived to be indulged as well as controlled and supervised by adults and parents. Some studies associate early childhood with divinity and purity and goodness. Traditionally, parents perceived children on an Axis of Human–Divine (Misiri, in Bisht, 2008), and a gift from god. Child development is perceived as an organic process, regulated by nature and God (beyond parental control), the shaping of a girl's body is never brought to the level of independent discourse - as gender didactics or apprenticeship of culture (Kotalová, 1993).

Kakar (1981) in his classic book *The Inner World – A Psycho-analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, writes that infants in India experience mother's immediacy and responsiveness, and emerge into childhood with a belief that the world is benign and the people in his environment can be counted to act on his behalf. There is an emotional capital built up during Indian infancy that manifests itself in the trusting friendliness with a quick readiness to form attachments, abundant warmth, intimacy and vitality that characterize the social relations in India. The metaphor of "the good mother" is mythologically represented by every female goddess *Lakshmi*, *Saraswati*, *Parvati* etc. "providing life-giving reassurance through her pervasive presence" (Kakar, 1981: 84).

Maternal nurturing is portrayed by minor deities as *Annapurna*, "portrayed as a fair woman standing on a lotus holding a rice bowl, or by the heavenly cow *Surabhi* who gives an eternal fountain of milk" (Kakar, 1981: 84). The dominant modality of social relations in India is seen in the inter-dependence between family members. The indulgence enjoyed in infancy and childhood has been observed in Western studies of Indian childhood as "Training in self-reliance and achievement are conspicuous by their absence. Children are not encouraged to be independent" (Hitchcock, *ibid*,

1981:86), or “Family life tends to develop an acute sense of dependence with a strong sense of security, and a clear sense of responsibility without an accompanying sense of personal initiative or decision” (Bowlby, *ibid*, 1981: 86).

The extended family is the immediate society encountered by the Indian child. Its members engage in many activities necessary for its cohesion and survival as a cooperative unite. As an organization it has a division of labour that articulates role relationship on the basis of traditionally elaborated hierarchical principles (that have conserved Indian traditions) of age and sex. Elders have formal authority (entitled to obedience and compliance) over the younger person – men having greater authority than women. This principle of hierarchical ordering extends beyond family to the schools. Kakar notes that in Indian text-book analysis studies undertaken by him, there was not a single instance of egalitarian authority relationships cast in a fraternal democratic mode. Indians view “ideal superior” as one who acts in a nurturing way so that his subordinate either anticipates his wishes or accepts them without questioning” (Kakar, 1981: 119). Compliance is evoked by providing for the subordinates needs. Simultaneous to the manipulative interaction between superiors and subordinates, Bisht (2008) asserts in her more recent study that children are marginalized in the adult-child power structure and often excluded from decision making about their own welfare and activities, and have little space for negotiating within the power structure. Younger children are supervised and guided, whereas older children are considered competent and given more freedom but guided. According to Vasanta (*ibid*, 2008) the power dynamics between parents and children as well as teachers and students are completely overlooked because they are considered natural.

In earlier Western discourses, there was a perceived indifference to children by adults, and a widespread mistreatment and abuse of children in earlier times. In the current Western conceptions, children have become precious and emotionally valuable. This has led to increased adult surveillance of children. There is a simultaneous growth of parental duties, obligations and responsibilities towards children. In the West absolute parental authority is no longer the basis on which generational and gender relations are organized in domestic institutions. Children’s vulnerability and need for protection co-exist along with discourses of children’s rights to empowerment and self-

determination. The new construction of childhood has led to a lessening in parental patriarchal rights over children. This is also seen in recent Indian discourses. Bisht (2008) documents also, that there is a lessening of patriarchal control of parents over children - growing democratic tendencies in the adult-child relationship, in her study located in India.

Bisht (2008) makes a comparison of Western and Hindu childhood. According to her Western conceptualization of childhood (constructed by Rousseau) shows distinct and clear boundaries between child and adult worlds, while in the Indian context, the boundaries are not so rigid. In both rural and urban educated middle classes in India, weak adult-child differentiation has been documented (Raman, 2000). Kotalová (1993) documents that the child's maturation is generally perceived as gradual understanding of the rules relevant for association with others. Children are not encouraged to develop a particular skill or proficiency apart from this. Although cultural marking of children as male and female by linguistic differentiation and different treatment of the body starts early, deliberate sexual segregation is minimal at this stage because childhood (*shishukal*) is equated with the state of non-reason (*obuj*) (ibid, 1993).

Kakar (1981) says that in the fourth or the fifth year, Indian childhood widens suddenly for the male child "from the intimate cocoon of maternal protection to the unfamiliar masculine network woven by demands and tension" (p.126). There is less unchecked benevolent indulgence and new inflexible standards of absolute obedience and conformity to familial and social norms. The liberty the male child is allowed during earlier childhood becomes increasingly curtailed (Dube, 1978). Boys are prepared for work outside the home and work on the farm alongside the male adult while the girls are prepared for work inside the home besides their mother and trained for their future roles as care-takers of household (Meynert, 1984). At the advanced age of early childhood in India, cultural expectations of boys and girls begin to diverge radically. The Indian daughter is insulated at the age of four or five from abrupt severance from her mother and other women in her household, although given "grown up" adult tasks and responsibilities, and learns to be like her mother. After the age of 6 or 7, the "unknowing" and irresponsible child enters the cycle of life stages which frame a person's moral responsibility to others. The conception of "an individual as a

unique being, autonomous and self-fulfilling” does not enter into local thinking (Kotalová, 1993).

However Kumar notices a change in the life of the child (who lived earlier embedded in the world of adult activity) “due to macro-processes and economic changes like immigration, breaking up of joint families and scholarization” (Kumar, in Bisht, 2008: 5). This blurring of child and adult worlds is also documented in the West by Ariès (1962), where the child is seen as a little adult. According to Corbet (1985). Ariès view’s childhood as a fairly new concept:

It did not exist at all in the medieval period, grew into existence in the upper classes in the 16th and 17th centuries, solidified itself somewhat more fully in the 18th century upper classes, and finally mushroomed on the scene of the 20th century in both the upper and lower classes. But, in his argument, childhood did not really penetrate the great masses of the lower and lower-middle classes until very late 19th and early 20th centuries (ibid, 1985:1).

Ariès sees the progressive separation of children and adults as a part of more general cultural changes due to the change of the extended family to the isolated nuclear family that has resulted in the separations by social class and race in modern society. Bisht (2008) documents some dissimilarity between the earlier Western notion and that of Indian:

...that while in the West, individualism is valued and the self is seen as bounded and autonomous, in India “familism<sup>25</sup>” is a reality and children “belong” to their parents. The notion of bounded unitary self is not familiar to basic Indian Psyche (ibid, 2008: 5).

The symbolic construction of childhood in India as in Bangladesh is through two overlapping systems of organization – *agnation*, related to or descended from the father's or male side and *affinity* - imagined, spoken and lived on the ground as interpenetrating categories and arrangements of belonging (Kotalová, 1993: 16). She adds that the local understanding of “the understanding” and of knowledge in general has no other context than a capacity to relate to people. Casual attention is given to child’s performance directed to such motor and verbal skills as enable it to reach others.

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<sup>25</sup> A form of social structure in which the needs of the family as a group are more important than the needs of any individual family member.



The previous paragraphs on the intersections between discourses on children from the South (India as a case in point) and the North show the marginalization of children in sociological discourses on children. In both the North and the South, there is a perceived emergent decrease in patriarchal control of children by adults, with adult-child relations becoming more democratic and participatory, manifested in greater negotiation of control by children. The “Century of the Child”<sup>26</sup> notable for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the new Sociology of Childhood has brought children into the arena of International politics and academic debates in both the North and the South.

Having explored discourses within childhood studies in this chapter, I shall explore the implications for childhood, pedagogy and educational research in the postmodern in the next chapter.

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<sup>26</sup> The 20th century, declared at its start to be the “Century of the Child” by Swedish author Ellen Key, who saw an unparalleled increase of state activity and expert knowledge on child-rearing on both sides of the Atlantic. Children were seen as a crucial national resource whose care could not be left to families alone.

#### **4. Towards an intertwinement of the progressive threads of the modern and post-modern conceptualisations**

The previous chapters have focused on how the differing conditions of modernity and postmodernity that have affected the construction of children and childhood are viewed and how the contemporary discourses in the study of childhood has crystallized into what is called the New Sociology of Childhood. This chapter addresses the third and the fourth aims of this essay, related to implications that emerge in conceptualizing children and childhood, pedagogy and educational research in the postmodern; and the problems that arise from postmodern constructs for Education.

The New Sociology of Childhood constructivist approaches that claim children's autonomy rights coupled with the child as competent, self-controlled human agent are closely related to the discourses emerging at the boundaries of modernism - postmodernism. This in turn has opened up spaces for a more dynamic pedagogy that crosses geographical boundaries and the postmodern-deconstructionist educator, generating a plurality of educational dialogues, practices, ends and values. The new post-Enlightenment, postmodernist sensibilities in research contribution to educational research, challenges the epistemological and methodological basis of both positivist and post-positivist/interpretivist qualitative and quantitative researchers.

