Early Childhood Development and Education in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

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Note to Users

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been submitted for examination in any other course or accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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Abstract

The importance of early childhood education as the process for building strong foundation for children's further learning has been supported by scientific research. Currently, countries in Africa are incorporating early childhood development and education into their country development and policy plans. This study explored the post-war early childhood development through a critical ethnographic case study in order to identify and critically analyse the facilitators and barriers to early childhood development and education in Sierra Leone. A Bourdieuian theorization and analysis identified three main themes namely: Childhood Narratives, Values and Education and The Future. The themes contextualize the realities of childhood on the ground in Sierra Leone, revealing that despite how much children are valued they are rarely protected from the hardships of daily life.

The study exposes the kind of structural constraints children, teachers, and families experience but at the same time, possibilities can be found in the form of agency, social action, and global as well as local educational initiatives for the advancement of early childhood education. Based on these findings, the study provides theoretical, policy and practical recommendations to bring about immediate transformation in early childhood development and education in this country.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all students who struggle with schooling as an institution but have a passion for learning, especially my grandson Demitri.

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O Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of the eternal Father, Thou hast said, "Without me you can do nothing." I am ever thankful for the metaphysical presence, guidance, and courage given to me in order to complete this PhD journey by my God.

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CHAPTER 1 Background to the Study

The importance of early childhood learning and development has been advocated across the globe as the mechanism for building strong foundations for further learning and reducing economic and social inequalities (Heckman, 2006; Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Savelyev & Yavitz 2010; Woodhead, 2006). Such dominant discourses are only just being heard in Sierra Leone, a small poverty stricken West African country. This doctoral thesis explores the nature of early childhood development and education, including childhood, family, community, and government. As such, it casts the net widely into sociocultural, historical, political, and economic terrains in order to identify the constraints that have held back progress and posits possibilities into the future. Sierra Leone is a country still influenced by post-colonial history and post-war as well as, post Ebola recoveries with traditions, values, and culture from the past currently fused with a neoliberal and technocratic future.

This chapter provides an introduction to the current issues pertaining to early childhood development and education (ECDE) as well as background information pertinent to this investigation. The chapter begins by contextually positioning the research study within the socio-historical context of Sierra Leone. The research problem and subsequent research questions are explained as well as personal motivation for undertaking such a study. This chapter also presents definitions of terms and outlines the structure of the thesis as a whole. Educational blueprints pertinent to the understanding of Sierra Leone and the formalization of early childhood education are discussed in Chapter 2.

Historical Backdrop

Sierra Leone is a country of approximately 6.5 million people, bordering the North by Guinea and the South-East, by Liberia. An ethnically diverse country, Sierra Leone has approximately 16 ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture, language and tradition. In 1787, after the abolition of the slave trade by Great Britain, Sierra Leone was established as a settlement for freed slaves. It became a British crown colony in 1808 but British control did not extend into the hinterland of the country until the late nineteenth century when a Protectorate was declared in 1896 (Aboa, 2006). It was then that the government took control of the Freetown colony, through the Sierra Leone Transfer Act, thus making Sierra Leone a Crown Colony. Until this point, formal education in the country had been left largely to Christian missions (Aboa, 2006).

British colonialism produced a highly elitist and geographically uneven education system, where the provision for education was set aside for the elites (Novelli, 2011) and was concentrated in the urban areas. According to Kanu (2007) education during the colonial era was used "as a systematic and measurable tool for economic exploitation, reduction of local resistance to white rule, transformation of indigenous outlooks, and meeting the needs of the colonial civil service" (p. 65). As decedents of freed slaves from America and West Indies, the Krios were classified as non-natives and received high posts by the British in civil service. They were favoured because they were seen to be more amendable to western ways (Aboa, 2006; Keen, 2005). They inherited certain positions, status, and accessibility to education not available to the Indigenous tribes and they were not only favoured by the British but according to Kanu (2007) they were pitted against Indigenous ethnic groups (which served to accentuate the differences amongst the people). Keen (2005) claims that colonialism disrupted traditional authority and education served to widen the opposition rather than encourage social unity. Keen

(2005) adds that colonial educational policy had "set out to strengthen tribal patriotism, reflecting British instincts to divide and rule" (p. 14). This division continued during the colonial period, producing a top down approach to education and creating class distinctions that still exist.

Education for the elite

Tertiary education in Freetown became the central hub for learning with Fourah Bay College pioneering a western style education system. The college became a gateway for the elite seeking higher education, offering courses in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, philosophy, geography, history, logic, political economy as well as natural sciences (Redwood-Sawyer, 2011). During the late 19th and early 20th century, there were over 60 books produced by scholars, in and of eight different languages (Redwood-Sawyer, 2011) and Freetown is still fondly remembered as once being the Athens *of West Africa.* However, not everyone had access to tertiary education. Kanu (2007) claims, that such levels of education were only made available to one-third of the population. As most Sierra Leoneans were unable to access formal education or forced by circumstance to work, they were unable to complete even primary school education, thus Sierra Leone evolved into an elitist system of education during colonialism, which excluded the majority of the population. According to the World Bank, literacy levels at the time of independence were dismal with less than 15% of children aged 5–11 years having attended primary school and 5% secondary school (World Bank, 2007). Despite one hundred and fifty years of colonial rule, the country made little progress in educating the masses, with the majority of the population remaining *uneducated or under-educated* (Guo, 2014).

Perpetual instability

Sierra Leone gained political independence in 1961, after 150 years of British rule, without improvements to the livelihood of its people. The lack of compulsory education, political instability and misuse of political power and funds, led to an even steeper decline (Bellows & Miguel, 2009). Aside from the lack of schooling and chronic unemployment, the stagnation of the economy during this period caused an economic crisis that according to the World Bank report (2007) exasperated the already fragile legacy of colonial rule. The report states:

> While these structural legacies of colonialism and post-colonial mismanagement, corruption and patronage underpinned the grievances that led to war, it was the economic crisis of the 1980s and the resultant International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment policies that laid the contingent foundations for an upsurge in unrest, with massive increases in fuel and basic food costs combined with cuts in health and education. (World Bank, 2007, p. 22)

Just before the civil war, Sierra Leone had the second lowest living standards of any country in the world (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1993). Added to this, a growing discontent toward corruption, bad governance, chronic youth unemployment and political grievances (Bellows & Miguel, 2009) as well as the exploitation of diamond and mineral resources (Guo, 2014) became the backdrop for the violent uprising. The civil war from 1991–2002, commonly referred to by locals as the *rebel war*, left a trail of catastrophic destruction with its effects still very visible today (experienced first-hand in my daily encounters with amputees). Between 50,000 – 75,000 people were killed during the war and more than half the population displaced either internally or externally (United Nations International Children's

Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2011). The amputation of limbs as a weapon of war and power, (UNICEF, 2011) the rape of women and girls and the recruitment of child soldiers, some as young as seven years of age (Betancourt et al., 2010) robbed innocent children of their childhoods, their family and their community. According to the Human Rights Watch (1999) this was done by forcing many young people to commit atrocities (killings, assault) against loved ones and neighbours under threat of death. It is important to note that in contrast to most popular media coverage on African civil wars, Bellows and Miguel (2009) state that neither ethnic nor religious division played a central role in the Sierra Leone conflict and the "RUF rebels targeted people from every ethnic group and throughout the country" (p. 1146).

The young of Sierra Leone have inherited a brutal and deprived legacy of psychological economic and educational devastation that is still being felt today. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics 2010, the civil war has left the country with 60% of the population illiterate and 60% living below the poverty line. The government has now embarked on a huge task to educate a predominantly youth orientated, illiterate and unemployed society.

Post recoveries

Post war, the UNDP (2010) ranked Sierra Leone last in Human Development Indicators (HDI). Small progress has been made post war; however, according to the UNDP (2013), Sierra Leone still remains amongst the poorest of countries, ranking 177 out of 187 countries (UNDP, 2013).

Any gains made during this period of post conflict recovery have been mostly reversed as a result of the Ebola outbreak in May 2014, weakening an already fragile infrastructure and leaving economic and social devastation. Projected 2014 growth in Sierra Leone is now 4.0 percent (versus 11.3% before the Ebola crisis (World Bank, 2014). This has to some extent

thwarted the government aims for a middle income society and the reduction of poverty by 2035, espoused in *The Agenda for Prosperity* (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013). Priorities have now shifted with the focus being on restoring basic access to health and a 'return to school' drive, with an even stronger push for the regrowth of private sector partnerships (Government of Sierra Leone, *National Ebola recovery strategy*, 2015). Whilst the Ebola outbreak has slowed educational priorities down, it is undeniable that the gaps in education and in particular educational policy existed pre-Ebola and they will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

Research Problem

Education by and large in Sierra Leone has been, and continues to be less prioritized. In the context of education for all (EFA) early childhood education is still at an embryonic stage and there are many issues that have impacted on its lack of advancement. The emergent needs of health, security, food, transportation, water and power has demanded attention from both government and non-government agencies (NGO's). The focus on infrastructure and private partnerships dominates government agenda (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013) both in business and education. There is very little in the way of educational research and most especially related to early childhood education and it currently remains the lowest priority in the education ladder. The commitment of the current government to the 2015 Millennium Goal promising that all children will be able to complete a full course of primary school by 2015, has not been met (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2015). Five years prior to the deadline, the UNDP (2010) indicated that this goal would not be met in time. The new Sustainability Development Goals (SDG's) include access to early childhood education however, it is once again predicted that Sierra Leone will not reach the set targets (Braima, Fofana, Jarret, Kamara, Weeks & Wellington, 2015).

There are gaps between policy and practice and there are systemic problems in monitoring and evaluating existing preschool services. In addition, despite the plethora of strategic action plans, policy and white papers from government and donor organizations in relation to education there are educational gaps in both accurate data (Guo, 2014) and delays in implementation. This has led to poor monitoring and corrupt practices in government schools and issues such as *ghost teacher*s has created unreliable data and clouded the current picture not only of teacher numbers (Guo, 2014) but education in general. This has been further exacerbated by ministerial strategic action plans (mostly funded and directed by aid organizations) that have failed to meet the agreed upon deadlines. As the country struggles to educate the masses, priorities are now focused on primary and secondary education. The current state of ECDE is recognized as needing attention, and whilst there are advocates, there appears to be little power in advocacy and economic, social, and systemic barriers operating at both a structural and agency level thus thwarting the advancement of ECDE.

Personal Motivation for this Research

I had the opportunity of visiting Sierra Leone in 2010 as a volunteer for an Australian charity. Having had international experience in early childhood settings in Australia, China, and Hong Kong, I was asked to observe the educational programs established by a Greek Orthodox mission and especially the teacher training college which was to cater for the high ratio of untrained and unqualified teachers (U.U's) in the country seeking formal qualifications (UNICEF, 2013). The mission provides free primary school and a fully operational nursery school consisting of three preschool classes in rural western district and supports another government assisted primary school in the capital city of Freetown. I was overwhelmed by the level of poverty, the lack of infrastructure, the general condition of schools, and the limited resources and ECDE knowledge. During this volunteer trip (which lasted 3 weeks) I visited and

spent time in public and private pre and primary school settings. I naively assumed my experiences in teaching and administration in China were compatible comparisons however, my youth spent in a village in Cyprus some 40 years earlier, was the better comparison. Despite the enormous constraints experienced by people on the ground in Sierra Leone, I was inspired by the desire for educational transformation by students and by government policy. Realizing this was the context I wanted to base my research upon, I returned to Sierra Leone in February 2013 as a lecturer at the teacher training college and as coordinator of a youth program. I was to teach the newly designed Higher Teaching Certificate (HTC) course in early childhood and discovered that approximately 80% of the students enrolled, were U.U's and some had been teaching without a salary for over ten years. Students embarked on the course with limited resources, basic food and shelter constraints, and transportation challenges but this did not deter them as they hoped their qualification and new knowledge would lead to securing paid employment as teachers. This was the first ECH college in Sierra Leone to offer such a qualification with the lowest college fees in the country and was regarded as a once in a lifetime opportunity. I began with an exploratory pilot study involving student teachers, parents, and community members. This gave participants the opportunity to discuss and share their thoughts and ideas surrounding the progress of ECDE in the country.

I was surprised at the sheer lack of information on ECDE and the ad-hoc manner in which early childhood services were being established. It occurred to me that preschools were creating early learning opportunities for only those who could afford the fees as most were private preschools and such a context created compelling grounds for this case study. Aside from the diverse spectrum of challenges that were preventing the progress of early childhood education in Sierra Leone, my involvement with the youth of Sierra Leone and their parents, also revealed the systemic economic problems that were preventing older children from

attending secondary school (which is not free for most children). Realizing that investigating the phenomenon of early childhood education in Sierra Leone was going to contain many variables and involve issues on a micro and macro scale, I used the first nine months in the country as my ethnographic training ground which provided understandings into the lives and realities of families. In total I spent 22 months (over 3 years) in Sierra Leone entering the field of research, with a feeling of excitement and trepidation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the current state of early childhood development and education in post war Sierra Leone and gain insights into the nature of early childhood with all its constraints and possibilities, seen through sociological and child developmental lenses and examined using critical social theory. This study was facilitated using a qualitative approach, encompassing an ethnographic case study which included interviews and anecdotal records from the field and journal entries. The intent was to capture the essence of lived experiences by listening, thinking, letting people talk and making meaning from what was seen and heard (Lichtman, 2010). The purpose was also to investigate the delays in formalizing early childhood education and pose possibilities into the future. The specific purpose of this research study was to:

- Capture and represent the voices of stake holders including teachers, parents, government and non-government representatives.
- Document lived experiences and gain insider insights into the phenomenon of early childhood care, development and learning.
- Evaluate current policies and practices with the aim of identifying gaps in order to inform the future progress of ECDE.

- Discern attitudes beliefs and values related to the importance and value of children, childhood and preschool education.
- Examine the role that children play and their contributions to national development.
- Identify the possibilities and constraints for future progress and make recommendations.

Research Questions

The questions were initially framed around a broad central theme: *Early Childhood Education in Sierra Leone* with the focus on just early education. I soon realized the issue of early education was enmeshed in systems that support/thwart the care, development, and learning of young children and historical precedents shaped by past and present hardships impact on the holistic nature of early childhood with all its variables. I wanted to adopt a more relational approach to the investigation whereby teaching and learning, seeing and doing, feeling and thinking, were examined alongside care and development, mutually supporting the investigative process. The first research question was broad and narrative, the second explored constraints and possibilities, and the third positioned children in society.

1. What is the current nature of early childhood education and development in Sierra Leone?

   Subsidiary questions:

   a. What does ECDE look, sound and feel like?

   b. How is it expressed in relation to the value of children?

2. What are the barriers to and facilitators of early childhood education in Sierra Leone?

   Subsidiary questions:

   a. Who are the advocates of ECDE?

   b. What are the structural and physical constraints?

3. What role do children play in the country's national development? Subsidiary question:
   a. *What can children do?*
   b. *How can they contribute?*

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in three important ways, all of which point to transformation as a process involving the combined influences of habitus, capital, and field upon structure and agency (Wacquant, 2006). The first is to theory. The work of Bourdieu has contributed to not only understandings on the sociology of childhood but more recently his theories have provided insights into the growing narrative of early childhood development and education (Alanen, Brooker, & Mayall, 2015). This study situates Bourdieu's ideas on how childhood exists on the ground in Sierra Leone and the correlation between personal hardship, educational opportunities, and physical support with notions of the inter-play between government and agency. Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus capital and field provide insights into the way childhood is constructed, enacted, and constrained through the development of habitus and the level of capital accrued is influenced by fields of power and dominance. At the same time, Bourdieu's critical social theory explains the way child agency and capital under the right circumstances can be mobilized potentially leading to transformation in ECDE in Sierra Leone. The second significance of this study is to policy. There is currently a fragmented approach to policies related to ECE (World Bank, 2013). There are also gaps between policy and practice and both the National Inter-sectoral policy ECD *draft* (2010) and the National draft preschool curriculum, (n.d.) remain in a stagnate position. This locally based ethnographic study will contribute up-to-date country specific researched material which includes global empirical and theoretical knowledge bases, focusing specifically on early childhood education. It is anticipated that this study will support government in various local and ministerial departments to work

with all stake holders and advocates in leading the way towards national standards and a revised updated national curriculum model that reflects the Sierra Leonean landscape. The third significance is its practical contribution to pedagogy and practice. Understanding how African children think and learn should not be measured against western developmental milestones and this study opens windows of opportunity for further exploration into children's development, classroom interactions, and preschool curriculum. The study is helpful to early childhood teachers, administrators and other stake holders who are designing preschool programs, thus contributing to wider understandings about child development, teaching, and learning. Finally, it is anticipated that this research study will add to the emerging early childhood research, in West Africa.