Even while postmodernism opens up spaces for new sensibilities, there are problems of incoherent subjectivity, moral, ethical and linguistic relativism, unconstrained pluralism, epistemological ambivalence, political ambiguity and the notion of the end of Education as a project. The nihilism in postmodern discourses presents a threat for those who are located in the Enlightenment values. Western Enlightenment based on

rational thought that has given way to Postmodern Enlightenment based on socially constructed reality where the self is an illusion, and eternal truths appear to be inseparable from the cultures that create them and the languages in which they are stated – both sharing the common goal of liberation.

The following text is divided into three parts: the first part addresses the implication for issues related to childhood, pedagogy and educational research; the second part where the problems presented for education by postmodern constructs are discussed; and the third part which deals with how critical postmodernism tries to synthesize desirable values located in the modern and postmodern. Finally the concluding paragraphs summarize the essence of the entire essay.

### **Issues related to childhood**

In the last two or three decades the sociology of childhood has gained increasing attention and has triggered a number of empirical studies as well as theoretical disputes which started in the Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries. Up to now children and childhood were approached from a socialization perspective – where the family is considered to be the agency of primary socialization and the first focal socialization agency. The emergence of the new childhood sociological paradigm ran parallel to the feminist critique of sociological traditions. Childhood sociologists (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2005; James & Prout, 2007; Corsaro, 2005) attacked the “adultocentric” approach and the “separatist view” of sociology towards children. Hence an interdisciplinary approach was adopted by childhood sociologists, connecting history, cultural studies, ethnomethodology and pedagogy.

The new Sociology of Childhood is organized around two central discussions (Corsaro, 2005).

a) ***The child as social actor*** – focusing on everyday life and ways of children orient themselves in society. It engages with the cultural performances and the social worlds they construct, and take part in. The theory and research methodology approach children as active participants and members of society from infancy onwards. Hence

current Sociology of Childhood is distinctly different from the established concepts of socialization research and development psychology.

b) *The generational order* –centring on the socio-structural and socio-theoretical questions connected with social equality and social order in society (which categorizes their members by age and segregates them in many respects viz. rights, deeds, economical participation, ascribed needs etc.). The categorization of societal members by age is far from being an innocent representation of natural distinctions, but a social construction deeply connected to other dimensions of social inequality. Social and economic changes and socio-political interventions become central topics of childhood sociology.

While childhood research still focuses on socialization practices, there is a new approach where analysing socialization processes means to reconstruct the historical and culturally varying conceptions, processes and institutions of disciplining and upbringing of children. The strategies of “habitus” and the practices of status production and reproduction are considered. The sociology of inequality and sociology of family and private life are important fields for childhood sociologists. Children’s own action, their resistance, cooperation, and collective action among peers have to be taken into account. De-legitimizing western middle class socialization that mask inequality and the interest of social order, are important tasks.

In this sub-chapter, my arguments have gone beyond the implications emerging from the new Sociology of Childhood to the postmodern understanding of childhood and have blurred the boundaries between these two emergent spaces. Within the New Sociology of Childhood, children have conceptually been liberated from their passive dependency on adults and have been elevated to the status of social actors (James and Prout, 1990). The “Child Question” is not only taking over the “Woman Question”, but is in conflict with it. Oakley (referred in Brannen & O’Brian, 1996) writes that Women’s Studies and the Women’s Movement originated through women’s own realization of their position in society and their desire to change it. The uncovering of children’s perspectives and positions is complicated by the power relations of those who claim to be working on the behalf of women. Women are being displaced

gradually from the International arena that they had been occupying since the Women's decade and children are being brought in to the centre of the International stage since the International year of the child (1979). Furthermore, the emphasis on the urgent need for nurturance and protection of the child delimits women's possibility to break free from traditional roles and institutions such as motherhood and family.

Within childhood research there is a consciousness about the invisibility of children's perspectives and voices, and the acknowledgement that children's worlds so far have been known only through adult accounts. Despite the focus on the autonomous space attributed to the child who is located in a variety of domains, researchers, professionals and policy-makers are still enclosing children conceptually in socialization terms within families and schools, making their relationship to the wider social world invisible (Qvortrup, 1994). There is an acknowledgement that the boundary between families and the outside world are permeable. Researches on young people has tended to locate them in institutional contexts and subcultures, while the household domain, which is a key arena in which transitions to adulthood takes place, has been neglected. There is a consciousness about the ways in which researchers have expressed their adult-oriented approach to family life, through their neglect of children as participants, because children are assumed to be immature and perceived to lack necessary competence to provide reliable responses.

The postmodern condition complicates the concept of family. Beck and David Morgan (referred in Gillies, 2003) and Judith Stacey (1996) believe that in the contemporary societies the postmodern family shows a great variety in family relationships and has moved away from the single dominant family type. The old divisions and certainties about the concept of family are breaking down. Families are no longer clear entities and reconstituted families, involving all sorts of people and family membership goes beyond the biological and legal ties. Traditional nuclear family is being replaced by family diversity, changing gender roles and changing relationship between parents and children. There are implications for the way children are experienced in the light of changes in the conceptualization of family. According to Beck and Morgan (referred in Gillies, 2003), there is a nostalgia for relationships characterized by permanence and stability. This is reflected in the significance accorded to children in post-traditional

age. Adults experiencing frail and insecure nature of intimate relationships with adults, seek to establish a more reliable bond with their child. Smart *et al* (ibid, 2003) note that children who are reflexive agents are not to be viewed as victims, and family breakdown can be seen as offering greater opportunities for the democratisation of relationships between children and parents. The cultural space for reflection enables children to become more actively involved in family negotiations and decision making, and are able to participate in matters that affect themselves. Contemporary experiences of family as fluid and unstable are compensated by greater respect and autonomy accorded to individual members. In opposition to the previous notion, it is argued that the principles of discussion and negotiation associated with the “democratic family” resonate with the White middle class, while pathologizing alternative understanding and practices of working class and ethnic minority parents (Edwards *et al*, ibid, 2003).

Brannen and O’Brien (1996) note that ethically, researchers are still legally required to protect children’s status as minors. On account of children having become emotionally valuable in the postmodern era, increased adult scrutiny and surveillance of children have “discovered” child abuse and sexual abuse of children. The new construction of childhood has led to simultaneously a lessening in parental patriarchal rights over children as well as a growth of parental duties, obligations and responsibilities towards children. Absolute parental authority is no longer the basis on which generational and gender relations are organized in domestic and institutional life. Discourses of children’s vulnerability and need for protection continue to co-exist alongside discourses of children’s rights to empowerment and self-determination. There is an acknowledgement that children exist in a multiplicity of communities in which cultural claims used in one community is often used to justify denial of children’s rights and thereby conflicting with human rights norms. Therefore a key challenge here is to construct a conception of rights which promotes responsibility, trust and meaning between children and adult in their plurality of difference. Hence difference, change and fluidity in contemporary (postmodern) life becomes one of the starting points in the analysis of childhood (James & Prout, 2007), who criticize the portrayal of

children as being passively socialized by monolithic social institutions of family state and education.

In research, contexts are seen to have shifted from the hierarchically organized family to the less hierarchical peer group setting. The child is seen to find multiple expressions of the “self” through engagement with different sets of people in different social groups (ibid, 2007). Since children have a greater range of contexts to negotiate, they require skills to move easily between these different contexts and to integrate these into their “self-identity” (Clark, in Brannen & O’Brien, 1996). With increasing breakdown of parental partnership and increasing complexities of new partnerships in the postmodern era, children have to negotiate moves between a number of homes and life courses.

Children are also increasingly becoming a political issue. Due to the new perception of children as key social agents, there is a concern about the material rights of children in developed and developing countries. There is a need to take children as statistical units and treat children as key social actors. Demographically, children are a scarce resource in contemporary times, because of an increase in the aging population and a decrease in childbirth. They vary greatly in their access to the material and cultural resources that are needed to negotiate the complexities of contemporary life. It has been noted that social distribution of wealth shows a disproportionate allocation of material and social resources to families with children, who are therefore at risk of poverty. Number of children living in poverty is underestimated, since households are defined in terms of parents rather than children. Harrop and Moss (ibid, 1996) write that there is a polarization between “work-rich” households (with adequate labour making them economically viable) and “work-poor” households. Children in the developed world are experiencing “time poverty” or “parenting deficit” as well as material disadvantages. James and Prout (2007), note that for professionals involved with children this mismatch between the “real” and the “ideal” is not news, but what is new is the extent to which the “ideal” is being reassessed within the public domain.

The emerging “postmodern childhood studies” offer a reaction against “modern childhood studies” and modernist belief that science will reveal the nature of the child,

and what the child best needs. “Modern” views are housed in a discourse of “truth” about children’s helplessness - constituting childhood within a dichotomous hierarchal relationship with adults (as the other), define children as deficient and as an oppressed group. Like all truths this belief rests on the power relationships between groups of people (children and adults in this instance). The discourse of developmental appropriateness, power resides with adults. Child development discourses have as its underlying premise the deficient child, the privileged adult and social regulations (Cannella in Wilson, 2009). Adult privilege like white privilege is an invisible and unacknowledged force that prioritizes adult culture over child culture by accepting adult entitlement as normal.

There are tensions inherent in the worldviews of developmental psychology and postmodern childhood studies (Walkerdine in Wilson, 2009). In the former, childhood is understood in terms of a journey towards completeness, towards adulthood. In the latter, children are looked at in their present state, “blurring the line between childhood as an unfinished, and adulthood as a finished, state”. Piaget being a case in point when he observed the so called generic expression of child behaviour in the early twentieth century, that he generalized to all cultures and historical eras. Postmodern childhood studies challenges these views by denaturalizing childhood, and acknowledging the complexities of human lives.

In order to conceptualize childhood differently postmodern childhood scholars look at a distinctive set of problems and issues surrounding childhood and its interpretation.

- 1) The contexts of power, ideology, and history surrounding a specific childhood.
- 2) The material conditions of children.
- 3) The accepted beliefs of childhood in popular culture.
- 4) The struggle of children and adults to engage in a non-hierarchical connection (Canella, cited from Wilson, 2009).

Many postmodern studies of childhood contend that younger human beings (and children) are the largest group of people who have been “othered”, marginalized, and colonized. Postmodern childhood studies scholars see themselves as different from traditional early childhood scholars in that they believe childhood is a socially constructed phenomenon and that there is no such thing as a universal child/childhood.



They also view individual children as competent social actors who are worthy of being studied.

While postmodern childhood studies scholars reject the idea of children being pigeonholed into a growth/development chart, they do believe that children share commonalities and that some of these are biological. They believe that instead of concentrating on the similarities among children, childhood is best understood within localized and diverse frameworks as it is too fractured to look at as a whole. In order to make sense of childhoods, childhood scholars James, Jencks and Prout (referred in Wilson, 2009) have summarized three models of childhood that can help frame childhood research:

- 1) In the first model – the “social actor” model, children are viewed as competent social actors, with much to contribute to the world around them.
- 2) The second model is the “childhood space” perspective, which examines how childhood is structured in a social space – especially spaces when they are free from adult gaze and when not. This model is concerned between childhood and adulthood and with how these boundaries blur.
- 3) The final model is the “socially constructed childhood in which childhood is given to children by adults who construct it for them, and in turn children reconstruct what is given.

The general ideology in these models is the idea that children shape culture as much as culture shapes children.

I conclude the childhood issues by saying that at the global level there has been an increasing discontent with how children have been named, reified, and measured.

Prevailing Eurocentric and North-American notions of “childhood” and “development” and benchmarks about progression viewed as universal, influence how “childhood” is constructed and how “development” is theorized. Little has been done to disrupt the colonization of families who have children who do not fit the Eurocentric milestones and who are asked to change their family practices in order to be “ready for learning.” An emerging field of global-local childhood studies are trying to build a dialectical relationship between global and local contexts to provide insight s into how different countries address contemporary *global politics shaping local*

*childhoods*. In this paradigm dichotomies such as global-local, mind-body, nature nurture, or society-subject etc. are rejected. Children's development is seen as the intertwined nature of both general (species specific) and local (socio-culturally specific) aspects of human development (Fleer, *et al.*, 2009).

### **Issues related to pedagogy**

Following the construction of childhood within the postmodern, I try to discuss issues related to pedagogy that is located in the postmodern. Traditional and mainstream understandings of pedagogy and education have been deconstructed by comparative educationists in the 70s, and the boundaries between education, pedagogy and socialization have been blurred by educational ethnographers. In this sub-chapter I discuss how postmodernist discourses manifest within pedagogy as practiced predominantly in the formal school system. Different educational sociologists have commented on the different dimensions of pedagogical practices as located in the modern and the postmodern. Parker (1997) makes a distinction between modernist and postmodernist educational theory. Modernist educational theory has a vocabulary of means, efficiency, universals, law-like generalization and bureaucracy. It includes distinct hierarchies of the detached academic researcher, the manager, the scientist, the bureaucrat, the inspector and the therapist, who are placed in-charge of administrating the domain of their expertise and authority. Its institutions are managed and hierarchical. The actors operate discretely and their control over their hierarchies is guaranteed by appeal to the higher authority of natural and universal laws. In describing itself, modern educational theory uses terms such as “positivism”, “scientism” and “technical - rationality.”

The postmodernist educational theory is one of autonomy, emancipation, uniqueness, democracy, ends and values (ibid, 1997). It consists of the autonomous, reflective teacher - researcher who is committed to the improvement and emancipation of her work - context. This teacher or researcher is a member of a reflexive community where hierarchies are flattened or eliminated under democratic commitments. Here, the actors defend collectivism, democratic ideals and unique distinctiveness. In describing itself postmodernist educational theorists use terms such as “reflective

teaching”, “action research”, “critical thinking” etc. Hence modernist and postmodernist stances come from different world views.

Postmodern reflexivity requires teachers and students to become deconstructive in their readings of educational texts. The teacher-deconstructor is the postmodern educationalist. According to McLaren (ibid, 1997), postmodern teaching practices are acts of dissonance and interventions as students are ritually inscribed into the codes of the dominant culture, and acts of refusal to accept existing relations of power and the creation of subaltern counter-publics. The effect of a deconstructive education enable students and teachers to make visible the textual, political and ideological devices and perspectives inherent in all texts.

Parker (1997) further comments that students and teachers informed by postmodernism will recognize that each position, each commitment or belief is contingent. They also understand that the truth of narratives conceal a politics and an ethics. The overt story in the narrative hides a covert message. Postmodern teachers recognize that they have a choice in education. Every decision to teach a particular way or organize one’s classroom would involve endless levels of choice. Teacher education courses will need to equip students with the deconstructive manoeuvres by means of which they will be able to withdraw from realism and engage in creative, literary writings.

Postmodernism generates a plurality of educational dialogues, practices, ends and values. This will involve educational institutions where the linearity of a means-end frame work gives way to a multiplicity of styles co-existing and offering the potential for an endless inter-textuality. Alternative interpretations of the practices and dialogue of education would exist side by side without institutional or meta-theoretical pressure. The postmodern person is committed to a framework of self-chosen, self-created values and realities. This person is idealized as being numerous selves in different contexts - the identity switcher, fluid, unknowable and non-existent except within a relationship. Postmodern educational practice form out of philosophical and literary dialogue concerning values of society and education (Parker, 1997).

According to Dahlberg, *et al* (2007), within contemporary discourses, one finds two processes: a) Increasing standardization and regulation of modern life accompanied by rhetoric of individualism, diversity and choice, and b) the substitution of democratic politics by managerial practice accompanied by rhetoric of participation, listening and empowerment. They note that the dominant, positivistic, Anglo-American discourse on child pedagogy and care treats childcare and schooling as a technology that can help fix many faults in the post-industrial society, without addressing its underlying structural flaws of inequality, injustice and exploitation.

Kvale (1989) notes that language or conversations produced from within modernist paradigm ascribe to values and assumptions such as universality, objectivity, certainty, stability and closure. The language of this paradigm is a technology of normalization, establishing norms against performance and calls for an autonomous observer to make de-contextualized and object statement of facts. By contrast to the language of modernity, postmodern, post-structural or post-foundational language resists dualistic (either/or) thinking. Post-modernity sees the world as multilingual (in terms of discourses), where by language is meant “meaning-making” and participation or dialogue” (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007).

Meaning making is ascribed with attributes and assumptions such as contextuality, values, subjectivity, uncertainty, provisionality. It is seen as a democratic process of interpretation, a process that involves making practice visible and is subject to reflection and dialogue. It’s outcome is seen as contextualized and provisional, because it is always subject to contestation.

Dahlberg *et al.*. (2007) note that modernist and postmodernist discourses work with different tools. Modernist discourse uses predefined norms and sets out criteria for measurement, such as rating scales, checklists, standardized protocol and procedures, detailed systems of inspection. They involve a process of measurement to determine conformity to specification. The tools of postmodernity, post-structuralism and post-foundationalism on the other hand, are pedagogical documentation and reflection and listening. They requires making practices visible through many forms of

documentation, such as written and recorded work produced by children, photographs or videos and many other innovative possibilities..

The authors further assert that within the social constructionist position is the understanding that there are different social constructions or understandings of children, childhood and childhood institutions, produced from different paradigmatic positions. Modernist perspectives treat pedagogical concepts as neutral and self-evident but they are in fact value – ridden. The modernist pedagogical perspectives are a part of a narrowly conceived and implemented approach to childhood that seeks to govern the child through normalization, technical practice and instrumentality. In postmodern discourses childhood institutions are seen as forums situated in civil society in which child and adults participate together in projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance, and have many and varied outcomes (ibid, 2007). Postmodernism treat dominant discourses as constructed from local discourses. It is the nature of dominant discourses that they lay claims to truth, and seek to set boundaries on what people can think, question and practice. Everything within these boundaries become natural, self-evident, taken for granted and everything outside is ignored or dismissed as untrue, unrealistic or unimaginable.

The implications of postmodernism for formal education have been explored by Usher and Edwards (1994) and Blake *et al* (1998). Strategic postmodernists, Beckett and Hager (2002) document seven postmodern trends within postmodernism that affect non-formal schooling. These are a) celebration of change and crisis; b) a loss of confidence in and incredulity towards existing narratives and institutions; c) an emphasis on difference, diversity and fragmentation of identity; d) a focus on the particular and the local; e) a recognition of the political and social dimension of knowledge; f) overcoming dualisms – organic rather than binary; and g) a major focus on the power of discourse.