Definitions of Terms

Given the sociocultural context of Sierra Leone's education system, some of the terminology used throughout this thesis, reflects a need to define key concepts and terms. Where necessary, brief explanations that frame the terminology is provided.

Early childhood

Early childhood refers to a process in which the child grows physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, spiritually, and morally, from ages 0–8 years (Berk, 1991). Whilst in Sierra Leone, there is general agreement that early childhood covers these ages, young children enter formal schooling at different ages depending on accessibility and affordability. Despite the formal age of school mandated at 6 years of age, some start schooling as old as 10 years of age. Therefore, early childhood education in this context is not as clearly defined by age.

Ghost teachers

The term 'ghost teachers' refers to those names on school registers that never take sick leave, never experience a loss of income and never die. In other words, they are names but not people that exist. This has been draining funds since the 1980's and has been a platform for corruption involving members of parliament, including inspectors and school principals for decades.

Government and government-assisted schools

According to The Education Act (2004) a government school is defined as one that is totally owned and managed by or on behalf of the Ministry. A government assisted school pays teacher salaries, provides teaching and learning materials, but is not owned by the government.

These are schools established by Faith Based Organizations (FBO's), Non-Government Organizations (NGO's), individuals and communities.

Higher Teacher Certificate

The HTC is a nationally accredited qualification which offers secondary, primary, and nursery school teachers the opportunity to gain a formal undergraduate teaching qualification. It offers some nursery subjects for those wishing to gain basic early childhood knowledge. There is now an early childhood specific HTC and the first cohort of students sat the national exam in 2015.

Untrained and unqualified teachers

Unqualified is defined as those teachers who teach at a higher level than their academic qualification. Those with no qualifications are defined as untrained. The Ministry of Education has embarked on a campaign to address the issue of U.U's in primary and secondary schools. It is hoped this process will uproot the *ghost teachers* currently operating in schools.

Preschool

The term "preschool" is used synonymously with other terms such as "nursery school" and the government-preferred term "pre-primary school". In the context of this study I refer to such terms as belonging to children between 3–6 years of age and with reference to formal early childhood education prior to school entry. In Sierra Leone, some preschool environments are categorized into three specific age groups: Nursery 1: 3 years of age, Nursery 2: 4–5 years of age and Nursery 3, 5–6 years of age.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into seven chapters.

Chapter 1: This chapter introduces the thesis as a whole and contextualizes the research study providing information pertinent to this investigation. It explains the rationale behind the study and its purpose and includes the research problem and subsequent research questions as well as personal motivation for undertaking such a study. This chapter also presents definitions of terms and outlines the structure of the thesis as a whole.

Chapter 2: This literature review is divided into two parts. Part 1 sets the stage in terms of educational blueprints pertinent to the understanding of Sierra Leone's progress toward formalizing early childhood education. It includes global and local policies, white papers and strategic reports designed by government and aid organizations. Part 2 critically reviews various relevant material from a range of sources. It is organized under related dominant discourses in the field of early education and especially themes that relate to the research topic. It includes findings on the long reach holistic benefits of ECDE, national economic benefits, the influence of neuroscience, notions of school readiness, developmental theories, pedagogical practices, the politics of spending, as well as afro-centric notions of childhood.

Chapter 3: This chapter asserts my chosen theory and gives an overview of the importance of theory in research. It provides an in-depth focus on the theoretical underpinnings that informed the research study, show the relationship between the theory and the thesis as a whole. It explains how critical social theory guided investigation into the three research questions and how Bourdieu's conceptual thinking tools of habitus, capital and field illuminated the examination, interpretation and discussion of the data.

Chapter 4: This chapter addresses the *how* questions in methodology and contains the philosophical and theoretical influences that framed the process of choosing, organizing and

conducting the research. It includes the approach, design, methods and tools used to collect, record analyse the data and explains the steps in data analysis. It also includes researcher praxis in relation to critical reflexivity.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents examples of the sources of data collected during the field work (interviews, observational and field notes, journal entries). It is organized around three themes derived from the data analysis process: Theme 1 C*hildhood Narratives* Theme 2 *Values and Education*, Theme 3 *The Future*. The themes not only contextualize childhood on the ground in Sierra Leone, they also relate back to answering the research questions.

Chapter 6: This chapter brings the research findings together, discussing them in light of the themes that emerged from the data analysis process and the three research questions. It goes on to interpret the data and critically discusses the findings as a whole, weaving in Bourdieu's theoretical ideas and examining the data through his conceptual thinking tools of habitus, capital and field.

Chapter 7: This final chapter brings the study together as a whole, summarizing the key findings in relation to the research questions. It contributes to existing knowledge, policy and practice and makes recommendations based on the constraints and possibilities for early childhood education in Sierra Leone. It concludes with the limitations of this research study.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a general introduction and overview of the thesis. It contextually positions the study within the socio-historical context of Sierra Leone and outlines the purpose, significance, and personal motivation for the research study. It also includes the research questions and the significance of the study to pedagogy and practice, to theory and to policy. Lastly, it defines terms pertinent to discussions in this thesis and outlines the structure

of the thesis. Chapter Two, continues this general introduction but with a more focused look at the educational and social platforms that have positioned ECDE in Sierra Leone.

CHAPTER 2 Literature Review

This chapter is divided into two parts focusing on issues related the current nature of early childhood development and education (ECDE) in Sierra Leone in its broadest sense. The review includes past and present initiatives that act as facilitators and/or barriers in the advancement of early childhood education in the country.

Part one reviews global initiatives historically setting the scene with educational blueprints that have reformed education. It also covers local reforms that have helped mobilize changes to legislation and includes government reports, policy and country agendas to demonstrate where preschool education is situated. Part two is organized under three conceptual issues: the importance of ECDE, childhood in context, and structural issues. Topics related to the importance of early good starts including neuroscience, economics, school readiness, child development and diverse childhoods. Key structural concerns such as economics and poverty are also covered as they impact on access, provision, and delivery of ECDE services in the country.

Part 1: Global Initiatives

The historical journey of educational reform in Sierra Leone has been guided by macropolicies and initiatives in the international arena as well as micro-policies and agendas closer to home. Educational blue prints set priorities, directions and new agendas as well as measure and evaluate targets serving to raise the profile of education both globally (EFA) and locally. It has facilitated a movement in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) based on the premise that education is for everyone regardless of country and circumstance. This review begins by presenting the global initiatives as a point of the reference and context and is followed by local blueprints that have influenced policy and practice in relation to early childhood education in Sierra Leone.

Globally, the movement to increase and improve education for all children has contributed to increased access of basic education around the world (Global Education Monitoring, 2012, 2014). This movement has not only highlighted the importance and benefits of ECDE it has also accelerated service provision in some countries. Historically, three major platforms have steered the global aim of improving accessibility and quality of education:

- The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand (1990)
- The World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal (2000)
- The United Nations Millennium Summit, New York (2000).

Each has played a crucial role in advancing Universal Primary Education (UPE) urging countries to prioritize and support education using a human rights-approach (*The Dakar Framework for Action,* 2000). These early historical blueprints have served as a beacon in raising important issues of education especially for Sub-Sahara African countries and most especially for driving educational reforms in Sierra Leone.

EFA and the Dakar Framework for Action

The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in 1990 was able to mobilize countries in the developing world to participate in the global movement toward accessible education for every child in every country around the world. West African countries such as Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Senegal, adopted the EFA declaration and set regional goals using background information from the final report, (World Conference on Education for All, 1990). The World Education Forum in Dakar, a decade later, set out to review the original goals, (realizing that many countries were unable to meet the time lines established a decade earlier) and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) was accepted. According to UNESCO, this framework was based on the most extensive assessment of education ever undertaken: *The Dakar framework for action* (UNESCO, 2000, p. 4). It produced a detailed analysis of the state

of education in six regions and was designed as a reaffirming tool and road map for achieving the EFA goals by 2015. The Dakar Framework for Action (2000) identified six key education goals:

4. Expand and improve early childhood care and education.
5. Provide free and compulsory primary school education for all.
6. Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults.
7. Increase adult literacy by 50 per cent.
8. Achieve gender parity by 2005 and gender equity by 2015.
9. Improve the quality of education.

In order to evaluate each country's headway in relation to EFA, an index was devised as a snapshot of progress and used to rank individual countries. The Education Development Index (EDI) was intended to measure progress but only four of the six EFA goals (goals 1, 4, 5, 6) were included. In principle the EDI should have included all of the goals but reasons given for the exclusion were that they are less quantifiable and constraints existed due to a lack of comparable data (Global Education Monitoring, 2012). The EDI for early childhood education (ECCE) created a less than accurate picture, only serving to highlight the *lack of* progress in improving early childhood care and education. The ECCE index uses 3 key indicators to summarize results: Health – *survival beyond 5 years of age,* Nutrition – *measuring children not suffering from severe stunting,* and Education – *preschool enrolments*. The value of the ECCE index is the mean of these three indicators. Only 68 out of 205 countries had such information (on all 3 indicators) and lack of data from high income countries accounted for this gap.

According to Global Education Monitoring (2012) "one effect of extending the index is that the absolute value of the index falls, on average, indicating that countries are further from achieving goal 1" (p. 307). Whilst the ECCE index is intended as a progressive measurement tool it failed

to provide accurate insights on the global state of ECDE especially given the applicability of the definitions given for nutrition: *stunting*, and health: *child mortality*, which according to Global Education Monitoring (2012) are not major issues of concern for high income countries (p. 45).

Despite the limitations of The Dakar Framework for Action, it was adopted by the regional conference EFA in Johannesburg (*The Dakar Framework for Action*, 2000). The region set out its own optimistic strategic priorities for Sub-Sahara Africa and provided a picture of 21st century rejuvenation of education (pp. 24–34). In relation to ECDE it set out the following:

> 5.1 Expansion of quality early childhood education and development: Ensure that early childhood development (ECD) programmes are expanded twofold by the year 2006, and that they offer safe, secure, and stimulating environments. Countries should work towards providing access to ECD programmes to all children from ages 3 to 6 by the year 2015. (*The Dakar Framework for Action: EFA*, 2000 p. 21)

This target – for all Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) countries to expand and improve early childhood programs – was highly ambitious. As the timeframe drew nearer, it was evident that the target would not be met. The Sub-Sahara Africa Report (2014) confirmed that SSA countries were showing "timid progress" (p. 7) and the region was still statistically placed behind all other regions (*Sub-Sahara Africa 2013; EFA Report*, 2014). The Global Education Monitoring (2014) goes further in its critique of progress, by stating:

> With the deadline for the Education for All (EFA) goals less than two years away, it is clear that despite advances over the decade, not a single goal will be achieved globally by 2015. (*The Global Education Monitoring*, 2014, p. 1).

As a participating country, Sierra Leone is one of the country's that has lagged behind. Despite the limitations, awareness of ECDE issues helped draw attention to the issues of access and provision of education for all, in Sierra Leone.

The Millennium Development Goals

Building on the momentum of the Dakar Framework for Action, the United Nations Millennium Summit held in New York, 2000 produced a Declaration document identifying key values, principles, and objectives for the international agenda for the twenty-first century. It set out a series of time-bound targets also with a deadline of 2015. The Millennium Development Goals were to:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women.
4. Reduce child mortality.
5. Improve maternal health.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

There is resonance between the Dakar framework goals and the MDG education targets in some areas, however the absence of early childhood education and higher forms of learning beyond primary school are not clearly expressed in the MDG's. It can be argued that the goals are focused on broader issues but the absence of an ECDE goal is a failure to see the long reach benefits that it contributes to social and human capital investment (Woodhead, 2006) especially as a broader poverty reduction strategy (Nores & Barnett, 2012) that can yield long term economic benefit on investment (Bartik, 2011; Heckman et al., 2010). If the MDG's had

integrated an ECDE target into goal 2, it would have supported the other goals. For example, high quality holistic ECDE programs can support both the education and welfare of young children by monitoring children's health, nutrition, hygiene (MDG 1 and 6); by preparing children for primary school (MDG 2); by working in partnership with parenting programs (MDG 4, 5) and by providing specialized foundational early learning programs (MDG's 3 & 7).

Whilst there has been significant progress in achieving many of the MDG's globally (for developed countries) SSA countries lag behind and as a region there are contrasts. For example, primary school completion (PCR) in Seychelles is at 100% capacity followed by countries such as Ghana, Botswana, Zambia and Cape Verde (13 countries in total) experiencing 90–100% PCR. In contrast for 31 other countries, including Togo, Rwanda, Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Liberia and Sierra Leone, ranked lowest and according to the *Sub-Sahara Africa 2013* "not likely to be achieved before 2020" (p. 6). Challenges for some of the lowest ranked SSA countries are many as they continue to struggle with food shortages, higher infant and child mortality rates, conflict, instability, housing, and poverty. It was abundantly clear that the majority of MDG targets could not be met and most especially for Sierra Leone.

The Sustainable Development Goals

It has been more than 25 years since global education leaders met in Jomtien, Thailand, and the idea that learning begins at birth has resonated across the globe spreading an advocacy trail for ECDE. The new United Nations initiative: *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* has established an intergovernmental set of 17 aspiration goals with 169 targets which will drive international development for the next fifteen years. The Sustainability Development Goals (SDG's) represent an integrated approach to development incorporating economic social and environment goals. ECDE is now embedded under Goal 4:

Education: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all,* with an aim that:

> By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. (*Target: 4.2).* (UNDP, 2015)

The EDI as discussed earlier, made an attempt to include early childhood as a specific developmental index of measurement (Global Education Monitoring, 2012) and the Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI) will now be one of the proposed indicators identified in meeting target 4.2. The inclusion of target 4.2 is an important accomplishment and reflects the widespread evidence of the importance of nurturing children's development, care, and education well before formal schooling and also reflects a growing understanding that children are agents of change who can contribute to national transformation.

Legislation and law

The development of pragmatic policies, legislation and social justice laws, have tended to set the stage for advancing ECDE in various countries making government policies powerful facilitators of change. Historically, the anti-poverty and civil rights laws of the 1960s and 1970s brought about dramatic changes to access and equity issues for education. Laws legislated can become powerful road maps for reforms, transforming ideas into actions, frame works into measurement tools and targets into practice. It is within such legislative frameworks that the rights of the child have emerged.

The rights of the child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) has received unanimous support across the globe even in developing countries that face many challenges in its implementation. Sierra Leone has demonstrated its commitment to this treaty by incorporating it into the country's Child Rights Act (2007) which supersedes all other national laws. More countries (193 in total) ratified this Convention than any other treaty in history. Three countries have lagged behind, but as of January 2015, Somalia signed the convention and South Sudan, (which only gained independence five years ago) has already passed a bill for its ratification. This surprisingly leaves the United States. Whilst it signed the convention back in 1995, it has never been ratified and some US officials have argued that ratification has not been necessary because US law has caught up with the convention's provisions to date. It appears somewhat ironic, given that the US was instrumentally supportive in the early stages of setting up this treaty.

Many countries including Australia and the UK have yet to incorporate the Rights of the Child treaty into law, which begs the question as to the applicability of a treaty that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and whether in 2016, it still has relevance given what we now understand about children's learning and development. In looking more closely at the treaty especially Article 28, its subjectivity can be argued. Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, (1989) states:

> 1. Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all.

Whilst the convention defines *children* as those under the age of 18 years (Article 1) it goes on to exclude preschool aged children from a right to education in Article 28 (1.a).

UNESCO's *The right to education: Law and policy* (UNESCO, 2014) claims the treaty recognizes the right to education and the need for equity "but only as it applies to making primary education compulsory, available and free to all" (p. 11). Whilst UNESCO (2014, pp. 25–47) has devised a list of recommended education indictors, which include treaty ratification, constitutional provision, national strategy, action plan and curriculum, once again the indicators exclude preschool education. Despite current knowledge on the benefits of early education and the importance of early good starts that are guiding research and public policy and serving to frame recommendations for social and economic action the treaty is being contested due to its subjectivity. An article in the *California Law Review* (Ryan, 2006) demonstrates how public activism has been able to push the constitutional boundaries to include the right to a preschool education in the United States due to subjective laws. Community groups, teacher's (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2008) unions, business partners, anti-crime organizations, charities and economist's, petitioned the courts for accessible public preschool education and this has proven politically salient. According to Ryan (2006) all state constitutions contain an education clause but the precise language of the clauses varies and only 7 states specify age limits. This leaves it open to interpretation and some states have advocated and persuaded the view that public schooling begins at pre-primary level. This has enabled both state and executive officials to go "down the path of providing access to preschool" (p. 99) as a constitutional right. Ryan (2006) also adds:

> In states that have recognized or can be persuaded to recognize a right to an adequate education, there are strong legal arguments for a right to preschool.
>
> This should be encouraging news for preschool advocates. (p. 81)

It can be argued the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is outdated and at best requires constitutional amendments to reflect current knowledge bases but it is still a powerful international law that has actioned advocacy which in itself acts as a facilitator of ECDE. Many

countries have used the Rights of the Child treaty to guide their work on advancing ECDE and used the Articles as a guiding tool in implementing and combining public policy with action. Backed by evidence from economist, social scientists, psychologists as well as neuroscience, the rights of the child treaty has served to mobilize preschool enrolments, position and prioritize the education of young children in political and public policy agendas.

Sierra Leone has been influenced by such international platforms and many of the local educational blueprints (past and present) are now embedded in the rights of the child.

Local blueprints

Early childhood education in Sierra Leone is valued by government but is yet to be prioritized. Its value is reflected in how government has now positioned pre-primary school into the educational structure of the country and this has been a progressively long historical journey.

Educational reforms

After 150 years of colonial rule which ended in 1961, the Education Act of 1964 was established followed by the first White Paper on Education, released in 1970. From 1970–1990 the socioeconomic situation of Sierra Leone was deteriorating against the backdrop of the rebel war, which seriously affected educational advancement. For example, from 1970 to 1985 the average primary school enrolment figures were 6%. In the five years that followed, primary school enrolment fell to 2.0% (Department of Education, Sierra Leone, 1995). An educational review setting out reforms led to the publication of *All our Future* in 1976 and this was perceived by the Secretary of State (in writing the foreword to the New Policy for Sierra Leone in 1995) as a document containing educational ideas far ahead of its time (Department of Education,

Sierra Leone, 1995). It was two decades later that the New Education Policy (Department of Education, Sierra Leone, 1995) was produced to provide a framework for the education system

and was strongly influenced by the world conference for EFA in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. Pre-primary education was loosely defined as 3–6 years of age and its main purpose was to prepare children for primary school. However, the New Education Policy did not perceive early education as a right stating:

> Preschool education cannot, at this stage of our development be a 'right' for every child. It is now given in private schools of varying quality mainly in Freetown. (2.1.3 p. 9)

The new system of compulsory education (with pre-primary regarded as optional) was 9 years in length – 6 years primary and 3 years of junior secondary school, with English language the medium of instruction after class 3. Since then, there have been significant events in education at the national and international level which drew the attention of the Sierra Leonean government e.g. the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, the Millennium Summit which adopted the MDGs and the passing of a number of Acts in 2001, culminating in the New Education Act in 2004. The new Act still included provision for pre-primary school but was once again excluded from the formal system (regarded as optional). It reiterated much the same objectives around its purpose (school readiness). Governed by the Ministry, the role of local authority was to enforce the rules of the Act for establishing pre-primary schooling as well as primary and secondary schools.

A paradigm shift has since occurred in terms of how pre-primary school is now positioned as a result of the Government White Paper of 2010, based on recommendations from the Gbamanja Report in 2010, embedded in the New Education policy (Ministry of Information and Communication, 2010). In addition, a plethora of document policies and donor aid papers are now contributing to dominant discourses surrounding educational reform in the country. The government mandated a new structure of education extending an extra year to secondary level

education due to the poor results in West African Education Council (WAEC) exams and repositioned pre-primary schooling.

National Education Policy 2010

The reforms for pre-primary were introduced into the National Education Policy (Government of Sierra Leone, 2010) and pre-primary is now positioned under the education structure with some ambitious expectations:

> Pre-school education is for children aged 3–5 years old. It shall be free and compulsory. Every primary school shall have a pre-school wing attached. Preschool education will support the all-round development of the child and lay the foundation for future learning success. (2.1.1 p. 9)

The new system presents an idealistic vision of 12 years of compulsory schooling – 3 years preschool, 6 years primary, and 3 years of junior secondary marking the end of compulsory schooling (*National Education Policy, 2010*). The intent under this policy is to improve learning outcomes for young children and support their holistic development however, there are many promises in this policy yet to be fulfilled, such as the development and enforcement of minimum standards for the establishment and operation of private preschools, improved government transparency and the assurance that language of instruction in classes 1– 3 remains in the national language of the region until class 4. Despite government initiatives to improve ECDE there has been slow or no progress made in the implementation phase with many of the set targets for ECDE unmet.

Preschool and the education sector plans

During this period of educational reform, two country plans were designed to guide progress, one in 2007 and the other in 2013. The Education Sector Plan 2007–2015 *A roadmap to a better future* (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MEST], 2007) outlined the goals and aspirations for education up to the year 2015 with an aim of achieving universal basic education by developing partnerships with the private sector. Like many other African countries, Sierra Leone under-went a major decentralization process that transferred power and responsibility to local governments. The management of schools was reassigned from the Ministry of Science and Technology (MEST) to District Education Councils (DEC) City/Town Councils, who were expected to take full control and supervision. The Plan addressed to local councils stated:

> Outside of central government, the recently re-established local councils are going to have the biggest influence on education in Sierra Leone. District Education Councils (DEC) and City/Town Councils are to take full control and supervision of all pre-primary, primary, and junior secondary schools by 2008, including such functions as the recruitment and payment of teachers, the provision of textbooks and teaching materials, and the rehabilitation and construction of schools. The process has already commenced. (MEST, 2007 p. 11)

The Plan was released alongside its sister document *Education in Sierra Leone – Present Challenges, Future Opportunities* published by the World Bank (2007) which highlighted the status of pre-primary school as existing predominantly in the private sector *"dominated by children from wealthier families"* and mostly in the urban districts (p. 66). Partnerships between the different ministries (i) Education, Science and Technology, (ii) Health and (iii) Social

Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs) are mentioned in this plan as an indication of the government's concern for a more holistic approach to early childhood care, development and education. According to the Ministry Education Science and Technology (MEST) the lack of resources and capacity lead to a focus on encouraging private investment in the running of preschools as "it establishes the necessary policy framework, trains personnel/carers/teachers, established a book policy, develops methodologies and curricula and provides required teaching/ learning materials in collaboration with its development partners" (p. 16). The actions identified for implementation were to increase the number of privately owned childcare centres (*short term goal)* and the other (*long term goal)* was for government to inject much needed funding to early childhood education (p. 89). To date, the long term goal has not been actioned. Other objectives and strategies included the development of an integrated early childhood education curriculum incorporating, health, nutrition and education, building on indigenous practice as well as establishing operating standards and monitoring and evaluation of early childhood education (ECCE) programs and an injection of public funds.

The Plan was designed to be flexible and adjustments made over time. The aims strategies and time lines identified in 2007 were (and still are) a work in progress. This Plan has now been replaced by the latest Education Sector Plan 2014–2018, *Learning to succeed,* published by MEST in 2013. This new Plan outlines issues pertaining to access and preschool enrolment stating that Sierra Leone lags behind other Sub-Sahara Africa countries (p. 20). It sets out a five year plan and vision for the future of education in the country. For pre-primary school, it lays out ambitious plans to develop and pilot cost-effective communities based preschool models and develop minimum National Standards, however, it remains to be seen if the following intervention will be actioned:

Intervention 1.2 a

Develop and pilot cost-effective community-based pre-school models, targeting the most marginalised communities.

This includes constructing early learning spaces, developing minimum standards, and training teachers and caregivers. The majority of the pre-schools in Sierra Leone are private and fee-based, and they are mostly located in cities and large towns. There are very few pre-schools in rural communities, and in those areas many pre-school aged children are enrolled in primary schools even though they are not ready for school. MEST will develop and pilot community based preschool models that will target the neediest communities. (p. 25)

The country's Education Sector Plans aim to increase access, improve quality, and strengthen systems. Whilst the aim of EFA especially in Sub-Sahara Africa has focused on access and preschool enrolment numbers (African Child Policy Forum, 2013) simply going to preschool is not enough. In Sierra Leone, Nishimuko (2007) claims that access to education is not just about increasing the number of children going to school, it is about the quality of education provided. This he claims involves a collective commitment and meaningful planned learning outcomes (Nishimuko, 2007). Improving the quality of preschool education requires a more vigorous and collaborative effort between structure and agency and includes a combination of contextually appropriate early childhood programs, human capital and material resources (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) with an injection of public as well as private contributions. The Global Partnership country report for Sierra Leone states that the country has received two grants to support the implementation of its sector plans: US$11.6 million for 2008–2012 and US$17.9 million for 2014–2017 (Global Partnership for Education, 2015).

The lack of advancement in relation to Early Childhood Education (ECE) may well be thwarted by government-wide decentralization issues and the complex challenges in redefining

and allocating responsibilities and functions at central and local levels. To address this issue and ensure progress of the Education Sector Plan 2014–2018 (MEST, 2013) MEST designed a supportive document, the Education Sector Capacity Development Strategy (Carpenter, Grout Smith, & Wood, 2011). This strategic action plan is to ensure the Education Sector Plan 2014–2018 meets the criteria for endorsement by the Education Development Partners Group and addresses decentralization, management, and education matters. Issues identified in relation to the existing provision of early education include a lack of preschool provision, untrained ECE teachers, *ad hoc* ECCE materials and content which according to the Education Sector Capacity Development Strategy 2012–2016 "relies on primary school materials rather than distinct curricula and resources that are based on ECCE theory and practice" (Carpenter et al., 2011, p. 46). The Plan identified other *critical issue*s such as the lack of standards, supervision, and monitoring structures in delivery which accordingly, positions ECCE in the *fringes* of quality (p. 46). The implementation of *Strategic objective 13*: *Early childhood care and education, where available, provides a safe and positive environment* (p. 46) is a broad and ambitious objective which was costed at 165,000USD with a 5 year time period for implementation (Carpenter et al., 2011), which has now expired.

In terms of continued privatization of preschools, the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) which focuses specifically on policies in the area of ECCE, reported that out of 644 pre-primary schools operating only 7% are publicly operated with 50% not formally approved (World Bank, 2013). In Sierra Leone today, government schools are still in a post war condition with many classrooms overcrowded, without suitable desks and chairs, no teacher resources, lack of toilet buildings and no water supply (Nishimuko, 2007, UNESCO, 2013). In terms of infrastructures, overall public and non-public schools do not adhere to

infrastructure standards and 48% of all pre-primary classrooms are in need of repair (World Bank, 2013, p. 22).

For now, it seems that ECE carries no urgency and remains a *quiet voice crying out in the wilderness* which is only heard by the private and charitable sector.

Government agenda priorities

Sierra Leone has a history of progressive and ambitious reforms for advancing the country despite the many challenges it has experienced as a nation. Whilst such visionary footprints demonstrate the government's legislative commitment to young children's wellbeing, education lags far behind as other pressing child rights issues, such as child protection, harmful traditional practices, child labour, poverty, girl-child inequality etc. remain policy priorities. These priorities are the burden of all West African countries but the right to an early childhood education needs a robust framework that calls to accountability the strategic directions the country wishes to take in terms of education. The President of Sierra Leone, Dr
Ernest Bai Koroma, declared in the National Agenda for Change Policy Reduction Strategy 2008–2012, the following:

> In Education, activities will be aimed at improving access to education and raising completion rates – improving the quality of education through extensive training programs for teachers, providing adequate teaching and learning materials; improving the conditions of service for teachers especially in remote areas; providing early childhood care for more children and encouraging the girl child to attend and complete school. (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2008, p. 9)

This was an eagerly anticipated reform agenda, placing *Education* fourth in order of strategic priorities, with *Power Supply, Productivity and Transportation*, the first three respectively. It is within this fourth priority *Education*, that the voice of early childhood education was faintly heard. As early childhood education attempts to find its place as an

important contributor to life-long learning and national development, it must compete firstly with vital infrastructures, secondly with food productivity and thirdly with national transportation needs (pp. 44–78). Early childhood education must also compete within that fourth educational priority for scarce government funding as priorities appear to rest in primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

Moving forward, *The Agenda for Prosperity: Sierra Leone's Third Generation Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2013–2018* changed country priorities. Whilst the need for improving all levels of education is still recognized, we see a shift in government values post 2013, with a vision for middle income status by 2035. Education now sits specifically under the umbrella of Pillar 3 *Human Capital* with an ambitious free and compulsory education for every child vision (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013). Education (primary, secondary and tertiary) is given 4 pages of a 216 national visionary plan and early childhood education is not mentioned at all. Questions about why the president decided to abandon a manifesto pledge – the *Agenda for Change*, which by his own admission, remains incomplete, to introduce a new set of policymaking objectives encompassing eight *Prosperity Pillars* are being asked. The rebuttal is that this second agenda has built on the successes to date of the first and as such the focus now is on empowering the Sierra Leonean economy through the support of private sector. This in essence has moved country priorities from a peace building post war recovery agenda (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2008) to a public/private agenda with the following prosperity pillars: Diversified

Economic Growth, Managing Natural Resources, Accelerating Human Development,

International Competitiveness, Labour and Employment, Social Protection, Governance and Public Sector Reform, and Gender and Women's Empowerment (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013).

A conference of Sierra Leone principals held at Makeni University explored the important role of education in the Agenda for Prosperity. The Vice Chancellor, Rev Fr Dr Joseph A. Turay highlighted the challenges in implementation and suggested strategies for the way forward. Whilst supportive of the new agenda he concluded that it is an *educated population* that is the key to prosperity (Turay, 2014) stating:

> Government needs to scale up investment on education in order to break the cycle of poverty and fast track economic transformation. Here critical trade-offs have to made. An educated population will make better preventative health decisions, adopt better family planning practices, can create the space for partnership with government, demand accountability from all levels of leadership, create the middle class, create a modern ICT based economy rather than cash based one. Indeed an educated population can better work to achieve the Agenda for Prosperity challenges. (p. 6)

The Agenda for Prosperity (2013) has a huge task ahead in terms of implementing its strategic priorities. Into the future, the need for an established well-structured education system will strengthen all aspects of nation building. The government is aware of the need for public–private partnerships in education as well as commercial enterprises, and in 2007, Sierra Leone joined the Global Partnership for Education. The Educations Sector Plans (2007, 2013) are a road map towards that goal; however, a robust review of policy development in relation to ECDE must be the next step forward in order to build firm developmental and educational foundations for the future well-being and prosperity of the country.

ECDE integrated policies

The term "policy" is not a tightly defined concept but a highly flexible one, used in different ways on different occasions and in this instance, I use Webster's dictionary definition: *A definite course or method of action selected (by government) from among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and, usually, to determine present and future decisions*. In particular I focus on early childhood policy both in Sierra Leone and neighbouring Ghana for the purpose of reviewing alternatives. I also define the draft national preschool curriculum in Sierra Leone in this context, as it is still a work in progress.

This holistic approach to child development, well-being, and education is crucial to the survival and optimum growth of young children in Sub-Sahara Africa and there has been an influx of inter-sectoral ECDE policies in SSA (Neuman & Dervecelli, 2012). Integrated approaches to the care and education of young children are found to be directly related to learning and motivation (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003) and to good health, good nutrition, and appropriate stimulation (African Child Policy Forum, 2013; Berk 1991; Nores & Barnett, 2012; Young, 1996). Sectoral and multi-sectoral policies grounded in laws and regulation not only provide holistic approaches, they also define specific accountabilities and responsibilities from each sector and impose duties on government, especially by establishing procedural requirements and follow through (Neuman & Devercilli, 2012).