While modernism views change and crisis as something that needs to be managed, postmodernism views these characteristics as a product of a post-industrial or information society. This brings about crisis, and lead to conditions where people are constantly redefining themselves and adopting different identities. Postmodernism is

not a specific theoretical position, but an intellectual trend that comprises several different theoretical or philosophical theories. These include post-structuralism and deconstructionism that take a stance of incredulity towards modernism and its theories, and there is a growing realization of the limitations of language and discourse (ibid, 2002).

People experience the feeling of fragmentariness and dislocation due to melting of identities and dispersal of authority. Since postmodernists emphasize difference, diversity and loss of identity, there is an on-going tension between sameness and difference in educational thought and practice. For Burbules (ibid, 2002), difference is in inevitable dialectical interplay with sameness or commonality. He outlines five different sorts of differences: difference of a) kind; b) degree; c) variation; d) version; and e) relative difference. An understanding of the particular sort of difference requires reliance on some notion of sameness. Variations consist of different combinations of these characteristics. Hence, rather than replacing sameness by difference, richer types of postmodernism recognize the need to overcome this dualism. To make sense of the postmodern de-centred, fractured self, there is a need to recognize the dialectical interplay between disconnection /continuity or connection/discontinuity (ibid, 2002).

Beckett and Hager argue that Postmodernism's celebration of the particular and the local should not be understood as a rejection of generality and universality. Although learning is contextualized and significantly particular, local and contingent, extreme stance between particular/universal and local/global dualism is seen as a false dualism which sound theory needs to overcome. Hence binary dualism needs to be straddled in education.

Postmodernism asserts that knowledge is not neutral or apart from the influence of power (Foucault, 1980). Knowledge is regarded as culturally and socially shaped reflecting power relations, as well as questions notions of objective truth. Burbules (referred in Beckett & Hager, 2002) asserts that power relations are inherent within educational establishments. Postmodernism radically questions traditional hierarchies that privilege theoretical knowledge over practical knowledge and formal learning

over informal learning. This opens up spaces for practice-based informal learning in a postmodern educational world.

Change, crisis, difference, diversity and fragmentation of identity, connectedness of culture and society, and of knowledge and power, are important aspects of contextuality. Influential thinkers like Dewey (ibid, 2002), promote the paradigm of learning that seeks to overcome dualisms common in educational writings such as mind/body, thought/action, pure/applied, education/training, intrinsic/ instrumental, internal/external, learner/world, knowing that/knowing how and process/product. Postmodernists focus on the role of language in shaping knowing and experiencing. In addition they claim that meanings are determined from inside of language. There are multiple discourses with their own epistemologies and ontologies. Since discourses are constitutive of the subject or self, they are powerful constructors of meaning. According to Faigley (ibid, 2002), language creates consciousness (postmodernist view), rather than consciousness creates language (modernist view). Foucault claimed that “the self is constituted in, and by public linguistic discourse”. In this notion the subject or agency is subsumed by language. Since discourse produces everything including experience, everything is ultimately constructed in discourse. Hence real world practice and experience is marginalized (Blake et al, 1998).

Identity and diversity are key issues in postmodern discourses within education. Identity of a person is neither unified nor fixed and is produced in different locales by different agents for different purposes (Giroux 1991). Meynert (2000) has concluded in her essay *Structuring of Modern and Postmodern Identities with Reflections on the Pedagogical Implications in a Multicultural World*, that an individual child has a hierarchy of identities, with a primary attachment to one identity and at the same time different degrees of attachment to a whole net-work of other identities. Postmodern emphasis on fragmentation, difference and plurality and on the liberation of individuality from the fixedness of identity has relevance to the kaleidoscopic experiences of contemporary life, especially in the highly charged context of diverse struggles in different fields of power (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990). Mouff (referred in Giroux, 1991) argues for a politics of democracy where the political community that comprises of a diverse collection of communities, can be a forum for creating unity

without denying specificity. According to Giroux (1991), the discourse of identity is not to be treated as apolitical since it involves the recognition of the multiple positions of marginality and subordination one is located in. There is a need to acknowledge differences that promote inequality, shape consciousness and influence the distribution of power and privileges. The postmodern notion of difference needs to be radicalized.

The notion of “border pedagogy” has been developed by critical postmodernists like Giroux and McLaren (ibid, 1991). This pedagogy gives students an opportunity to engage in multiple reference points that constitute different cultural codes. They learn to read cultural texts critically and see for themselves how these texts are regulated by different discursive codes and represent different ideological interests. Within this discourse, students engage knowledge as border-crossers, moving in and out of physical and cultural borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power. Differences are seen as historically constructed and socially organized, with maps of rules that serve to either limit or enable particular identities, individual capacities and social forms. Students cross over into borders of meanings, maps of knowledge, social relations and values and negotiate and rewrite codes and regulations, which organize, destabilize and reshape. The terrain of learning becomes linked to shifting parameters of place, identity, history and power. Students draw upon their own personal experience and real knowledge. Students get empowered and speak for themselves and are located in history, where they participate in constructing their own identity. Students go beyond just speaking for themselves, and engage critically with the ideology and substance of speech, writing and other forms of cultural production (ibid, 1991).

Postmodern education would then involve resisting diminishing (belittling) or fixed identities that are imposed on the child and changing rather than reproducing prevailing power relations. Critical postmodernists would help students to understand how differences within and between social groups are constructed and sustained within and outside schools in webs of domination, subordination, hierarchy and exploitation in order to resist the abuse of power and privilege and construct alternative democratic communities where the category of difference is central to the notion of public life. These sentiments are resonated by pedagogues from the South, who assert that overly



hasty formalistic promulgation of “universals” in education, would merely serve to impose dominance of the West over the East, the North over the South and the elite mainstream high culture within a nation over folk, the little, marginalized and oppressed identities (Shukla, 1991).

### **Issues related to educational research**

Since 1990, a rich body of work on postmodern educational research has developed. Doing research in the postmodern is about a shift in attitude, towards learning “to hear” and “understand” a statement made within a different structure of intelligibility. It requires learning to sensitize oneself to unusual and imaginative ways about what is traditionally described as, data collection and analysis. Postmodern thinking requires a new literacy (language). According to Bleakely (2004), postmodernism’s contribution to education research is often rejected simply because it challenges the epistemological and methodological basis of both positivist and post-positivist/interpretivist qualitative and quantitative researchers.

Usher and Edwards (1994) suggest that education as a discipline finds it difficult to accommodate the critique of postmodernism because education is so central to the post-Enlightenment, emancipatory liberal-humanist project of modernism. Enlightenment, the project of modernity and education are deeply intertwined with each other. There is a deep commitment to the notion of a humanist subject capable of self - knowing, autonomy and agency, will choose education to overcome ignorance and build a better world. This is to be done through progressive accumulation of knowledge and self-development. Furthermore, postmodern research asks awkward questions about post-Enlightenment and about the supposed benefits of “progress” - the means by which knowledge is legitimated. It also questions the assumptions concerning human agency and the nature of the “autonomous self”.

Research in the postmodern is often concerned with textual critique rather than formal experiment or real social investigation. Postmodernists’ are interested in “destabilizing text”. According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000), to “reflect” is necessary but postmodernists talk about a more critical process of “reflexivity” or “reflexive

methodology". According to Hillman (referred in Bleakley 2004), while reflection may stay at the level of personal, confessional account and description of events, reflexivity involves a "second look" - a re-search, or a re-vision in which the educational practice or textual practice that is reflected upon, is "situated" historically, culturally and socially. It is not taken as transparent, unproblematic or simply "given", but as constituted. In other words, a persistent self-critique operates" (ibid, 2004). This in its own right can be seen as an important aspect of postmodern research.

Researchers in the postmodern suggest that such research may be constructing rather than revealing the object of inquiry. Here, language is an active medium for such constructions and not a passive descriptor. Objectivity is seen as a social construction, since discourse itself is particular, situated in a context, biased and constructs identities and knowledge.

Bleakley (2004) asserts that post-structuralism is one of the many schools within Post-modernism focusing on discursive and linguistic patterns central to the production of subjectivity and identity. Derrida's (1978) idea of deconstruction is placed in this category. Foucault (1980) is generally ascribed to post-structuralism because he tries to rethink conceptions of the subject and of power and discipline which produces it.

Foucault is not satisfied by only deconstruction, but attempts to introduce a more "holistic" rethinking of history and dominating ideas with the help of alternate ways of thinking (Margolis in Dalhberg *et al.*, 2007). Rosenau (referred in Bleakley 2004), describes the difference between postmodernism and post-structuralism.

Postmodernists are more oriented towards cultural critique while poststructuralists emphasize method and epistemological matters. Poststructuralists concentrate on deconstruction, language, discourse, meanings and symbols while postmodernism is a broader concept. It is more of a difference in emphasis than substantive difference.