The value of integrated policy frameworks has been instrumental in supporting children's learning and development through specific intervention programs. Nores and Barnett's study (2012) reviewed evidence on the benefits of early childhood intervention programs across 23 countries. They found that children from different countries and contexts receive substantial cognitive, behavioural, health, nutrition and schooling benefits from early intervention programs that were sustained over time. The programs that were mixed e.g. care

and education or stimulation and nutrition, evidenced the largest statistically significant effect on cognition, compared to say just one intervention e.g. nutrition (Nores & Barnett, 2010, p. 279). The African Child Policy Forum (2013) concurs that children with good health are more likely to have better educational outcomes and this is evidenced through higher school attendance, performance, and production. In SSA it is concerning that 13 countries have drafted ECDE polices that are still not adopted (Neuman & Devercilli, 2012) which in turn slows down the process of implementation. In the case of Sierra Leone integrated policies related to health, nutrition, and cognition are crucial as they link to young children's physical survival.

Inter-sectoral policy Sierra Leone

The draft National Policy for Inter-sectoral Early Childhood Development in Sierra Leone (NPIECD) was developed in 2010 and according to the *Sierra Leone ECD SABER Report* (World Bank, 2013) "it sets forth an ambitious set of goals pertaining to intervention coverage levels and quality" (p. 6). An overview of the goals to be achieved by 2015 included:

- Ensure the provision of 70% of public primary schools with three pre-primary classrooms.
- Raise parents' awareness with the aim to ensure all children aged 3 years have access to ECD programs.
- Ensure all maternal hospitals and clinics are baby friendly and 80% of babies are exclusively breastfed until six months of age.
- Educate 90% of pregnant women and lactating mothers of the importance of adequate and balanced diet and inform them about the optimal feeding practices for infants and young children.

The adoption of the draft NPIECD (2010) has not been advanced and perhaps for good reason. The fragmented approach to policy direction and lack of cohesiveness still prevents service delivery in 2016 as expressed in Figure 2.1.

The 2007 Global Monitoring Report on Education For All makes a compelling case for investment in early childhood care and education, which it defines as encompassing "children's survival, growth, development…" This comprehensive vision includes children's health, nutrition, and hygiene, including the cognitive, social, and emotional development. Historically, Early Childhood Development provision in Sierra Leone has been in the domain of individual institutions, religious bodies, agencies and government departments. For example, child nutrition, safe motherhood, and child survival was purely in the hands of the health sector. Early childhood education has always belonged to the Education Ministry and private agencies, whilst child protection received the attention of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs. The fragmented approach to Early Childhood Development has persisted because of the absence of a comprehensive policy framework available to provide policy direction. The interventions as a result had considerable gaps, which had implications on service delivery.

Figure 2.1. Draft National Inter-sectoral policy early childhood development (2010).

A fragmented approach to early childhood in Sierra Leone

The Sierra Leone ECD SABER Report (World Bank, 2013) states that although the NPIECD aims to achieve high inter-sectoral synergies "it is important to note that the policy was not designed in a participatory manner … Furthermore, it is unclear whether government is willing to pass the draft policy" (p. 7). Like many policies and action plans the NPIECD goals pertaining to intervention, access, and quality are ambitious and with no mechanisms in which to facilitate coordination between state and non-state stakeholders and ministries and without funding to ensure adequate resources to implement policies, the barriers to ECDE are transparently evident. Policy lever 1.3 Finance in the *Sierra Leone ECD: SABER Report* (World Bank, 2013) states that:

> While legal frameworks and inter-sectoral coordination are crucial to establishing an enabling environment for ECD, adequate financial investment is key to ensure that resources are available to implement policies and achieve service provision goals. (p. 7)

The government must coordinate in order to advance the NPIECD as it has the potential to systemically guide and increase collaboration between government ministries and local authorities as well as stake holders both locally and internationally. As Neumann and Devercilli (2012) claim:

> In some ways, waiting for a policy to be approved has become an excuse to delay implementation planning, allocation of financial resources, and the scaling up of interventions. (p. 30)

Ghana's comprehensive early childhood care and development policy

In advancing an ECDE policy, lessons can be learned by drawing on examples from other African countries as presented in the Sierra Leone ECD SABER Report (World Bank, 2013) and from the experiences of neighbouring Ghana. Implementing strategies in advancing the ECDE policy in Ghana included the following policy directions (Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs Ghana, 2004):

Critical Strategic direction for implementing the policy goal and objectives include:

- Creation of appropriate/conducive environment for developing and implementing Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) programs.
- Promoting Integrated Services.
- Encouraging establishment of Conventional and Non-Conventional ECCD systems for all children.
- Building capacity for ECCD practitioners and institutions.
- Broadening Parental participation in the Implementation process.
- Providing quality ECCD programmes and services.
- Organizing regular research, monitoring and evaluation programs to enhance all aspects of ECCD systems.

- Mobilizing resources for implementing ECCD programs.

The policy (Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs Ghana, 2004) is also regarded as a poverty reduction strategy by investing early for long term benefits (p. 7) and like many long term investment policies related to ECDE targets, its full implementation is yet to be met. The Ghana Business News (November 29, 2014) claims financial and logistical constraints are the major restrictions to the implementation of the policy. According to the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs who led the formation of this policy document in collaboration with stake holders, the policy is a work in progress:

> The policy should be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity to continue to develop the country's human resource base for the present and the future. Its successful implementation, thus, depends on the several and collective responsibilities of all stakeholders who share the clear view that early childhood care and development is a strong foundation for the development of individuals, society and the nation as a whole. (Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs Ghana, 2004, p. 21)

Whilst the challenges of full implementation continue, over the last decade there have been advancements as a result of advocacy, coordination, and collaboration with key stakeholders and beneficiaries. Three years after the policy was drafted (2007) Ghana became the first country in SSA to expand 2 years pre-primary education into free and compulsory basic education. Pre-primary enrolment rates are now regarded as the highest in the region (World Bank, 2015). Initiatives driven by Ghana Education Services (GES) involving a cross section of local and international consultants, various steering and coordinator committees, community working groups and situational/ stake holder analysis reports, collectively contributed to an operational plan document titled "Program to Scale-up Quality Kindergarten Education in Ghana" (2012). This identified key outcomes and priorities in 5 year evidence –based

operational plan to support quality kindergarten education. According to Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) which is a research and policy non-profit organization, research in Ghana is currently taking place to evaluate, trial and develop a cost-effective model of training that would transform kindergarten teaching, as well as identify ways to inform parents about quality kindergarten education which are both regarded as crucial steps for Ghanaian education policy and practice.

Whilst Ghana's education system is not the same as that of Sierra Leone (in that pre-primary is not part of basic free education) the policy journey of Ghana provides an opportunity to review the current inter-sectoral policy of Sierra Leone as well as the draft preschool curriculum in order to make both documents more relevant and evidence based and reflective of the SDG's, national reforms and recommendations. Ghana's comprehensive ECCD policy took a decade to implement but with systemic coordinated and collaborative approaches, policy drafts can translate from *products on paper to products of social action.*

National preschool curriculum

The National Preschool Curriculum written by local stakeholders in 1993 (funded by NGO's and overseen by MEST) was reformed in 2005 to include theory and practice but is still awaiting government approval. According to the Sierra Leone ECD SABER Report (World Bank, 2013) "no details are available regarding the time frame or process for implementation for the drafted national curriculum" (p. 22). The document itself is not readily available and it was through Mrs. Julia Parris the head supervisor of the Nursery Schools Association, that I was able to obtain a copy.

While the advancement of ECE has moved slowly in Sierra Leone, the backdrop for an early childhood national curriculum has remained at the forefront of organizations and individuals. In the absence of historical data on the Nursery School Association in Sierra Leone,

the interview data in this study revealed that the Nursery School Association began in the 1960's and through to 1980's it was an active and professional body representing teachers, parents and their young children. It has struggled to retain its membership since then but is still a strong stakeholder in early childhood reform and consultation. It has been an advocate for quality ECDE programs, adequate resources, and teacher education, so much so, that the government handed the Association sole responsibility of licensing and supervising new preschools (Hinton, 2009). According to Mrs. Juliana Paris, (*exploratory field notes, June 2013)* this responsibility has come with very little financial support. At that time, three supervisors were responsible for approximately 250 private ECDE centres to conduct visits, training, and inspections, all of them working on a part-time basis.

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MEST) in their foreword statement of the National Reviewed Draft Preschool Curriculum (n.d.) outlined its position beliefs in 10 statements:

1. Early childhood, both formal and informal, is an important time for growth and development.
2. Children's rights start at birth and young children are dependent on adults to ensure those rights.
3. Quality ECCE programmes and policies aim to ensure that children grow up healthy, well-nourished, and protected from harm, abuse and neglect, with a sense of self-worth, identity, enthusiasm, and opportunity to learn.
4. Education for all, especially ECCE is the first steps toward meeting both the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and Millennium Development Goals.
5. Quality early childhood care and education programmes are good national investments that lead to better educated, healthier populace, increasing Gross

National Product (GNP), reduce gender and class inequalities, and reduce poverty and related effects such as violence and crime. Gender equality must be promoted from the start of education.

6. With quality ECCE, children can be more ready to enter primary school and learn.
7. Quality ECCE that addresses the psychosocial needs of children can also address trauma related problems and prevent future violence.
8. Quality environment for ECCE is needed for the promotion of the holistic development of the child.
9. Corporal punishment must be discouraged in early childhood care and education.
10. Improving on quality early childhood service must promote quality training for educators.

The statements are seen as a forward for ECE advancement however, the draft curriculum is prescriptive, teacher directed with limited opportunities for child agency or an understanding that children are active social agents and pro-active learners. There is also a wide gap between what it [the curriculum] ought to do (*National draft preschool curriculum*, n.d.) and what is actually carried out in the classroom such as the need for *adequate relevant teaching learning materials for children's activities* (p. 26). Also in objective 6 it states: "Children should express themselves in the community language and basic English" (p. 2). This is not consistent with the National Education Policy (2010) which states that language of instruction must be in the language of the region up to and including class 3 of primary school. The preschool curriculum also requires reforms to match modern day Sierra Leone with relevance to Indigenous communities in rural and urban regions. It require rigorous analysis to align with empirical evidence based research and data from African knowledge bases (which is discussed

later in this chapter) drawing upon western notions of child development but not being overshadowed by them as is the case in this draft curriculum document.

Part one of this review has examined the global initiatives both past and present that have served as a beacon in advancing educational reforms in Sierra Leone, as such they can be regarded as facilitators of ECDE. Whilst local blueprints (on paper) have advanced education in general, current government priorities and polices have yet to facilitate the advancement of ECDE (in practice).

Part 2: Dominant discourses

This second part of the literature review is to examine dominant discourses in the field of early childhood development and education that are pertinent to the African and especially Sierra Leone context. The review is organized around three conceptual themes/issues which will provide insights into 1) the importance of early childhood education, 2) concepts of childhood and learning and 3) structures that impact on the individual and the nation at large. This review has been organized with the aim of situating the research study in the broader context of ECDE issues and debates thus supporting the investigation into the current nature of ECDE including the constraints and possibilities.

The historical movement toward education for all (EFA) has provided broad scope for discourse analysis with narratives surrounding the importance of ECDE, access, and provision of preschool as well as structural barriers that impact on impoverished families. As advocates, stake holders and economists deconstruct the benefits and profits that ECDE programs bring to the individual and society at large, new discoveries and long-standing findings emerge from the fields of neuroscience and economic research. In addition, data from the social sciences on diverse childhoods and school readiness has served to highlight the importance of early positive

beginnings, reinforcing the notion that investing early matters on an individual and on a structural level.

Importance of ECDE

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Starting Well research report (Fisher, 2012) three strands of research combine to support the importance of the early years.

1. Neuroscience – understanding the critical periods of brain development
2. Economic – saving society money over time
3. Social Science – school readiness and academic success

Each of the strands has been influential in sensitizing and informing the world on the long reach effects of early childhood investment and the benefits for the individual, for schools and for society at large. I will address each one as a separate sub-topic below.

Early brain research

The importance of early brain development and its significance for later learning continue to gain momentum globally as new information and new findings emerge from the field of neuroscience. The latest imaging technology used in neurobiology and technological advances over the past two decades, have provided scientists with tools that study the brain (ultrasound, MRI, PET and EEG) in ways that have changed our understanding of cognition, early learning, and brain development (Southern Early Childhood Association, 2001; Young & Mustard, 2008). It is said that the brain goes through the most rapid changes in early childhood (Santrack, 2004; Young, 2008) and this development sets trajectories well into adulthood (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The brain is the only unfinished organ at birth with approximately 100 trillion neurons maturing after birth (Southern Early Childhood Association, 2001). More and more synapses continue to form during the first few years, with the quantity, quality, and

consistency of stimulation (both cognitive and emotional) impacting on the number of brain synapses formed. This synaptic pruning is a normal process of brain development, with the brain eliminating connections that are seldom or never used in order for the active connections to become stronger (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Whilst the synaptic pruning is a life-long process (Kolb & Gibb, 2011) we can infer from this architectural process that there are if not *critical periods*, at least *sensitive periods* where early experiences and stimulation have been found to contribute greatly to brain structure and learning capacity.

Because brains are built over time, these sensitive periods of neurological sculpturing are often regarded as *windows of opportunity* for early childhood development and learning. White, Hutka, Williams, and Moreno (2013) describe the natural process of learning as a "bottom-up" and "top down" progression (p. 12). They state that the optimal period for learning for instance, music and language occurs early when the brain's neural circuits haven't been fully specified so they are more open to input received (*bottom-up*). White et al (2013) claim that it is only after this sensitive *bottom-up* period that a *top-down* progression occurs which relies more on student attention to enhance input received. They posit that sensitive periods for optimum learning of say, language and music acquisition and the capacity to transfer such skills (music skills to language skills) is influenced by a combination of both environment and stimulation. In examining musical abilities as an example, Steele, Bailey, Zatorre, and Penhune's (2013) studies using diffusion tensor imaging in early –and-late trained musicians concur with this idea of a sensitive period for musical training, suggesting the influence of musical training on the brain and behaviour is strongest *during early childhood*. Their findings indicate that early musical opportunities (before age 7) has a different impact on white matter structure and sensorimotor synchronization performance. Steele et al (2013) propose that early

musical experiences may prompt plasticity in motor and auditory connections, serving as a scaffold in building ongoing abilities.

The combination of both stimulation and environment for early brain development in early childhood education settings is not a new concept in the developed world, but it is yet to filter into teacher training courses/syllabus or preschool curriculum in countries such as, Sierra Leone. In 1996, Mary Young's Poverty Reduction report outlined the importance of early interventions and how predisposed early brain development is to environmental forces. Young claimed "there is considerable evidence showing that infants exposed to good nutrition, toys, playmates had better brain functioning at twelve years of age, than those raised in less stimulating environments, (Young, 1996, p. 5).

The in-utero stage

The early years and especially birth to 3 years have been well established as sensitive/crucial periods for brain development, setting life-long trajectories for learning behaviour and emotions (White et al., 2013). There is however, further discussion to be had and consideration given to the importance of the in-utero stage of brain development.

Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) question the attention given to the periods from birth to 3 years, asking if we are starting too late and finishing too early. They claim there is a danger of over emphasizing birth to 3 years and this could be at the expense of investing and supporting the in-utero periods of brain development. Their argument, that "abundant evidence indicates that brain development begins well before birth" (p. 216) has validity. Scientifically, the inutero stage of brain development is identified as one of the first key periods of brain development (Kolb & Gibb, 2011). The Medical University of Vienna (2014) recently presented findings from two research groups using new methods of functional magnetic resonance tomography (fMRT) which offer insights into foetal brain development. One group observed 32 foetuses

from 21–28 weeks of pregnancy using fMRT and discovered rapid brain development especially in areas of sensory perception. The other group found a direct correlation between eye movement and brain activity starting well before birth. Veronica
Schopf states that "the relationship between eye movement and the responsible areas of the brain has been demonstrated for the first time in utero" (Medical university of Vienna, 2014, p. 1).

In Sub-Sahara Africa, this converging corroboration of brain development, genetics and experience, has profound implications for enhancing the life prospects of children and pregnant mothers and it can strengthen the social and economic fabric of society. An exemplar project by the NGO *Focus 1000* in Sierra Leone (presented in chapter 5) specifically concentrates on the development of the first 1000 days of a child's life, defined as beginning with in-utero (280 days) and up to the age of two years (720 weeks) making a total of 1000 days. So what are the implications of such neurological findings for Sierra Leone? Government needs to take this knowledge into consideration when designing integrated policies and supporting provision for ECDE programs. Consideration on the impact of in-utero and early birth brain development periods should aim to deliver holistic developmental outcomes incorporating emotional, cognitive, and social knowledge bases (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The important role environment and early experiences play is also crucial so that the genetic blueprints of brain development can be given equal priority to contextual factors, as Kolb and Gibb (2011) state: "it is the complex dance of genetics and experiential factors that shape the emerging brain" (p. 2). Added to this growing body of neuro-scientific research is the long reach effect that financial investment in ECDE contributes to a country's economic and social well-being.

Economic benefits

The second strand of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) research report (*Starting Strong*, 2012) is economic. Early childhood experts, advocates and educators have been professing the benefits of early education for decades, however it was not until economists began discovering the financial gains of investing in the early years that policy makers and business leaders paid heed. According to Pence and Nsamenang (2008):

> In the 21st century the most powerful proponents of early childhood development are not parents, care providers/teachers, or child development specialists – but economists. (p. 4)

Noble laureate James Heckman, Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago, (2006) claims that high economic returns are a more powerful argument than equity because the gains can be quantified. Indeed in the USA, ECDE is not just a social policy but an economic development strategy (Bartik, 2011; Carneiro & Heckman, 2003; Heckman, 2006; Young, 2010). Cost benefit analysis and rate of return calculations are becoming semantic slogans synonymous with early childhood policies and white papers. Evidence is mounting that putting money into early education programs not only fosters human development but "saves government's money in the long term" (Young, 2010, p. 25).

The Perry Preschool project

One of the first studies to report a return on investment from an early education program is the Perry Preschool project. Conducted in the USA by the High/Scope Education Research Foundation in the 1960's, it involved 123 *at risk* African/American children. They participated in a quality preschool program for 2.5 hours five days per week, where the curriculum was highly interactive and inquiry based, supporting both cognitive and socio-emotional development and included home visits by qualified teachers (Schweinhart, 2003). This

longitudinal study involved interviews, administration data as well as police and court records, spanning a period of 40 years. As the study accumulated, rich data on the participants and their families from birth to 40 years, the results began unveiling the many benefits to the individual and to society. Early interventions were found to have lasting effects on learning and motivation, resulting in less money spent on remediation programs and training later (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003). Data collected from police records showed that juvenile delinquency was significantly lower for the target group, including fewer arrests and juvenile court petitions, thus saving society money in the long run. Heckman's analysis (2006) further corroborated that early interventions result in school retention, raise the quality of the work force, enhance the productivity of schools, and reduce crime, teenage pregnancy, and welfare dependency (Heckman, 2006, p. 14).

Whilst investing in disadvantaged young children demonstrated high economic return, the exact cost benefit from the Perry Preschool project needed further validity and has since undergone a more rigorous meta-analysis. Both the initial cost benefit analysis which indicated a saving to the public of more than seven times the original investment (Parks, 2000) and a further re-analysis, still maintain a return of more than twice the initial investment. An even more conservative return found by Heckman et al., (2010) at around 5% claimed to have improved on previous estimates by using other variables, such as locally determined costs, missing data, and dead weight costs of taxation, etc. Their findings concluded that "in general the estimated rates of return are above the historical return to equity of about 5.8% but well below previous estimates reported in the literature" (p. 11). Whilst Heckman et al., (2010) calculations provide a lower estimate on the true rate of return to society, it none-the-less provides a more rigorous cost-benefit report as it separates the rates of return to both the individual and society at large.

The findings across the board have served as an advocacy tool to support financial investment in early years, echoing the savings to both the individual and society (Bartik, 2011; Heckman, 2006; Young, 2010). In addition, the Perry Preschool project has been widely cited serving as a flagship to support economic and policy making decisions. Added to this are further corroborating longitudinal studies such as the Abecedarian study which began in 1972 and the Chicago Child-Parent Centres Study, that also looked at the effects of quality interactive ECE programs and the impact across the lifespan. All three studies found positive returns on investments for society, with evidence that getting it right in the early years, means less spending in the latter years and saves tax payers money in the long term (Heckman, 2006; Schweinhart, 2003).

The third and final strand of the E.I.U. research report Starting Well (Fisher, 2012) relates to the Social Sciences and specifically school readiness and academic success.

School readiness and academic outcomes

An important benefit of preschool is school readiness and this includes curriculum that concentrates on practical and academic outcomes. Preschools are often regarded as preparatory platforms from which children can successfully springboard into formal schooling. Evidence has been supportive in suggesting that children who experience a preschool education prior to attending primary schooling do better socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003; Young & Mustard, 2008). The economists add that *getting it right early* saves money in the long run, with less teacher salaries and resources spent on remediation later (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003). It would seem that most stake holders are in favour of early education even if they share differing opinions, priorities, and values about the purpose of what it has to offer.

The terms school readiness and transition to school are often used synonymously; however, definitions depend on perspective and answers to such questions as Is preschool a ,state of *becoming*; where school readiness is measured by a child's future ability to pay attention, count, recite letters, answer questions and follow instructions? Or is it a state of *being*, a place in the here and now to socialize, empathize, develop dispositions for learning, express ideas and thoughts, imagine, and learn – through the art of play? The definition really depends on who is answering the questions and in which context the discussion takes place and almost always involves a set of standards, expectations and/or attributes (Dockett & Perry, 2009). Three purposes of preschool: academic skills, intervention red-flags and socialization benefits, are suggested by Graue (2006):

> On the one hand, readiness is related to what children know when they come to school – their knowledge of letters, colours, and relations among and between concepts. These are teachable things, seen as related to the richness of the environment or if missing, as a marker of potential disability. Targeted intervention programs that serve children living in poverty or early childhood special education programs often focus on this aspect of readiness. On the other hand, readiness is posed as a way of being – social aspect of being a student in the institution of the school. (p. 47)

Regardless of the different lens we choose to view its purpose or benefits, it seems that preschool is a place where *skills beget skills* (Heckman, 2006) whatever those skills may be. Bartik (2011) concurs that children who participate in high quality ECE programs tend to be in environments that "unlock the child's potential for skill development" (p. 16) which implies that preschool should be a place of many spaces where children are free to explore and experiment in order to unlock their gifts and talents as well as a place to develop skills and dispositions for life. This view of preschool, however, is not shared by all stake holders, and from the data in

this study we see preschool as being either practical or academic with the focus being on one or the other.

The academic preschool push

Children are neurologically conditioned to feel and to learn (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) and preschool in many developed countries have been a place in which both cognitive and social/emotional opportunities are nurtured and developed. But has neurological science and discourses surrounding early brain development created some tensions as to what should be taught in preschool? Focusing on narrow definitions of school readiness related to brain development has pushed academic skills away from the traditional holistic process driven focus of ECDE programs. Dockett and Perry, (2013) claim that this focus has resulted in the "pushing down" of an academic curriculum into early childhood settings (p. 170). This to some extent has been a result of the way commercialism has crept into neuroscientific interpretations and the marketable push to teach young children academics at a very young age. The capacity to learn and absorb in the early years of life when the brain is more malleable to particular types of learning has certainly influenced many western parents to enrol their young children in early enrichment classes including, brain gym for infants and an array of extracurricular classes for toddlers, even before they start preschool. Fisher (2012) is critical of brain based products and brands that have "misleadingly lead the public astray" through false advertising claiming "the one (and only) real link is that children who are learning do indeed have a brain" (p. 132). Neuro-scientific research has also been criticized for focusing only on the discipline of science, as Fisher (2012) claims, information about neuroscience has been focused on the *science* of brain development and there is "scant evidence investigating connections between mind, brain, and education" (p. 132).

The academic push however, has also been influenced by empirical studies related to early literacy and instructional teaching methodologies. Callaghan and Madelaine (2012) found that children who have good phonological awareness skills in preschool are more likely to be good readers in primary school. Calling for a systemic focus on explicit early literacy instruction to improve skills, they go on to cite a longitudinal study in 2006 by Chatterj (as cited in Callaghan & Madelaine, 2012) which highlighted the gaps in reading between children from low and high socioeconomic backgrounds (increasing over time). Callaghan & Madelaine (2012) claim that there is "overwhelming evidence that kindergarten –entry literacy skills significantly predict first grade reading scores" (p. 13) suggesting that children who do not enter schooling with high levels of literacy skills are not as successful in first grade. It is unclear if such findings consider the language of instruction used to assess levels of literacy compared to the home language. Such findings have implications in Sierra Leone in relation to what language should be used to teach and assess pre and early primary school literacy skills. Academic pushes could result in English becoming the major language of instruction at a younger age eroding children's tribal languages at a much younger age. It could be argued that such academic *pushes* for English literacy skills will make English a more cultural and economic commodity than children's home languages, especially in SSA schools. In Sierra Leone, English language acquisition is already highly valued.

A case study conducted in urban Zambia (Zuilkowski, Fink, Moucheraud, & Matafwali, 2012) showed positive outcomes of an English preschool literacy program where intentional instructional teaching improved cognitive skills, resulting in improved school readiness. It also lead to higher primary school enrolment and less drop-out, which it claimed ultimately increased long term educational outcomes (Zuilkowski et al., 2012). Once again, the results did not indicate if all children entering preschool brought with them English language competencies,

therefore the *successful results* may only apply to those who already enter preschool with the right type of linguistic capital. Results from a Ghanaian study on language policy and pedagogical practice (Davis & Agbenyega, 2012) indicate that a push for English as the medium of instruction for young children contradicts Ghana's national policy on teaching in local languages in the early grades, which also applies to Sierra Leone's mandate (Department of Education, Sierra Leone, 1995; Nishimuko, 2007). The motivation to instruct in English so that children are able to read and write in the upper grades suggests assimilative forces are at play on the part of teachers and school administrators who according to Davis and Agbenyega (2012) have not considered that children are predisposed to cognitive development and thus academic success, regardless of which language they master first. Davis and Agbenyega's (2012) findings conclude that:

> Those who are able to express themselves in fluid English are accorded special respect (symbolic capital) and therefore accepted at all social functions or gathering. However, those who are not able to express themselves in English are often mistakenly described as illiterates even if they can read and write in the local language. They are therefore excluded from certain social functions, especially the formal ones such as graduation ceremonies where the formal or official language is used. (p. 345)

Pre and primary school readiness in African contexts should not be determined by explicit systematic English instruction in vocabulary, spelling of random words and repetitions. Literacy acquisition is a highly interactive process that comes naturally as part of African developmental learning (Nsamenang, 2011) and not by the level of instructional outputs that young children regurgitate as a product of instructional and didactic teaching. Sierra Leone must be cognizant of its colonial past and the subtle ways that linguistic erosion of mother tongue is operating in pre and lower primary schools perpetuating the colonial perception that English is

a more *prestigious* language (Fillmore, 1991). Children learn that without such linguistic capital they become socially and culturally excluded (Davis & Agbenyega, 2012) and in time according to Fillmore (1991) they often lose their first language.

It is undeniable that the teaching of academics has always been a component of most pre-primary school programs globally however, the holistic development of young children involves other skills equally beneficial not just to the child but for society. Nores and Barnett (2012) found that specific approaches to teaching and learning for social and emotional development matter "at least as much as for cognitive development" (p. 4). Their research concurs that, regardless of context, high quality programs accrue social benefits for children and also contribute to social cohesion. Graue, (2006) reinforces that school readiness is complex, multidimensional and process orientated, adding that from this perspective:

> Readiness mutually constitutes the social context of child development, the material resources available to support or constrain growth, the beliefs and practices that structure opportunity and the physical, social, emotional and cognitive state. (p. 51)

Supporting children's school readiness

Whilst children need a variety and balance of social and academic skills to succeed in school, awareness that children already possess an inborn capacity to be agents of their own learning (Nsamenang, 2011) in their own ways must be acknowledged and catered for. This raises the issue of how to support readiness for school. Societal and government expectations place the onus on the child to be ready for school but are we neglecting the readiness of adults and institutions for this transition? In other words, should a child be ready for school or should school be ready for the child? According to Dockett and Perry (2013):

> A great deal of research attention has been directed towards the development and validation of measures to assess readiness, particularly children's readiness for

> school. Less attention has been paid to measure the readiness of schools or education. (p. 167)

If we are to seriously consider the benefits of preschool programs in preparing children for school, then schools should also be preparing for children. The question of readiness must include the readiness of parents, teachers, administrators and even government readiness in the investment of preschool provision, spaces and resources. This requires an understanding of the way young children grow, think, feel and learn and awareness that school readiness is not a race (Elkind, 2001; Rogoff, 2003) that begins at 4 years of age and finishes a year later. School readiness and childhood in general, cannot be hurried (Elkind, 2001). Viewed ecologically (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) school transition should be an organic and communal process, embedded within a community of relationships (Dockett & Perry, 2009) that can support children and this should involve parents, siblings, extended family, teachers, community members and even society at large described by Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta, (2000) as a "healthy ecology" (p. 505).

Systems and structures that support children to transition into school, understand the need for stable relationships, acknowledge changing family contexts and relationships over time and are able to help children adapt in different contexts (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000). Government policy needs to consider that preschool provision is not enough; neither does it guarantee good academic starts for children. Accessible, affordable as well as quality preschool programs that take into account the socio-cultural and linguistic realities that shape development and learning require a structural commitment. Government funding must provide adequate support and resources that enable structures of the child's microsystems (child's immediate environment) to come together and be linked to their *mesosystem* (child's external environment) where family community and school are interconnected and relational (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

This feeling of being connected in the here and now, to home and school settings is a vital ingredient for optimum attachments, especially in Sierra Leone where the fragility of family and community require resilience, adaptability and at the same time, a need to maintain a sense of belonging, in changing contexts.

Childhood in Context

Notions of childhood are expected to accommodate the diverse ways in which children grow, develop, and learn and the different beliefs and values drawn from a past and present, as well as local and global pool of knowledge. As sociocultural and historical patterns of communities continue to shape our understanding of different ways of being belonging and becoming (Peers & Fleer, 2014) we cannot overlook the invaluable diversity, and multiple perspectives that now contribute to a new sociology of childhood (Alanen et al., 2015; James & Prout 1997; Rogoff, 2003). Child rearing priorities, child development, constraints such as poverty and possibilities such as child agency, will be examined in this second topic where development and learning, highlight variances in the changing face of childhood in Sierra Leone.

Child rearing priorities

Barbara Rogoff's (2003) claim that "parents priorities are quite different when you are confident your child will grow up" (p. 106) is a reality for many parents in developing countries. With child mortality rates in Sierra Leone ranked as the second highest in the world (UNICEF, 2015) which according to World Bank (2015) rests at 31.7% per 1,000 live births, one can understand why physical survival becomes the priority and attention in the first 2 years of life by mothers, is not for cognitive stimulation but for nurturing their very survival. If parents are in a position where their child rearing goals are simply survival ones, then other priorities such

as discipline, transmission of culture, social values, religious beliefs and academic outcomes take second and third priority. Robert LeVine (1988) presents a hierarchical model of child rearing goals that mothers in this survival context would have. Despite the fact this model is dated, it still has relevance in Sierra Leone.

Priority 1: Physical survival and health

Priority 2: Economic independence

Priority 3: Cultural values and intellectual achievement.