Postmodernism has been used as catch words for a multiplicity of different themes which in many cases have little to do with each other. Bleakley (2007) documents the thematic variations in the understanding of postmodernism. For Foster (1986), it includes various styles in architecture, art, literature. For Lyotard (1985) it is a certain conception of science and knowledge. For Derrida (1978) it is a philosophical style, often with linguistic focus. For Dudi it is a certain general cultural mentality or is

restricted to the intellectual (Bauman in Bleakley, 2004)); a certain social epoch which is regarded in modern Western countries as having begun sometime after the second world war (Jameson, in Bleakley, 2004), and which is characterized either by computer revolution (Lyotard, 1984), by the influence of the media and “the imaginary” (simulations) or again by consumption having replaced production as the core element in the economy (Baudrillard, 1984); Jameson (referred in Bleakley, 2004) stresses the de-differentiation within some appropriate societal sub-area such as scientific disciplines; high and low culture (Lash, in Smith, 1988): or the division of work in organizations (Clegg, in Crowther and Green, 2004)) used to refer to the political changes in Eastern Europe and the “death of communism” (Madison, referred in Bleakley, 2004) ). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) summarize all these aspects by saying that postmodernism is a broad socio-cultural trend.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), document four central pragmatic postmodern methodological principles: a) Research work and texts capture a plurality of different identities or voices associated with different groups, individuals, positions or special interests; b) Single participants may convey multiple representations; c) Phenomena can be presented using a variety of modes and media, including the use of different sorts of descriptive languages; d) Command of different theoretical perspectives and familiarity with the critique of these on the part of the researcher (reflexivity). This multifaceted methodology leads to flexibility - the possibility of openness and different sorts of readings to surface in the research. These elements break the mould of traditional research pattern and are called “daredevil research” by Jipson and Paley (referred in Bleakley 2004). Dare devil research use subversion, irony, pastiche, innovative forms, humour, slyness, paradox, etc. and make the strange familiar and familiar strange.

Researchers in the postmodern worry less about proving a point or providing evidence to support an argument and concentrate more on generating multifaceted data in order to animate interpretation (Lather, 1991). According to Slaterry (referred in Bleakley 2004), alternate forms of research presentation like fiction, art installations, dance and readers-theatre become acceptable. The ground for rigor has shifted from traditions of validity to aesthetics and ethical interests. Education research in the postmodern asks

“what counts as valid research evidence” (Lather, 1991)? The term “inquiry” replaces the term “research” in order to avoid expectations set up by normative, positivistic, experimental research that code, classify and derive a schema from data. Here the focus is upon reflexivity and flexibility rather than classification.

Postmodern research differs from the modernist, realist position. For Scheurich (1997), the subject or agency is not autonomous and transparent and does not authentically speak the research. Postmodernists challenge the notion that there is a reasoning mind executing practices of reason, to which methodologies conform. This is called “the crisis of identity” of both researchers and subject of research of methodological certainty”. For Scheurich (1997), the narratives or accounts of the agency (considered autonomous, reasoning and authentic-speaking) cannot be taken as direct representations of reality. This is said to be “the dual crisis of representation and validity”. For Bleakley (2004), postmodern research does not seek essences or truth, nor are the data taken as facts. Data is in descriptive terms and is both contextualized and relativized (placed in a historical and cultural setting).

Although it goes against postmodern sensibility to turn guidelines for research into principles and prescriptive manifesto, Bleakley (2004) attempts to document some basic principles: a) Research in the postmodern attempts to erase the distinction between research practices and subjectivity of the researcher. Research practices come to construct identities, of which researcher is one such identity; b) Post-modern research documents the “crisis of representation” of the “real”. Furthermore, research accounts of the supposed “real” (i.e. direct reports or transparent representations) are not seen to uncover a constitutive reality, but constitute that reality through acts and conversations of research; c) Research in the postmodern requires practices of “reflexivity” and understanding of the possibility that “reality” is socially constructed. “Reflexivity” moves beyond introspective contemplation to a more rigorous consideration of the nature of subjectivity that supposedly is doing the contemplation and to consider what theory of knowledge derives assumptions about the nature of that subjectivity d) Modernist research assumes that there is a reality “out there” waiting to be investigated, described and catalogued. Social constructionism does not abandon the notion of an external world to be investigated. Rather, it focuses on how meanings

are ascribed to a “reality”, thus constructing and producing (constituting) that reality, through social conventions, discourses, conversations and negotiations within communities of practice.<sup>27</sup>

Postmodernism is not a unitary view or a coherent movement, but is made up of conflicting schools of thought typically grouped together only because they all have a common point of divergence – modernism. “Modernism” is itself a contested notion and not a unitary view. Postmodernists challenge the notion of empirical research and the assumption that there is a neutral, concrete or literal set of phenomena out there, that researcher gets to work upon. They argue that the meaning of the word “out there” is constructed and that the notion of “empirical” is itself just a construction. For postmodernists “Empirical” is a complex, problematic notion. Educational research, work on “texts” and “texts” are “empirical” as artefacts. Working on “texts” is the outcome of the “linguistic turn” that characterizes the entry of postmodernist thinking.

This view suggests that the meanings humans ascribe to phenomena are embedded in language and constructed and negotiated through discourse. Social practices do not involve readymade stable identities but produce plural and unstable identities through such practices. Education research in the postmodern is concerned with production of meaning in social practices that are located in historical and cultural contexts.

According to Bleakley (2004), postmodernists see person as “texts” and material artefacts as “texts” to be read. Education research in the postmodern offers various ways of “reading” and “writing”, where social practice of research itself is “reflexively interrogated”.

Postmodern inquiry engages in healthy criticisms of the unacknowledged assumptions of modernism. Research in the postmodern problematizes the ideals of the Enlightenment project. The Enlightenment principle “progress” is questioned. Progress for whom? Towards what? Education is seen a vehicle for cumulative progress, reinforced by the paradigm of Darwinian evolution. There are contradictions such as the growing gap between the rich and the poor; the ecological and population crisis;

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<sup>27</sup> Summarized from Bleakley, A. (2004), Education Research in the Postmodern, Peninsula Medical School, University of Plymouth.  
<http://www.Edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/postmodernism/pmhome.htm>

the manipulative effects of globalization; continuing racial, ethnic and religious conflicts; the inability to solve the world food crisis; the ethical question raised by biotechnologies and advanced medicine. Post-modernism retains a healthy scepticism for such claims (ibid, 2004). There is scepticism towards “truth” claims. What passes as a claim for “truth” is a claim for power that is relative to historical, cultural and social contexts. In a complex world where principles indeterminacy and uncertainty dominate, one cannot claim certainty.

Postmodernists are especially sceptical of the claims for emancipatory research. They have made visible that it is the privileged group that dictates the conditions for emancipation. Since the researchers belong to the privileged group, they are subject to paternalism. Lather (1991) notes that in the issue of liberation from oppression, the question “emancipation into what?”, is often overlooked. Bleakley (2004) argues that where the researcher participates in the emancipatory research, there is an assumption of uncomplicated personal agency, with little or no reflexivity about the constitution, plurality and stability of that supposed agency. Modernist research is explicitly ideological, although rarely described or acknowledged as such. It is also explicitly rhetorical, persuading an audience into its world-view. In fact research in the postmodern may be described as reflexively “post-ideological” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000).

“Difference” is a key term for postmodernism. It describes a social condition of tolerance for “otherness”, underpinning racial and gender tolerance and mutual respect. Difference is also used to describe how identity is constructed through the presence of the “other”. Deconstruction has as one of its main principles the notion of the persistence of the “presence of absence”. While the world is researched “as found”, deconstructionists remind postmodern researchers of the influence of the absent or the excluded, that is rarely acknowledged in modernist research (Bleakley, 2004). Derrida (1978) notes that presence and meaning is always dependent upon another factor (which is then absent) (Cherryholmes, 1998). If one lives in a postmodern condition - described as a cultural condition of “post-modernity” arising from the post-industrial process of “post-modernization”, then one should attempt to research it within its own emerging literacies. It is a common critique that modernist teachers may find that

students already fully inhabit the postmodern world in which they themselves have limited engagement, due to their commitment to modernist ideals. Bleakley (2004) argues that even if one exists in a “double coded”<sup>28</sup> mix of modernist continuity and postmodernist / post-human emergence, one should still be committed to understanding and using the emerging research literacies of postmodernism for the sake of relevance.

### **Challenging the postmodern constructions**

Postmodern constructs have provoked strong reactions from both academics and lay persons in all walks of life and disciplines. On the one hand there are those who are located in nation building and emancipatory projects who see deconstruction and de-centring of vital concepts as being disruptive and close to anarchy. On the other hand, the educational left and the critical school theorists like Henry A. Giroux and Michael Apple, and feminists like Linda J. Nicholson have derived intellectual support from some central elements of postmodernist project and acknowledged the emancipatory spaces that postmodernism opens up for the subaltern subject and for furthering democracy in political life. In this section I bring up the problematic postmodern concepts pose for education that Usher and Edwards (1994) discuss extensively in their book *Postmodernism and Education*. The following paragraphs reconstruct these discourses in order to make explicit postmodern problematic for education. I further try to locate postmodernism within critical theory in order to appropriate the desirable aspects of modernity and postmodernity.

### **Problems with postmodernism in education**

Giroux (1998) sees education as a cultural and pedagogical practice that takes place across multiple sites such as schools, universities, mass-media, popular culture and other public spheres. Within these diverse contexts, education makes us both subjects of, and subject to, relations of power (see also Young 1971; Foucault, 1980).

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<sup>28</sup> By double coding is meant using codes (hybridizing/eclecticizing) and straddling (locating in) the domains of two distinct (bipolar) ends of a paradigm viz. modernity and postmodernity.

There are problems confronting those who attempt to relate postmodernism to education. Historically, education is one of the projects that were meant to actualize the ideals of modernity's "grand narrative"- the Enlightenment ideals of reason, personal freedom and benevolent progress (Bleakley, 2004). Modernity believes that progress in all areas will emancipate humanity from ignorance, poverty, backwardness and despotism. Education was expected to produce enlightened citizens who would be masters of their own destiny (Dahlberg et al, 2007). Education was supposed to help subjects to become fully autonomous and capable of exercising their individual and intentional agency. Lyotard (referred in Usher & Edwards, 1994) notes that modernity is deeply intertwined with education. However, education does not fit easily into the postmodern moment because educational theory and practice are "founded" in the modernist tradition. Also postmodern discourses perceive modernity as being instrumental because of its obsession with efficiency and effectiveness that Lyotard (ibid, 1994) calls "performativity".

Postmodern discourses are often a source of confusion for those who work in education. Teachers are confused by the new educational jargon; academics are confronted with values that have little to do with engagement with the young or the subject; families are confused by the contradiction between children's rights and the simultaneously existence of the ethos of care; society dominated by economic rationality, obscures value of bringing up a child. Postmodernism brings about a kind of intellectual paralysis.

There are problems of *identity, subjectivity and agency* that arise due to the decentring of self and objectivity which are no longer thought of as unified and coherent, within postmodern discourses. The drive towards efficacy and performativity as well as the tendencies towards dispersal and differentiation are located at the borders of modernity and postmodernity. Plurality and difference are celebrated and tolerated in the postmodern because it advocates a more ambivalent and less fixed positioning of subjectivity. Personal autonomy (the ideal of western culture) through education gets displaced. Education is currently the site of conflict. Postmodernism questions modernist epistemology (theory of knowledge) and poses problems for notions of foundations and scepticism that rest on certainty and a belief that is the ground for



inquiry and knowledge. This opens up spaces for redefining the effects of education at both the personal and structural level. However there is no uniform, unified postmodern discourse of education. Although education continues to contribute to the formation of subjectivity, subjectivity itself has become a site of struggle and it is no longer very fixed and invariable nor exclusively the subjectivity of the “rational man”<sup>29</sup>.

Postmodernism challenges *foundational knowledge*. The conception of the subject, who learns, as well as existing concepts, structures and hierarchies of knowledge are challenged. Education is a socio-cultural structure which is connected with the production and dissemination of foundational knowledge and reproduction of hierarchies of knowledge (Foucault, 1980). The nihilism and unlimited relativism in the postmodern undermines foundations and absolutes, and leaves nothing in its place leading to social anomie. This leaves no external grounds for subjects that guarantee the truth of factual claims. Post-foundationalism rejects appeal to moral universalism, and the position of moral relativism and cultural pluralism present moral, political and philosophical problematic. The rejection of the notion of foundations of knowledge raises problems as to the legitimacy of all and any knowledge claims.

*Postmodern relativism* is problematic for education, and can be differentiated into three areas viz. a) educational relativism, b) moral relativism and c) linguistic relativism. Post-structuralism and deconstruction excite resistance in many quarters. Postmodernism is seen as cultural relativism and social pluralism revived in a deceptive way. It is perceived as threatening both the value of culture and the cohesion of society and the normative foundations of our lives. Postmodernism is therefore resisted first and foremost in education. Relativism and postmodernism have caused problems in the content of curriculum. It has also led to uncertainties within the

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<sup>29</sup> The rational man or “*Homo economicus*” is a metaphorical species of human who is able to, as economists say, optimize. He exhibits rationality in the economic sense by making decisions, even in uncertain situations, based mainly on self-interest and a strong grasp of the alternatives at hand” cited from Stephen Slivinski (2008:24), *Is Rational Man Extinct? –Searching for homo economicus*, Region Focus, Spring/Summer 2008 retrieved from [http://www.richmondfed.org/publications/research/region\\_focus/2008/spring/pdf/rational\\_man\\_extinct.pdf](http://www.richmondfed.org/publications/research/region_focus/2008/spring/pdf/rational_man_extinct.pdf) accessed January 2012.

relationship between teacher and student in terms of both authority and care (crisis of authority) that have left youth without direction.

**Educational relativism** has two varieties, namely *subjectivism* and *linguistic relativism*. Both kinds of relativism refuse to accept empiricist and rationalist conceptions of knowledge as given. The *subjectivist* variety is associated with progressivism which finds empiricism congenial. It claims that knowledge is the given in experience, which is individual and private and that there is no self-evidently correct way of making abstractions, since all subjects do so in different ways. What is knowledge is not the same for anyone because knowledge is determined by the meanings available, and meanings must differ. This relativism is different from post-structuralism that claims that subjectivity is constructed by discourse. Who we are and who we become is determined by the things both said to us and about us – Lacan's (1968) account of the self. According to poststructuralists, there is no subjectivity prior to an individual getting embedded in the discourse of others. Hence one cannot view meanings as something generated by the private self. *Linguistic relativism* is concerned with meanings which are perceived as given in our language. Different languages give us different meanings (Whorfianism). Linguistic relativism sees us imprisoned in our own language just as subjectivists find us imprisoned in our own subjectivity. On one hand, linguistic relativism is important for educationists because it problematizes monolithic assumptions of language and knowledge. However they do not see that meanings are malleable and subject to change. Deconstruction brings to light the intrinsic impossibility of stabilizing meaning, of ensuring identity of meanings from one occasion of the use of a word to another (Derrida, 1978)

Most reactions come against "*moral relativism*" which stresses that there are no moral ethical standards and that each person must live according to their own understanding and each is immune to moral critique by others. There is concern against moral disintegration in education. The question arises whether genuine moral diversity should be cherished and respected, while fearing moral dogmas and pressures towards moral conformity. Moral pluralism or relativism would accept the notion of moral humility and respect for the judgments of others moral positions. While this position is

steeped in epistemological inconsistencies, its virtues lie in it insisting that knowledge is problematic in certain ways, and that it contests the dominant culture.

Postmodern philosophy has changed the way *the ethical self* is conceptualized. It has changed the way the positions of the parents and the teacher are conceptualized because knowledge and subject are conceived differently. This affects the way ethics is interpreted. The traditional picture of ethics is that of rationalism. Morality is based on principles and one that elaborates a particular idea of the good life by indicating what kind of person one should be with insistence on virtues (located within Aristotlism). Postmodernism rejects rationalist ethics and treat truths as being countless and located locally, hence see institutions, communications and traditions as hidden instruments of conservatism (Rorty, 1991). Reason is seen as socially embedded hence morality is seen to be bound to us through the practices, codes and images that make up the “historical life” in which we are located. For Foucault (1980) the question of subject cannot be separated from the question of power and thus establishes the limits and dangers of rationality.

The onset of the *Information Age* is associated with digital revolution which creates a knowledge based society. Lyotard (1984) views the impact of technology as having inevitable consequences for knowledge, especially with the way knowledge is produced (researched) and transmitted (learnt). The real world of learning becomes computerized learning. The control of learning through state-sponsored institutions is replaced by networks of information, in which to be ‘educated’ is to have consumed the information necessary for the optimizing of performance, in a world of education that functions like a market place. According to Usher and Edwards (1994), as the modern grand narrative fade because of the proliferation of technologically created language and information, the epic story of progress collapses. Postmodern condition that follows the fragmentation of modernity, allows a legitimation of knowledge (which is a-historic) that optimizes the efficiency of a competitive global economic system. Here education finds its rationale in the postmodern moment.

In a world where success means gaining time, thinking becomes a waste of time. The authority of the intellectual is replaced by machines. Student’s access learning through packages which they work through themselves – a form of learning associated with

open learning and distance education. Learning to learn and empowering forms of student centred learning become the focus. Distance learning by way of grand narrative of emancipation represents “freedom to learn”, “learner centeredness” and “open access” (ibid, 1994: 166).

A resistance to the information-age-postmodern moment (that of a monolithic technical efficiency) would involve a return to the modern *grand narratives* - a return to emancipation of humanity that is seen as obsolete by the postmodern moment. Postmodern science does not function within the ambit of modern science legitimized by grand narratives, nor is it subject to efficiency. It operates within its own language, reflexively questioning the rules of its own language game as it develops (Wittgenstein). A postmodern science produces its own “little narratives” of self-legitimation, and is constantly reinventing itself (Lyotard, 1984). According to Benhabib (referred in Usher & Edwards, 1994), Lyotard’s position is seen as politically ambiguous. It articulates a neo-liberal interest group pluralism, and proliferation and democratization of computers. Little narratives become powerless in a situation of the increased performativity in a system to optimize efficiency and power. In stressing little narratives, the game is left at the local margins while power concentrates at the economic and political centre. “Blue prints” for change become problematic because of postmodern critique of grand narratives. Both Universalist explanations and Universalist prescriptions for action have been questioned. There are no closures. One is left to cope and operate within the openness, uncertainties and diversities of the postmodern moment. The postmodern moment rejects the notions of progress on the grounds that they continue forms of oppression. It also involves the recognition that although power can be productive, not all resistance to power is emancipatory. Oppression itself is multidimensional. Postmodern moment is one of questioning and criticizing, rather than posing alternatives. Resistance to the exercise of power replaces progress through reasoned reforms or emancipation through revolution (ibid, 1994).