Levine (1988) claims that "parents might want to be assured of infant survival before attending seriously to the child's socioeconomic participation, future economic security and the development of culturally defined virtues" (p. 4). In Sierra Leone, babies are breastfed on demand, they sleep at all times attached mostly to their mother and are carried constantly on her back whilst she works, walks, eats, and rests. According to Levine (1988) this is the optimum parental strategy for agrarian societies and my own observations in the field over a period of 3 years in both rural and urban districts concurs with this practice. In addition, a mother's strategy to "maximize the number of surviving children by spacing births" (p. 7) ensures that every infant is given a chance for survival. This '*urban –industrial parental strategy*' (LeVine,1988) produces less children, thus parenting is more able to focus on the acquisition of skills and academic knowledge, rather than the number of children a woman gives birth to (priority 3) which the data alludes to in chapters 5 and 6. Sierra Leone is making small advancements in priorities 2 and 3 and this is reflected in the declining fertility rates, with the average number of births per woman 4.1 in 2003 and 3.7 in 2011 (World Bank, 2013). In addition, the World Bank report found that women who delay their first birth have fewer children overall. This may have long term implications for poverty reduction strategies on a structural level but for now, the

small steps taken by parents and especially mothers, to reduce the number of children they give birth to, hold possibilities for children's survival and development in the early years.

Childhood and agency

Changing images of childhood have conceptualized and challenged the notion of children as powerless innocent, empty vessels. Historically, childhood was a period of forming *(becoming*) rather than *being* (Sorin, 2005) and was influenced by John Locke's (1632–1704) philosophical belief that the child is born into the world as *Tabula Rasa* (blank slate) ready for culture and knowledge to write itself. It was Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) who introduced the view of the sacredness of each individual child and their natural inclination to learn according to their interests. This was followed by Joham Pestalozzi (1746–1827) who, inspired by Rousseau and influenced by his own background as an educator, identified children as intellectual, physical moral/spiritual beings. Known as the father of pedagogy, Pestalozzi left behind a legacy which is still retained in many early childhood settings e.g. child-centred rather than teacher-centred approaches, considerations of the needs and interests of children and holistic education as well as the pedagogical practice of teaching *from the heart*. Up until this point, education for young children was still in a state of *becoming*. Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) was the first to coin the term kindergarten (children's garden) and introduce preschool education to the world, enabling children the freedom to explore, play freely, socialize and be valued as human beings not just as human becomings. Historically, sociology echoed the early ideas of the non-personhood of children with the founders of sociology Emile Durkheim and Marx Weber suggesting that childhood is a period:

> -in which the individual, in both the physical and moral sense, does not yet exist, the period in which he [sic] is made, developed and is formed … the educationist

> is presented with a becoming, an incipient being, a person in the process of formation. (Durkheim 1979, as cited in Morrow 2011, p. 15)

It was not until the mid-1980s, that sociologists thought about childhood as more than a pathway to adulthood and involved more than simply s*ocialisation* (Morrow, 2011). It was during this period, that the connection between sociology and children became more deeply associated with agency. Qvortrup (1997) shifted thinking from family sociology to child sociology and James and Prout (1997) took a further leap in declaring children as social actors in their own right able to shape the structures and processes around them albeit on a *micro-level* (Morrow, 2011). This new sociology of childhood coming from the West (James & Prout, 1997; Leonard, 2005; Sorin, 2005; Woodrow, 1999) emphasizes children's agency and explains the various ways through which children's interactions with adults and each other "produces, reproduces, challenges, and transforms the nature of childhood and society" (Leonard, 2005, p. 607). It has shifted the dominant discourse that development is universal (Sorin, 2005) and challenged the idea that the world's children represent those we study in the West (Penn, 2005). It has also influenced pedagogical models such as the Reggio approach which holds an image of the child as intelligent, resourceful and able (Rinaldi, 2006). Sociology has now codified this as a '*new paradigm of childhood'* (James & Prout, 1997, 2015) where children are perceived as social actors shaping as well as being shaped by their circumstances and environment, as such, viewed not as future potentials but as valuable contributors to change, in the here and now (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 2015).

For Africa, the sociology of children as capable agents has been in existence since civilization (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011). It is during early childhood that children learn to become active and helpful members of society and are valued for their participation and contributions as evidenced in the data and discussed further in chapter 6. From this perspective

the child is *rich* in potential, resilient in adverse circumstances and as agents, children are able to "negotiate and interact within their environment causing change" (James & Prout, 1997, p. 9). Children in Africa however are often viewed as passive victims especially in relation to poverty needing to be rescued (Penn, 2005) whereas in reality poverty is something they learn to interact with (Boyden, 2009; Feeney & Boyden, 2004) and so their resilience must be acknowledged just as much as their frailty.

Child agency does have its contradictions in Africa. From a traditional standpoint, the African child is not yet ready to participate fully in society and deemed to be a *citizen in-waiting* (Ndofirepi & Shumba, 2014) but at the same time the child is expected to participate and contribute to the well-being and survival of the family, demonstrated most especially through tasks associated with adult duties. The African way, especially in Sierra Leone, still holds that responsibility comes before choice in many circumstances (Ndofirepi & Shumba, 2014) and as Feeny and Boyden (2004) concur, the rights of children in many societies are less important than their responsibilities, stating:

> Children's integration within families and communities and their advancement through the life cycle into adulthood is achieved through the fulfilment of their responsibilities. (p. 18).

We begin to see a different picture or diverse pictures emerging globally of childhood. In developing countries agency is not measured in the same way as the western world (Morrow, 2011) neither is it found in rights and free choice, rather agency emerges in the roles and responsibilities expected of children. If we take the notion of competence as an example, this is not measured by educational attainment or academic achievements but rather by the production of domestic or economic labour. Child agency from this perspective operates through employment, which according to Feeny and Boyden (2004) is not always negative or

exploitative. Research from around the world suggests that overall, work contributes more to keeping children in school than keeping them out (Abebe & Bessell, 2011; Siddiqi & Patrinos, 1995) and even when child labour activities are in breach of international legislation on the rights of the child (Andre & Godin, 2014) the problem is not so much child labour itself, as the conditions under which it operates (Boyden, 2009). International rights legislation does not reflect the socioeconomic realities of children's lives (Feeny & Boyden, 2004) and so the perception in developed countries that children need to be rescued or protected from exploitation (child labour) fails to see such contradictions and realities of many children in countries such as Sierra Leone where children must work in order to go to school and often choose to work in order to pay for schooling.

It can be argued this contradiction of child agency can also be found in perceptions of education. The saviour of poverty is not education (Feeny & Boyden, 2004) and education has to "fit in" to the everyday life which involves domestic labour and family responsibilities for even the youngest of children who are expected to *pitch in* (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009) and contribute the same as adults "contributing in real ways as they learn about their shared economic and social reality" (p. 106). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) further emphasizes that every *child shall have responsibilities towards his family and society* (article 31, 1999) and in poor countries that includes contributing to the economic survival of family. As Nsamenang and Tchombe, 2011) posit, it is the very impoverished circumstances and the struggle for survival which "compel children to progress through their own agency" (p. 239). Child agency in the context of this study therefore, acts as a facilitator not a barrier to early childhood development and learning.

Structural issues

Whilst agency is both a capacity and perception, structure is what limits or empowers such capacity. In the case of formal preschool education the current situation in Sierra Leone reveals that not all children have the same advantages to early learning due to social and economic inequalities. No matter how much parents value education and children desire it, agency cannot be mobilized where access is not readily available especially for those of a particular social standing or class, making preschool out of reach, often geographically, economically, and socially.

Access and equity

Preschool education in Sierra Leone is mostly exclusive. It operates on a fee for service basis and unless families can afford the fees or have the symbolic, social, or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) which includes social networks and connections with those in power, their children will have to wait for the compulsory age of 6 years before they begin formal learning. Bourdieu saw the education system as maintaining the status quo whereby cultural capital is inculcated in the higher class, enabling those with privilege to gain higher educational outcomes (Sullivan, 2002) which I discuss further in chapter 3. In Sierra Leone it could be argued that this type of privilege has a historically tribal legacy.

Tribal privilege

The Krios are decedents of freed slaves from America and the West Indies and are classified as non-natives with no patrilineal affiliation with Indigenous Sierra Leonean's. They have however, inherited a large amount of cultural and social capital and therefore, tribal privilege. During colonization, the Krio tribe was favoured by the British and according to Kanu (2007) they were pitted against Indigenous ethnic groups (which served to accentuate the differences amongst the people). Krios received high posts by the British in civil service and

were favoured because they were seen to be more amendable and malleable to western ways. The Krios were enthusiastic participants of western education and established many school both in conjunction with missionaries and independently (Wright, 1990) thus, "completely dominating the early education scene both as pupils and teachers (p. 186). Once in positions of power they maximized their social standing by retaining their access to education (Aboa, 2006; Wright, 1990). According to Aboa (2006) they went as far as to prevent less privileged from accessing education claiming, "while the Creole's sought and valued education, they did not intend to acquire it in order to develop their country or help the natives improve their living conditions" (p. 127). Krios were (and to some extent based on my field notes) still are, regarded as being more cultured, more educated, more white, thus perceived by some as more *superior* (Wright, 1990). It is difficult to measure how much this de-facto tribal privilege has been handed down over the generations and if what Sullivan (2002, p. 144) describes as a "social gift" (during colonization) is now regarded as a *natural gift* (of entitlement). Entrenched privilege according to Wright (1990) takes a long time to erode, however many Krios now believe they are at a disadvantage simply for being Krio. One way to explore this phenomenon further is to look at which tribes are still the most marginalized and excluded from life opportunities and this is examined in discussing urban slum areas later in this chapter.

When viewed through a social class lens, privilege and power are breeding grounds for inequities preventing not only access to early education but access to certain knowledge bases. Notions of child development have been continually borrowed from more privileged countries and they have the capacity to psychologically under-mine the child's context and the accumulated indigenous knowledge bases found in African society, which has a rich source of undervalued cultural capital. A comparison of child development theories will follow,

highlighting diverse understandings of child development from African perspectives, facilitating Africa's contribution to a global science of child development.

Comparisons of child development

Most cultures identify childhood as a unique period in the life of a human being and would view child development as a process every child goes through. This progression involves learning and mastering skills like sitting, walking, talking, toileting, dressing, reading, writing etc., during predictable time periods, (Berk, 1991; Santrock, 2004). There is widespread agreement that all children experience developmental progression over time and this progression also applies to. However, understanding the cultural nature of human development and recognizing that children develop as participants in cultural communities (Rogoff, 2003) requires a more critical analysis of the similarities and differences surrounding notions of child development incorporating western and afro-centric ideologies.

Development does not happen in isolation neither is it static. Child development evolves over local time and place and happens in the process of being embedded in the sociocultural community (Rogoff, 2003) where practices are communally and inter-generationally driven and interpersonally binding (Monk, 2010; Ndofirepi & Shumba, 2014). It involves all of life's dimensions, for example, language, food, clothing, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual development as children participate in cultural, economic, health and world view values in their communities (Anning, Cullen & Fleer 2008). Western notions of child development have offered a vertical loom paralleling two dominant theories of development from the 20th and 21st century. They have both strongly influenced our understanding of how children think and learn. The first is the work of Jean Piaget and the second is Les Vygotsky.

Not only has Piaget influenced our thinking about child development but his cognitive development theory has been used for theoretical discussions and to case study research projects

such as, High Scope and Montessori for several decades (Parks, 2000; Schweinhart, 2003). Piaget viewed cognitive development from a biological perspective believing that as children mature biologically and psychologically they go through definable stages at a particular sequence using their intellect to progress through these stages (Santrock, 2004). Piaget believed that all children pass through the same developmental stages regardless of context making his stages of development a universally accepted model that has dominated early childhood curriculum, developmental assessment, and policy (Bredekamp, 1993; Elkind, 1976; Edwards, 2003; Serpell, 1984). In countries such as England for example, the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (DfES, 2007 cited in Edwards, 2003) has held fast the essence of Piaget's developmental theory advocating a curriculum model that views children's development and thus learning as taking place in a sequential fashion. This stage based curriculum model is linked to the wider National Curriculum and regarded by policy makers to be transparent and easy to plan and assess (Solar & Miller, 2003). Whilst it offers a cohesive simplistic centralized system, the early learning goals have prescribed outcomes seen by some members of the early childhood community as elitist, non-egalitarian and non-democratic (Solar & Miller, 2003, p. 62) thus resulting in a one size fits all ECDE framework for the whole country to follow. The current draft curriculum in Sierra Leone alludes to a similar structure (*National draft preschool curriculum*, n.d.).

A paradigm shift in terms of how we view child development has evolved as a result of expanding borders and global communities. Consideration of a more culturally appropriate developmental framework for ECDE has moved traditional sociocultural theory to sociocultural historical theory (Anning et al., 2008). This has come about because of a need to understand culture and history within societies and educational systems and how the diverse complexities of human nature impact on children's developmental outcomes. In fact when it comes to culture

there are according to Serpell (1984) no cross cultural universals and Rogoff (2003) points out:

> Being human involves constraints and possibilities stemming from long histories of human practices. At the same time, each generation continues to revise and adapt its human, cultural, and biological heritage in the face of current circumstances. (p. 3)

Lev Vygotsky's theory aligns with this need and interest in a cultural-historical theory. Vygotsky viewed development as firstly taking place on a social plane as a result of interactions between people and their social environment, including cultural artefacts, symbols signs and language etc. (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Weaving a cultural-historical theory into his ideas of cognition and development, children with the help of adults, developmental tools that empower them to manage more complex tasks using metacognitive strategies (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Vygotsky's theory gained wider acceptance once it was used as more than a rebuttal to Piaget's dominant developmental stages approach (Edwards, 2003). The application of his theory in the last 15 years has advanced outside of Russia and eastern Europe (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003) and been applied to both education and psychology fields, in USA, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia and many parts of Europe (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Rinaldi, 2006). This dialectical (interactional) relationship between biological, environmental and cultural factors as shaping individual development provides a more holistic framework, where the person and the setting are mutually involved (Rogoff, 2003) and it has undeniably influenced modern day approaches to pedagogy and practice around the world.

Piaget's belief that development leads to learning and Vygotsky's belief that learning leads to development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007), have both been weighty components across the globe. It is timely and necessary for a more robust analysis on what is adaptable from both theories in order to evaluate their relevance in a post-colonial African context.

African footprints

Vygotsky's emphasis on sociocultural forces that shape development highlight important roles played by adults, older siblings and peers in children's development and learning. These core communal approaches are held by many African countries whereby the individual and culture are not separate entities (Rogoff, 2003; Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). Vygotsky's theory according to Kozulin et al., (2003) has received "critical appraisal, partly prompted by the spectacular success of non-individualistic learning models prevalent in far Eastern societies" (p. 2). Critical of the way we have isolated children from the real world, Fleer (2003) suggests a need to refocus away from the individualistic notion of child-centeredness and move toward a *community of practice*. Fleer (2003) states:

> In creating child-centred programs in our centres, we have further removed children from the day-to-day world and placed them in an artificial world – one geared to their needs, where they are central, but separated from the real world. (p. 66)

This collectiveness as opposed to individualist out-look, appears to reflect the African landscape with its emphasis on family, community and group goals placed above individual needs or desires. According to Nsamenang and Tchombe (2011), children's cultural contexts provide the major source of their development; therefore, work group goals require children to learn different skills at an early age. In Africa, development happens from learning the rituals, daily routines and appropriate activities in the child's environment (which prepare them for adult life) but these may happen at different ages or life time frames depending on the traditional, social, and cultural norms of the society (Anning et al., 2008; Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011). Cultural expectations of child development as well as parental expectations can determine what children learn, who they learn from at different ages and how they learn.

These variables are dependent on children's context and the country they live in.

In Malawi, a qualitative research project conducted by Gladstone, Lancaster, Umar & Nyirennda, Kayira, Van den Brook & Smyth (2009) set out to explore concepts and ideas that communities have about child development. The study consisted of focus groups in both semiurban and rural villages across the country. The findings indicated that children's development was related to duties and roles within the community: responsibility, obedience, and good behaviour, which were deemed a priority in village and professional discussion groups (p. 351).