What then is the place of *education in the postmodern moment*? Usher and Edward (1998) describe four possible educational moments that can occur. a) There can be a continuation of the modern project of education. In such a situation, the liberal humanist discourse and its notion of learner-centeredness would gain ascendancy and

education will allow the subjects to negotiate the complexity and uncertainty of postmodernity. b) There can be a retreat from the postmodern moment into a form of cultural restoration. The modern project is reassured and re-imposed, around a sense of shared cultural values perceived as threatened by the consumption-orientation, uncertainty and heterodoxy of the postmodern moment. c) There would be an explicit use of aspects of the postmodern condition within modern power relations. Knowledge gets converted into “information” and is packaged through open and distance learning forms. Here, education supports the reconfigured power relations of late capitalist social formation. d) Certain dimensions of the postmodern moment may be introduced into the theories and practices of education to reinvigorate the modern project of education, such as emphasis of lifelong learning; the recognition and exploration of cultural differences; and educational provision for and by, marginalized and oppressed groups.

***End of education as a project*** - What might educational form look like within the postmodern? One of the main characteristics of postmodern moment is “incredulity” towards grand narratives. Derrida’s (1978) work is significant for deconstructing education’s own self - understanding as a “project”. The postmodern moment contains simultaneously the end of education as a “project” and of education as a medium for realizing the modern project.

If one were to concede this then coming to an end as a project implies that education can no longer be understood (or understand itself) as an enterprise standing above history and particular cultural contexts. Education can then no longer be dedicated to the achievement of universally applicable goals – truth, emancipation, democracy, enlightenment, empowerment (Usher & Edwards, 1998:123).

For the postmodernists’ and avant-gardists’, the end of the modernist project has certain implications for education. Education: a) would become more diverse in terms of goals and processes and in terms of organizational structures, curricula, methods and participants; b) be embedded in the diverse cultural contexts in which it is located rather than take its cues from the universal logo-centric norms.; c) would become a vehicle for the celebration of diversity, a space for different voices against the one authoritative “voice” of modernity rather than seeking to reduce everything to the

“same”; d) would be not be straight forward and causal in form, since the postmodern moment is reflexive.

Controlled education would no longer reproduce society or be an instrument in large scale social engineering, because determinism and predictability would no longer be present. Educational sites would neither be determining nor determined. Education would then become limitless in the space, potentially escaping the epistemological, political and physical boundaries imposed on it by modernity. Education would have to take into account diversity and plurality and attempting to place education into uniform, standardized curricula and teaching methods and the bearer of universal “messages” of rationality or morality would become difficult to impose.

As opposed to the convergent elitist modernist education, education in the postmodern is projected to be characterized by different levels and kinds of participation.

According to Usher and Edwards (1998), education in the postmodern based on cultural contexts and localized particular knowledge, designed to value the experience of the learner, would enable better participation of culturally diverse learners in diversity of ways. Education in the postmodern is likely to be marked as a general de-centring, a general loosening of boundaries - a decentring of education, authority, control and provision. However, these trends that loosen and blur boundaries and demarcations make exclusions and inclusions problematic. Also education ceases to be narrowly constructed and becomes an aspect of life itself. Everyone in different degrees and to differing extents, would be seen an educated person. The wider participation and engagement of the oppressed and marginalized groups, is a desirable notion. The postmodern reflective process would not be guided by some teleology of emancipation, but reconfigures emancipation/oppression in favour of the excluded and oppressed. The possibility of the oppressed becoming oppressors would imply that there is a danger of replacing one totalizing oppressive discourse with another. Most attempts to engage in with the postmodern moment, in relation to education, come from those who seek to connect it to a project of rejuvenating a politics of emancipation.

## **A critical pedagogy synthesis of postmodernist ideas**

For those who desire the continuation of the modern project – both neo-conservative and progressive – the postmodern is represented as a moment of danger. For neo-conservatives, it represents a threat to “traditional” values and cultural norms. For progressives including many socialists, Marxists and feminism, the postmodern undermines emancipatory goals and because of its nihilism, contributes to the ascendancy of neo-conservatism. Critical and feminist pedagogues have sought to integrate aspects of post modernity in developing their views on education (Giroux, 1991: Lather, 1991).

Critical pedagogy is a diverse field of theory and practice drawing on aspects of the modernist perspective of the later Frankfurt School, feminism, Freirian pedagogy, postcolonial discourse as well as postmodernism to construct a radical approach to education. Its eclecticism is resonant of the postmodern moment and has become a contested terrain. Critical pedagogy by discriminating between the emancipatory and neo-conservative aspects of the postmodern, attempts to incorporate the former into a re-conceptualized pedagogy that furthers emancipation and a radical participatory democracy. Giroux (1991) has explicated the need for educators to integrate the central features of a postmodernism of resistance with the more radical elements of modernist discourse.

Critical postmodern education scholars like Arnowitz and Giroux (1991), McLaren (1991) and Hammer (2013) have put forward concepts such as “border pedagogy” and “postcolonial pedagogy”. These positions argue for education and schooling to provide a “voice” for the excluded others oppressed in the modern social formations. The oppressed – class, gender, ethnicity, colour, sexual preference, etc. – must be given the opportunity to participate fully and equally. The oppression they face must be made explicit as a basis for moving to a more democratic social formation. The role of education is supposed to enable learners to become citizens within the social formation. The social formations are recognized as diverse and pluralistic, yet where power - both within and across states - function to oppress and exclude certain social groups.

The grand narratives of emancipation are deepened within critical pedagogy to include the structures and experiences of oppression. In carrying out this role, educators become cultural workers and education a form of cultural politics with emancipation and democracy deepened by a process Giroux (1991) calls “border pedagogy”. For critical pedagogues, the principal issue is the introduction of heterogeneity and the recognition of difference into educational practices. This is not simply an espousal of liberal pluralism. In addressing this in the educational setting, students and teachers are empowered and can struggle more effectively in and for a democratic society. Education as a form of cultural politics is therefore an attempt to re-conceive and reconfigure the notion of citizenship in the postmodern moment. Critical pedagogy aims to support such activity in order that the oppressions and exclusions of modernity are not reinforced. Border pedagogy is committed to a radicalized democracy and *border* crossing unassailable boundaries.

In the preceding paragraphs I have developed the implications of, and challenges to postmodern discourses in relation to issues related to childhood, pedagogy and educational research. New sensibilities in the understanding of childhood, pedagogy and educational research have emerged as an outcome of deconstructing these concepts that were located within the modern. I locate myself within postmodern critical theory and appropriate discourses with critical theory and critical pedagogy and synthesize these discourses with postmodern sensibilities.

## **Conclusion**

I conclude this essay by summarizing and presenting the essence that describes the shift in paradigmatic discourses from those located in modernity to postmodernity and how this shift has led to the new conceptions within theories of childhood, pedagogy and educational research, and the need to for caution when it comes to postmodern constructs, because they represent moments of threat for those who want the continuation of the modernist project and its accompanying emancipatory goals.

I have in the previous chapters read texts and hypertexts in order to explore and reconstruct discourses that make up concepts such as hermeneutics, modernity,



postmodernity, knowledge, childhood, pedagogy and research. I have contributed to the reservoir of educational knowledge by releasing the child from constricting structures located in the modern and have located the child within the postmodern that opens up spaces for a child with an active and dynamic agency, consequently opening up spaces for more flexible and critical pedagogies and new sensibilities in educational research.

Today there is an epochal shift that is defined by *thinking differently about the meaning of knowing*. There is a shift away from the concept of a “found” world, “out there”, objective, knowable and factual, towards a concept of “constructed” worlds. This is the on-going debate between ontology (reality as it exists) and epistemology (as perceived reality). Here knowledge is seen as constructed, contested and partial and is an effect of power (Foucault, 1980), and is shaped by the interplay of language, power and meaning. This shift is attributed to the growing influence of European thought on Anglo-American thinking. Said (referred in Lather, 1991) notes that “postmodern” is a term that denotes “the end of empire”, where several epistemologies such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, semiotics, Frankfurt School, Critical Theory, French post-structuralism and feminism intersect. According to Lather (1991), postmodernisms range across the neo-Freudianism of Lacan (influenced by post-structuralism), the post-Marxism of Foucault and Baudrillard (that goes beyond class and includes gender, ethnic and racial divisions), the post-feminism of Kristeva (who believes that the feminist struggle has achieved its goals), and the post logo-centrism of Derrida (which believes that objects and our presence in the world is mediated through language). Hence postmodernism is a self-consciously transitional moment.

Modernism with roots in Renaissance (the French Revolution and the eighteenth century Enlightenment values that have shaped Western intellectual and political projects till now) seems no longer capable of giving meaning and direction to the current conditions. Lather (1991) notes that the present cultural condition is made up of the confusing new world space of “hyper-capitalism” (extreme capitalism at the expense of traditional values) feeding and fed by an information explosion of global and uncontrolled proportions. The modernist project of control through knowledge has collapsed and boundaries between ideology and science have disintegrated. Liberal

humanism has failed due to mass consumer culture and technologies of surveillance. The exclusions and oppressions of modernism are now being questioned.

From the ashes of these tendencies for fragmentation have arisen what is called the New Sociology of Childhood and the new directions in pedagogy and educational research creating spaces for constructing notions of children and childhoods that understands the child as a unique complex, individual subject, rich in potential, strong, powerful and competent. Learning is seen as a cooperative and communicative activity, in which children construct knowledge, make meaning of the world, together with adults and other children. Children are liberated from their passive dependency on adults and get elevated to the status of social actors and become active co-constructors. The child who becomes priceless in a world where personal relationships become fragile exists simultaneously within discourses of children's vulnerability and need for protection and the discourses of children's rights to empowerment and self-determination. Children just as adults are seen to be located in a variety of domains and are located in a number of communities because they engage with different sets of people in different social settings, are seen to find multiple expressions of self. Hence difference, change and fluidity become the starting points in analysis of childhood.

While postmodern childhood studies scholars reject the idea of children being pigeonholed into a growth/development chart, they do believe that children share commonalities and that some of these are biological. They believe that, instead of concentrating on the similarities among children, childhood is best understood within localized and diverse frameworks as it is too fractured to look as a whole. In order to make sense of childhoods, childhood scholars James, Jenks and Prout, (referred in Wilson, 2009) have constructed three models of childhood that can help frame childhood research.

- a) In the first model - the "social actor" model, children are viewed as competent social actors, with much to contribute to the world around them. Children in this model are not seen as helpless but as competent citizens who can participate in most civic duties.
- b) The second model is the "childhood space" perspective, which examines how childhood is structured as a social space – especially spaces when they are free

from adult gaze and when not. This model is concerned with boundaries between childhood and adulthood and with how these boundaries blur.

- c) The final model is the “socially constructed childhood” in which childhood is given to children by adults who constitute it for them, and in turn children reconstruct what is given.

The underlying ideology in these models is the idea that children shape culture as much as culture shapes children.

Pedagogies located in postmodernism move away from positivistic, scientific and techno-rationality, to autonomy, emancipation, uniqueness, democracy, reflexivity, meaning making, ends and values. Postmodern teachers and children at school (students) discover the potential for endless choices. There emerges a plurality of educational dialogues, practices, ends and values. World becomes multilingual in terms of discourses. Tools of pedagogic evaluation shift from rating scales, checklists, standardized protocol and procedures to postmodernist, post-structural and post-foundational tools such as documentation, reflection, listening, dialogue, argumentation and other innovative possibilities. Childhood institutions emerge from being “enclosures” where technologies are applied to children to produce determined outcomes to “forums” situated in civil societies in which the child and adult interact together, towards many and varied outcomes” (Dahlberg, et al, 2007). A notion of “border pedagogy” offered by critical postmodern pedagogues, gives children (and students) the possibility to engage in multiple references that constitute cultural codes, experiences and languages. Children (and students) engage knowledge as border crossers, moving in and out of physical and cultural borders. The terrain of learning becomes linked to shifting parameters of place, identity, history and power.

Educational research in the postmodern is a shift of attitudes towards learning “to hearing” and “understanding” with a different structure of intelligibility. Postmodern research asks awkward questions about the benefits of progress, legitimization of knowledge, and assumptions concerning “human agency” and “the autonomous self”. It is often concerned with textual critique rather than formal experiment. Postmodern “reflexivity” questions “reflection” at the level of personal confessions and asks for a second look and a re-vision. Researches in the postmodern suggest that research may

be constructing rather than revealing the object of inquiry. Language is seen as an active medium for such constructions and not a passive descriptor. Research work and texts capture a plurality of different identities or voices associated with different groups, individuals, positions or interests. Single participants are seen to convey multiple representations.

Within childhood educational research children's voices are sought to be heard. Children are seen to be located in a variety of domains and the permeability between the boundaries between the world outside and the family is being acknowledged and made visible. There is a growing tendency towards a democratic approach to exploring children's lives. Researches involving children have diversified from a reliance on positivism to a more dynamic qualitative research. Qualitative research being seen as a way of self-consciously redistributing power. Children are no longer to be "Othered" but to be treated as having active agency, and not considered objects of research, creating a space in which children are considered valuable experts, having knowledge and insights and integral part of research. Knowledge is constructed through a tripartite exchange which challenges and reinterprets the power status between researchers (the adult professionals) and young people (the researched subjects) – redefining the role of the researcher and the researched. Participation is not static, as children develop trust with facilitators and their own skills and abilities; they demand increased control and participation.

Within the postmodern has developed extreme forms of research styles called "dare devil research" that seek to transform thinking about analytic practice and the construction of research knowledge, by experimenting with alternative models of representation that are unconstrained by traditional research protocols. Multiple and independent spaces are created for imagining how to differently identify issues for inquiry, select modes of analysis, and inscribe data into transmittable form. It is both a production of research knowledge and a conceptual field for meaning-making, Instead of providing evidence to support an argument, postmodern researchers concentrate more on generating multifaceted data to animate interpretations. There is a crisis of "methodological certainty", "crisis of identity" and a "dual crisis of

representation and validity”. Hence interest in research validity has shifted to an interest in aesthetics and ethics in research. Research in the postmodern are described as reflexively “post-ideological”. One is living in a “double coded” mix of modernist continuity and postmodernist/ post-human discontinuity. Hence one needs to understand and use the emerging literacies of postmodernism to become relevant in the era one is located.

The postmodern represents a perilous moment for those who want the continuation of the modernist project, because the postmodern undercuts the emancipatory goals. Postmodernism rejects all notions of totality. Boyne and Rattansi (1990) show the connection between the postmodernist decentring of the subject, its rejection of ‘grand narratives’, its espousal of ‘local narratives’, language games, and genealogies, its dread of totalising discourses leading to totalitarianism, and its political pluralism. There are problems of epistemological ambivalence, political ambiguity and unconstrained pluralism within postmodernism - and therefore it falls into the trap of particularistic theories which cannot explain the interrelationship between them and how they mutually determine and constrain one another. Giroux (1991) notes that while postmodernism rightly emphasizes the importance of local narratives, it blurs the distinction between mono-causal master-narratives and between situational realities and narratives which provide basis for historically placing different groups within a common project - capable of analysing differences ‘ ‘between unity rather than against unity’.

Serious political initiatives are needed in order to articulate alternative politics so that challenges posed by oppositions to meta-narratives can be overcome. Left postmodernist analysts make a call to the left to genuinely reconstruct its politics in the wake of new social movements without falling between a “pluralism of indifference”. According to them postmodernist critique of grand narratives, use theorizations which are close to the very meta-narrative they want to remove. What is currently required is not the abandonment of the whole enterprise of grand narratives, but the replacement of the flawed ones with versions that can command both theoretical and political credibility. While one needs to rethink social, psychological and historical analysis by inserting Foucauldian and other forms of discourses as key element, one need

simultaneously to acknowledge the contradictoriness and provisionality of subjectivities and personal identities, and the crucial role of contradictory discourses in the formation of subjectivities, identities and social relations (Boyne & Rattansi, 1990).

Postmodernists emphasize difference without reducing it to hierarchical positions or marginalizing it - they see it as a plural reality that is theoretically and politically harmless. However the issue of equality does not exclude difference, and depends upon the acknowledgement of difference that promotes inequality and that which does not. For postmodernist feminists, there is an acknowledgement that sexism, racism and class exploitation constitute interlocking systems of domination - that sex, class and race/ethnicity determine the nature of female identity, status and circumstances (Meynert, 1994). The postmodern notion of difference is radicalized by post-modern feminist discourse through a refusal to isolate any one difference as a social category and by simultaneously engaging in politics, aimed at transforming self, community and society. Feminists welcome the postmodern emphasis of local narratives and their stance against universals that are result of hegemonic power relations, but are sceptical towards their status-quoist view of difference. Difference has to be understood so as to change rather than reproduce prevailing power relations (Giroux, 1991).

Critical pedagogues (who practice critical pedagogy - a philosophy of education and social movement that combines education with critical theory) and social scientists, take cue from postmodern feminists (see Hutcheon, 1989; Lather, 1991) and call for a politics that employ the most progressive aspects of modernism like equality, fraternity, freedom and justice, and progressive aspects of postmodernism like struggle for a plural identity and right to self-representation and power to define oneself (Meynert, 1994). They reaffirm the importance of difference in a broader political struggle and recognize the importance of certain forms of narratives that provide a language of power that engages the issue of inequality and struggle. They have tried to integrate the features of postmodernism of resistance and the more radical elements of modernist discourse in what is called "border pedagogy", which is located in schooling where the voices of the marginalized and excluded are given an opportunity to be heard. Critical pedagogy helps deepen the grand narratives of emancipation by

encompassing the structures and experiences of oppression. I align myself with critical postmodern pedagogues who see education as a cultural politics, *where* students and teachers are empowered and struggle for diversity, and for / and within a democratic society.

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