The study also found variances between western notions of intelligence (academic) and Malawian emphasis on social intelligence, signifying that assessment tools created for western settings are not always valid or adaptable for use in such communities, most especially in relation to social and cognitive milestones. The study concludes by stating:

> This emphasis on social forms of intelligence such as obedience, independence, taking responsibility around the house and common sense, has repercussions in the world of cross cultural psychology and corroborates previous literature from other parts of Africa. (Gladstone et al., 2009, p. 352)

Further corroborating data in this thesis substantiates such findings. Field observations taken from my exploratory study in Sierra Leone (2013) indicated that children as young as 4 years of age have advanced self-care and life skills compared to traditional western notions of self-care developmental skills. Young children were able to physically retrieve water from a well, balance this water on their heads and deliver it safely home. They also took full responsibility for bathing, dressing and feeding younger siblings as well as helping their mothers prepare/sell food. Such children in comparison to say, Australian preschoolers have advanced skills based on cultural competencies that result from the community needs not the individual.

This begs the questions: if we were to assess the development of such children using standardized western assessment tools, would we measure by age, stage, or skill base? For example, if a child can balance water on her head at 4 years of age, yet cannot catch a ball at 5 years, would we rate her psychomotor development as *not yet competent* on a developmental continuum tool? The framework we use to assess young children's development is often one dimensional and this can disadvantage children, as Rogoff, (2003) reminds us, "the focus of analysis stems from what we as observers choose to examine" (p. 58).

Another study by Serpell (as cited in Rogoff, 2003) distinguished concepts of *every day cognition* where English children were found to perform well with paper and pencil (familiar objects) and poorly with strips of wire. In comparison, Zambian children performed well in creating models using strips of wire (familiar objects) yet performed poorly using paper and pencil (Rogoff, 2003 p. 239). Jahoda's study (as cited in Serpell, 1984) compared Scottish and Zimbabwean children's understanding of economic profit. African children showed deeper understanding of economic concepts at an earlier age, especially those whose families engaged in trading (p. 115). Gardiner and Kosmitzki, (2011) goes so far as to claim that conceptually it is more than simply an emphasis on environmental intelligences. They claim that different cognitive patterns do exist between European and African infants, citing research conducted as far back as the 1970's by Mundy-Castle (1974, pp. 19–20) that highlight the different cognitive patterns of social intelligence and academic intelligence between African and European children. It is however, unclear how much is nature and how much nurture as Gardiner and Kosmitzki (2011) go on to state:

> African babies receive more social stimulation and early emotional support than European babies, resulting in Africans acquiring an intelligence that is more

> socially orientated, while Europeans acquire one that is more technologically orientated. (p. 107)

Such developmental differences should not imply a deficit model of child development on either side but a strength-based *culturally competent model* that moves beyond a single universal goal of human development. Impoverished children live in a world where their individual personal history, geographic location, and family disposition influence a different type of development which to some extent pre-determines different outcomes and opportunities. Gardiner and Kosmitzki (2011) summarize such disparities by stating:

> While some see developmental science as a wondrous opener of doors, others understand it as a univocal gatekeeper that privileges certain understandings and perspectives while restricting other, diverse forms of knowledge. (p. 10)

An Afro-centric lens

There is a risk given the colonial past of a British education system that only privileged or homogenous voices are heard in Sierra Leone and this will result in the suppression of local history and silence discussions and critical thinking in relation to indigenous pedagogy and practice (Agbenyega, 2015). Examples of an afro-centric lens to view child development are starting to emerge across the continent and should be seen as important facilitators for ECDE. The Johannesburg 2013 Early Childhood Development (ECD/CD) scholar's workshop, designed to help advance a science of ECDE inclusive of African perspectives, priorities, values and scholarly leaders, is a beginning. In a Communiqué: *A Call to Action,* the fourth African International Conference on Early Childhood Development, 10 – 12 November, 2009 Dakar, Senegal made seven recommendations from the proceedings endorsed by the delegates. Included, was the need for both regional and global networking and the sharing of ECDE practices, lessons, and research findings through the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) the Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD)

and its partners. In response to these recommendations, it published an online journal that aims to bring together diverse groups to help ensure that ECDE combined with contextually relevant research, has a voice that is heard not only in Africa, but also internationally. Sierra Leone has already become involved in ADEA and together with Zimbabwe and Senegal won the FAWE-ADEA competition for girls' advancement in secondary education, 2016.

Other voices are reflected in text books such as, The Handbook of African Educational Practices (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011) which proposes a reconceptualisation of education in Africa. Nine themes incorporating Africa's philosophical worldviews, values and practices are posited by over 45 contributors, suggesting diverse Afrocentric (but not at the expense of universal perspectives) ways of integrating educational research, child development, curriculum and pedagogical practices. Nsamenang and Tchombe (2011) suggest that a mismatch between western institutional models of early childhood education and the lives of African children is occurring. They claim that African leaders and donor partners have made little effort to move beyond rhetoric to conceptualize educational curricular based on the African context. Nsamenang and Tchombe (2011) state:

> We have learned that no people entirely dislodged from their ancestral roots have ever made collective progress with development and that the era of outsiders deciding and 'supplying' what Africans need has not yielded hoped for outcomes. (p. 28)

This disconnection from the past undermines the value of preschool programs and schools as social and cultural institutions, which should always be connected to its host community (wherever that might be in the world). In Cameroon, the *1995 National Forum on Education* echoed that belief by strongly recommending the insertion of local knowledge and practices in the school curriculum to make the education system more relevant to the learners,

Lysette et al (cited in Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011). This is still a work in progress and much more is needed to improve the way forward. Perhaps it is time to move away from what Serpell, (1984) calls a "colonial hangover" (p. 114) and hand over the reins to those who have a deep understanding of Africa and who can explore ECDE knowledge bases from more localized contexts. Given that Sierra Leone is in an embryonic stage of developing early childhood policies, standards and curriculum, there are challenges ahead and there is a limited pool of money and early childhood experts in the country however, this is the time for review and critical reflection and an opportunity to embrace such challenges within the context of possibilities.

The concept of Sankofa

It is fitting at this stage, to consider the concept of Sankofa as a way forward for early childhood education given its West African roots and the potentially fertile landscape of ECDE in Sierra Leone. Sankofa '*returning to the past to move forward'* is derived from the Akan people of Ghana and Ivory Coast. Sankofa depicts a mythical bird flying forward with its head turned backwards. The bird is holding an egg in its mouth symbolizing the knowledge/wisdom of the past that generations forward can learn from (Kanu, 2007). The notion that we must go back to our roots in order to move forward, implies that we take the best of the past to teach us in the present. Interestingly, Kanu (2007) views Sankofa from a historical lens as a circular process (rather than the linear construct of time prevalent in western culture). The past is seen not a series of events frozen in time, but rather as occurrences that are at one with the present and the future. Kanu (2007) argues that a return to the insights of the past generations to consider their applicability to the present in Sierra Leone is crucial. She advocates that "more specifically,

I call for a return to what was deemed and still is deemed to be valuable in Indigenous African education, that can inform educational reconstruction in Sierra Leone today" (p. 69).

Teacher training

The question of whether to retain traditional (western) notions of child development or introduce afro-centric models raises another issue surrounding pedagogical knowledge bases set in teacher training syllabus. In Sierra Leone the Milton Margai college of Education and Technology and the Orthodox Christian college of West Africa are currently the only tertiary institutions offering a Higher Teacher Certificate (HTC) in Early Childhood Studies and the current syllabus of both colleges reflects a western child development teacher training program albeit with African undertones. The issue of relevance emerges.

Ali Mazrui (1978) sheds some light on this issue of theoretical and pedagogical relevance when asked if African students should study the *intellectual riches* of Plato or Rousseau as neither could be regarded as having any knowledge of key problems in Africa. Such thinkers he posits attempted generalizations at the broadest level and as such they have value. Mazrui (1978) claims that exposing student teachers to a variety of educational and developmental theories help them explore whether one idea or situation can lend itself to another. As Mazrui states, "if an idea is fertile it may well conceive a different kind of child if it is mated to a different kind of situation" (p. 208). In supporting this idea Serpell, (1984) states that the application of western theories in Sub-Sahara Africa has been taken too literally and a preoccupation with direct comparisons has thwarted the creative process of transformation. Serpell (1984) claims, "Western developmental psychology is supplied with raw data and *brought* for the training of African students on the assumption that it has the same kind universal applicability as the bicycle, the radio and the computer" (p. 124) which is not the case. Serpell (1984) admits that transferring cognitive developmental knowledge and adapting it to the needs

and aspirations of the socio-cultural and historical context of Sub Sahara African is a challenge facing researchers.

A closer investigation of developmental and psychological theories from the west, require robust analytical discourse to identify common themes/ideas but also require critical evaluation as to their relevance for the African and especially the Sierra Leonean context. For in so doing, a new depth of understanding and even a new way of *doing* will emerge. This kind of process however, takes intellect and courage as Muzrui, (1978) states, "the process might involve tearing down the theory out of its historical context altogether to bring the logic of all or some of its ideas to bear on a specific situation in perhaps one's time and one's own areas, in Africa" (p. 208). The idea of *Sankofa* where taking the best from the past to build on an African science of early childhood pedagogy may well be a way forward.

Part 3: Structural Factors

The third and final topic of this literature review relates to structures that impact on agency and education. Given that the aim of the country is to reach middle income status by 2035 (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013) the advancement of ECDE in Sierra Leone will only move forward when access, provision and shared dominant discourses are heard and acted upon in order to bridge the structural divide which currently segregates the marginalized.

There are a number of structural constraints that are at play in less developed countries which have systemically slowed down access and provision of ECDE. Whilst Sierra Leone has its own unique challenges in relation to these issues a way forward is to integrate ECDE programs into a country's overall strategy for developing human capital (Nores & Barnett, 2012; Young, 2010). This however requires public expenditure. Current challenges facing Sierra Leone, such as slower economic growth post-Ebola, ongoing poverty, reduced expenditure on education and lack of cohesion related to ECDE are factors currently impacting on progress for

ECE. Issues related to structural barriers, African spending on education and the value of investing early to build a nation will be examined.

The politics of ECE

The links between early childhood education and economic benefits continue to permeate discourse in the western world (Bartik, 2011; Carneiro & Heckman, 2003; Heckman, 2006) as discussed earlier in this chapter. Early childhood education is noted in developed countries as a priority because of its nation building capacity and there should be an understanding and acceptance that investment in human capital will not deliver immediate results. In Sierra Leone, there is competition in the field of politics therefore, getting government to financially support the delayed nature of benefits when there are so many other priorities, has its challenges. Investing in early education is not immediately visible in the way a new hospital or road is visible, and the long term economic and social benefits usually surpass the term of office for most politicians. Bartik, (2011) is critical of policies that have short term perspectives on economic investment for ECE programs referring to them as a "political handicap" (p. 5). Whilst policy makers should be willing to invest in early childhood programs with delayed benefits, Bartik (2011) claims that "unfortunately, that is not the way state, local and federal policy makers actually view the world" (p. 182). The reality is that politicians do not remain in office long enough to see the returns of such policy investments and this makes early education a less attractive option when deciding where, what and how much to allocate for preschool funding and resources.

In terms of expenditure on education the results vary across African countries. What stands out is that only one of the African countries reviewed (Lesotho) was predicted to achieve the Dakar Minimum Commitment pledge of 9% of GDP for education by 2015 (African Child Policy Forum, 2013, p. 55). Table 2.1 shows the broader picture of expenditure and out of 52

countries, 16 West African countries are included in this ranking. They are positioned very differently in terms of spending on education. Neighbouring countries Sierra Leone and Guinea share similar populations and score very closely in their expenditure on education ranking low at 44 and 42 consecutively. Bordering country Liberia however, spends even less and given its much larger population it ranks even lower at 49 out of 52 countries.

Table 2.1

Education Expenditure for 52 African Countries

Country	Percent
Lesotho	13.0
Djibouti	8.4
Namibia	8.4
Ghana	8.2
Botswana	7.8
Swaziland	7.8
Comoros	7.6
Kenya	6.7
Congo (Brazzaville)	6.2
United Rep. of Tanzania	6.2
Tunisia	6.2
Burundi	6.1
South Africa	6.0
Cape Verde	5.6
Senegal	5.6
Malawi	5.4
Morocco	5.4
Benin	5.3
Mozambique	5.0
Rwanda	4.8
Seychelles	4.8
Ethiopia	4.7
Mali	4.7
Côte d'Ivoire	4.6

Country	Percent
Togo	4.6
Niger	4.5
Algeria	4.3
Gambia	3.9
Gabon	3.8
Egypt	3.8
Mauritania	3.7
Mauritius	3.7
Angola	3.5
Burkina Faso	3.4
Cameroon	3.2
Uganda	3.2
Guinea	3.1
Madagascar	2.8
Sierra Leone	2.7
Chad	2.6
Dem. Rep. of Congo	2.5
Zimbabwe	2.5
Eritrea	2.1
Liberia	1.9
Zambia	1.3
Central African Republic	1.2
Equatorial Guinea	0.6

Note. Out of 52 African countries, Sierra Leone is ranked at 44 with only 2.7% public expenditure on education.

It would seem that Heckman's (2006) findings, that return on early education expenditure increases return on investment in later life and saves government money in the long run, is yet to be heard in Sierra Leone. Public expenditure for ECDE in Sierra Leone is dismal with little progress made since 2008, in the funding of early childhood education. There is no costing model for ECDE and according to the Sierra Leone ECD SABER Report 2013:

> The government does not disaggregate spending by preprimary school level and therefore official figures are not available for the percentage of the annual education budget that is allocated towards preprimary education (World Bank, 2013, p. 9).

Financially investing in children, means investing in education and this does requires public expenditure for both pre and primary school as one impacts on the other. Early childhood and primary school are inter-linked and it is well-known that formal pre-primary education can set a strong foundation for future success in school (Fisher, 2012; Heckman et al 2012; Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone, 2010). Unfortunately, due to the weak pre-primary system in Sierra Leone the impact is also felt in primary school. According to UNICEF's annual report on Sierra Leone (2013) universal primary education has not been met. More than half of children are starting school late and 22 % of children aged 6–14 years of age are out of school, especially the poorest. After three years of schooling, a majority of children do not know the alphabet. About 52% of primary school teachers are not qualified and there is a need for curriculum development to improve education quality (UNICEF, 2013, p. 2). Young and Mustard (2008) advocate that "developing and industrialized countries can no longer ignore the evidence and must give priority to investing in their people" (p. 72). Certainly this advice is timely given that the MDG goals did not meet their time lines in almost all African countries

(*MDG African* Report, 2014) including Sierra Leone. The African Child Policy Forum (2011) asserts that early childhood has been "almost entirely neglected by African governments regardless of the benefits" (p. 71). The report states that in economic terms, ECDE is the foundation stage in the process of building human capital and national development and as a result, should be viewed, "not merely as a vehicle for delivering badly needed social services, but also as an important element of economic and educational development" (*African report*, 2011 p. 71). Indeed there is much to be done in addressing the importance of ECDE for national development in Sub-Sahara Africa and especially for Sierra Leone.

Investing early matters, but to whom?

Investing early not only matters to children's future but the future of a nation, yet such dominant discourses that result in public funding for ECDE have yet to flow through the ministerial corridors of Sub-Sahara African government buildings. Millions of children under the age of 5 fail to reach their full potential, because of poverty, poor health and nutrition and lack of early education. 71 million of those children live in SSA, which holds the highest prevalence of disadvantaged children under five in the world at 61%, (Young, 2010). Some progress has been made and according to UNESCO (2015) there has been an increase in preschool enrolments in the region however, the average gross enrolment (GER) is still only 20% in 2012 and according to UNESCO "the private sector provision is high, limiting access to those who can afford it, in the following countries: Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Swaziland and Sierra Leone" (p. 2). It can be argued that early childhood education alone will not completely eliminate these problems, even over several generations, however, it can (and should) be one element of a broader educational strategy as well as a country wide strategy.

It is understandable that Sierra Leone has competing government priorities such as those outlined in the country's Agenda *for Change* (2008) which include energy, infrastructure,

agriculture, health, housing, among others and these issues are often seen as requiring more urgent attention than investment in human capital (especially young children's development and education) but Young (2010) cautiously reminds us that history has a way of repeating itself.

> Often the dilemma raised by policy makers in low-income countries is how to give priority to investing in young children when there are so many urgent and competing issues, such as high burdens of disease, low rates of child survival poor participation and school performance in basic education and limited infrastructures and resources. Indeed in these countries child survival has to be a high priority but survival must be addressed concurrently not instead of and sequentially. Children who survive but are poorly nourished and stunted and have inadequate or poor early development and limited education will become poor parents, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and its effects. (p. 28)

The key here is to see the priorities of early education *interrelated, interconnected,* and *interwoven* with other government priorities. As Schweinhart (2003) points out; "high quality preschool education should be part of a multifaceted effort to solve social problems; its role should neither be overrated nor underrated" (p. 8). Early childhood education should therefore, not sit outside of social capital, human capital, knowledge capital and public institutional capital (Super, Harkness, Barry, & Zeitlin, 2011). After all, it is the combination of all forms of capital that are required to build a nation with one form contributing to another. If ECDE programs make economic and human capital sense, can they also contribute to long term national stability?

Crime and national stability issues

The question of why the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) in the United States were publishing results from a preschool research project from the 1960's (Parks, 2000) aroused my curiosity during this literature search. Since its founding in 1974, the OJJDP has provided national leadership to Federal, State, and local governments in an effort to prevent delinquency. The aim of OJJDP is to strengthen the juvenile justice system, and protect predominantly juveniles from harm. It appears that the *Perry Preschool Project* has not only have been found to present savings for education, welfare and employment but present a scope of savings for crime reduction, (Heckman et al., 2010; Parks, 2000). Despite the fact that a reanalysis of the original savings highlighted by Parks (2000) eliminated the largest and least reliable saving category (reduction of savings to crime victims), figure 2,2 still shows significant savings in relation to crime reduction with a 40% saving in criminal justice costs to society (Karoly et al, as cited in Parks, 2000 p. 5).

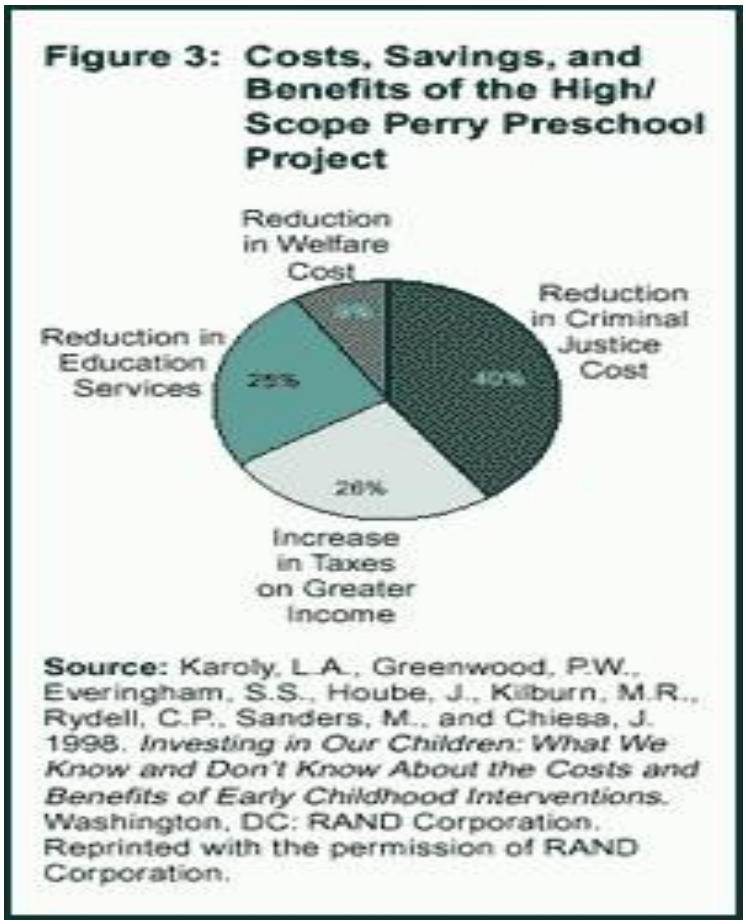

Figure 2.2. Re-analysis of costs, savings, and benefits. Eliminating the largest and least reliable saving category (victims of crime) it still left a return of more than twice the original investment.

Eliminating the largest and least reliable saving category (victims of crime) still left a return of more than twice the original investment. We can infer from the results of such findings, that ECDE has a wider impact on the country than just education and economy. Quality early good starts can influence peace building and even contribute to national stability by reducing crime rate expenditure.

Sierra Leone has a large youth population (15–35 years) constituting 34% of the total population. Youth unemployment sits at 60 % making it one of the highest in West Africa (*Sierra Leone Youth Report*, 2012) and according to the Africa Economic Development Institute

(AEDI) possibly the world. According to World Bank, *Innovations for Poverty Action* report (round 2 results, 2015) youth unemployment in Freetown has further declined post Ebola and with so many youth unemployed and the high cost of living, as well as what is commonly referred to as "youth idleness" there is a context for concern. The Status of the Youth Report (*Sierra Leone Youth Report*, 2012) became a major recommendation of Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (set up after the country's brutal 11 year war ended in 2002). The Commission identified youth marginalization as a major root cause of the war and given the historical past of civil unrest, youth problems may well have been the catalyst that spearheaded the rebel war and there is a risk of a repeat of history. Social responsibility and civic duty emerge in youth but like so many elements of human development, they begin in early childhood. Once again, we see the long reach impact of quality ECDE programs on national development. Such programs can and do act as preventative measures to reduce crime and juvenile delinquency (Heckman et al., 2010; Parks, 2000; Schweinhart, 2003). Investing economically in such programs has long term benefits for youth, for the nation and for longterm national security and stability, especially in a fragile poverty stricken country like Sierra Leone.

Poverty

Poverty is a structural and individual barrier to early education and the issue of poverty has been a top priority in global initiatives such as EFA and the MDG's as well as the new SDG's. Sierra Leone's commitment to *eradicate extreme poverty and hunger* (MDG goal 1) would have needed to fall to 40% in order to achieve target. This is an arduous task which is still a work in progress toward meeting the new Sustainability Development Goal (1) '*No Poverty'* (UNDP, 2015). National poverty levels in Sierra Leone have improved slightly and according to The World Bank (2013) poverty profile report compiled in conjunction with

Statistics Sierra Leone, poverty has declined from 66.4% in 2003 to 52.9% in 2011. The report states that "while steady positive progress is encouraging, much higher growth rates will be necessary to meet government's 4.8% targets outlined in the new Agenda for Prosperity" (p. 5). Currently there are no headcount statistics on poverty post Ebola although it is anticipated that new poverty-related data will be generated by the population and housing census conducted in December 2015.

Poverty can refer to many different aspects such as deprivation, lack of food and shelter, social exclusion, lack of access to basic public services, all of which are crippling the life chances and opportunities to enact agency. Children according to Morrow (2011) experience poverty in three ways: Depravation (lack of essential material conditions and services), Exclusion (on the basis of age, gender, class, caste etc.), and Vulnerability (with regard the changing array of threats in their environments) known as the DEV framework (Wordsworth, McPeak, & Feeny, 2005). Each of the DEV's is viewed as an important aspect of a multidimensional problem. As a structure, poverty influences the shaping of society, as agency it impacts on the perspective taken, for example, what people believe they can do and change and the action that follows. The complexion of interactions surrounding child poverty is an important discussion serving to highlight the way child agency can change perspectives personally and structurally (which can impact on how agendas policy and programs are designed and implemented). The Christian Children's Fund (CCF) study (Wordsworth et al., 2005) on the experiences and impact of poverty on children found that the range of experiences felt by impoverished children could be classified under the DEV framework. The key findings (p. 9) indicate that children:

- Understand poverty as a deeply physical, emotional and social experience (children prioritize the psychological and social experience of poverty as being more significant than any material deprivation).
- Are far more sensitive to and indeed affected by poverty than is appreciated by adults.
- Are acutely aware of its divisive nature and feel its effects particularly in terms of changing and constraining their relationships with family/friends.
- Experience poverty as a continuously changing condition due to the interaction of several processes at the personal, familial, communal and structural level.
- Are not passive recipients of experience but active contributors to their own well-being. In all but the most severe circumstances, children have options and make choices (depending on their age and social context) that impact their situation.

In exploring relationships between poverty and children an ethnographic study by Bray and Brandt (2007) employed a relational lens to examine the interaction between poverty and the nature and quality of childcare. The study was set in a poor district of Cape Town, South Africa, exploring three distinct but interrelated variables: the impact on mobility in the care of children, caregiving roles within and beyond the households and children's contribution to the care of others. The study cites economic aspects of structural poverty especially the lack of residential security as placing high levels of anxiety on mothers but at the same time highlights the reciprocal and supportive relationships between young children and their parents during extreme hardships and how child agency is enacted in the way children care not just for other children but for adults. The study recommends that childcare in impoverished communities should be conceptualized as "having an emotional component that operates in parallel with, and is as important as, material provision and practical action" (Bray & Brandt, 2007, p. 13). From

a Bourdieuian perspective, this implies that other forms of capital aside from economic (social and symbolic capital) are worthy and valuable assets that contribute to well-being (which I further discuss in chapter 3). There is resonance in this study with the context of Sierra Leone where the data highlights children's social and emotional intelligences and certain dispositions such as resilience, empathy and responsibility which are enacted through child agency –in spite of daily hardships. Such competencies are however, stretched in extreme cases of poverty such as those related to children living in slums.

Children living in slums

In Sierra Leone poverty has its own dividing lines separating the poor from the poorest in the form of slum dwellings and this is intergenerational and systemic. Freetown's population is now over one million, a tenfold increase since independence in 1961 (Hitchen, 2014). It has a very high prevalence of slums (Arimah, 2010) and Kroo Bay in Freetown city, is the largest and most hazardous beachfront slum in Sierra Leone. Home to some 6,000 of the poorest people where 95% of the slum population, operate with no private facilities including toilets (Hitchen, 2014). The lack of basic facilities and hazards is a daily way of life for people and my observational field notes concur that the surrounding water is riddled with mosquitoes that breed in the pools of water and people share space with pigs as they wash their clothes. Children who do not attend school spend their time roaming the sewers which poses an environmental and safety threat. The same scenario exists in smaller slum areas, such as Susan Bay and Mao Bay Wharf. I personally experienced the September 2015 flooding in the capital city which according to local media was on an unprecedented scale resulting in deaths and rendering several thousand people living in the slums, homeless. The Wilberforce and Signal Hill areas of the city were affected for the first time in living memory.

In returning to the issue of tribal privilege discussed earlier in this chapter, it is worth noting that there is no evidence of Krio inhabitants in the slums of Kroo Bay. According to the Kroo Bay Settlement Profile (2010) the predominant tribes dwelling at Kroo Bay is the Temne tribe who make up approximately 54.5% of the entire population. Other tribes include Limbas (9.0%), Fullahs (13.8%), and Mendes (4.5%) with no mention of Krio inhabitants. Their absence as slum dwellers could be due to their dominant presence as land owners. Krios have been urban landlords in Freetown since the nineteenth century and according to Cohen (1981)
"there are whole streets owned by Krio families, who live on the first floor and rent the ground floor as shops with many others being rented out to foreign embassies and business organization" (Cohen, 1981 p. 52). It is this house/land ownership that was and still remains "a source of power and privilege" (p. 51) although Cohen admits that it is very difficult to quantify such evidence.

Life in the slums of Sierra Leone, like child poverty itself, is intergenerational (Feeny & Boyden, 2004). A study conducted in Susan Bay (2006) by UN-HABITAT highlighted that one of the main reasons for staying in the slum was parents/grandparents. Given that 37.2% of the residents have lived in the Susan bay for over 10 years and the majority is under 24 years of age (UN-Habitat, 2006) it would seem both practical and culturally acceptable to remain close to kin. However, when the environment of primary socialization is internalized from a young age (habitus) it shapes perceptions, values, and attitudes that can enslave rather than transform children's lives. According to Adamopoulo (2011) children become socialized into a subculture which prevents them from escaping their marginalized economic class, and so will adopt the values of a slum culture by necessity. Trapped in what Oscar Lewis (1961) coined "The culture of poverty" which perpetuates socialization into a culture handed down from generation to

generation, children learn to cope with less, and parents pass this knowledge to their own children. As Lewis (cited in James, 2008) points out:

> By the time slum children are six or seven they have absorbed the values and attitudes of their subculture and are not psychologically geared to take advantage of changing conditions or increased opportunities that may occur (p. 28).

Families are caught within this *culture of poverty* and so their cultural and behavioural patterns are based on the needs of daily survival. This in effect does not offer them the same access to education opportunities. Whilst modern researchers debate the notion of a culture of poverty arguing that it is a myth clouding the real issue of classism (Gorski, 2008) the implications for children are none the less the same. Access to early education and parental involvement in any form of schooling no matter how much parent's value education is obstructed. Statistics such as those from the Susan Bay study which found that 50% of those surveyed were illiterate (UN-Habitat, 2006) is problematic. Families of the slums must overcome tremendous inequities to send their children to school as Sims, Nagaddya, Kivunja, Ngungutse, and Ayot (2011), research project in Uganda demonstrates. The social exclusion of children living in urban slums is only transformed once children have access to school and they are provided with opportunities to gain cultural capital (Sims et al., 2011). The Ugandan

Government introduced free primary education as part of its country strategy for meeting Millennium targets in education; however, other costs (uniforms, books, shoes etc.) are to be met by parents. The study found that families living in urban slums are unable to afford the additional costs of schooling. Thus children become excluded from school and in effect as Arimah (2010) points out, they are therefore, excluded from fully participating in the economic social, political, and cultural spheres of society. Whilst Adamopoulo (2011) claims that early childhood education can "neutralize that depravation" (p. 26) access to preschool requires more

than simply allowing children to come in. The financial burden of school supplies as well as the cultural capital needed in speaking English and the ability to understand and adopt to expected social norms and behaviours excludes children from the slums from entering and/or fully integrating into the field of schooling. Structurally, poverty is failing to meet its eradication goals. Despite the agency of individuals poverty will continue to fail children and families on a personal level if issues of Depravation, Exclusion, and Vulnerability (Wordsworth et al., 2005) are not addressed on a structural level in the form of human capital investment.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature pertinent to the dominant discourses surrounding the importance of early good starts, diverse and changing views of childhood, development and learning and structural constraints that impact on access and provision of ECE programs. It was organized into topics that explored the nature of ECDE, the facilitators and barriers to advancement and the important role that early education plays in the development of a nation. Is there a moral obligation from governments to prioritize preschool spending so that all children are offered the same life chances regardless of their circumstances? It is perhaps timely to critically posit such a question and at the same time make known the success stories found in child agency and indigenous knowledge banks which this review has highlighted.

Being critical, demands that consideration be given to the social, historical, and ideological forces and structures which produce and constrain outcomes for children and families. Such critique is necessary when attempting to understand the different tensions in under-developed countries from those experienced by developed countries, such as the juggling a universal rights based approach with a needs and priorities based approach. The importance of ECDE is well documented and the diverse childhoods found in African contexts add to the global knowledge bases surrounding child development and early learning. For educational

reforms to continue, the journey in meeting international and local targets requires a strong relational commitment. One where government, community and business partners come together to make choices based on a set of shared values surrounding the importance of early good starts and a willingness to pay for them.

CHAPTER 3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides an in depth focus on the theoretical underpinnings that informed the research study and shows the relationship between the theory and the thesis as a whole. In presenting the theoretical framework, I explain how critical social theory guided investigation into the three research questions. I begin with an overview of the importance of theory in research and some general explanations about critical social theory. Drawing upon the theoretical ideas of Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), I situate the research questions to the wider context of society in Sierra Leone – that is, the socio-historical and socio-political landscape. Social justice issues relating to access, equity, children's rights and social action are located within Bourdieu's critical social theory, which forms the principle theoretical lens used in analysis, discussions and recommendations. The ability to critique and challenge complex issues surrounding the advancement of ECDE is facilitated through Bourdieu's habitus, capital and field and I was able to examine the constraints and possibilities by moving between the three lenses, applying them on micro (agent) level and on a macro (structure) level .

Importance of Theory in Research

Theory is important in research not only for the purpose of situating one's work in a particular scholarly tradition but also in giving researchers different presuppositions in which to examine complex social issues. As Reeves, Albert, Kuper, and Hodges (2008) point out: "Theories provide complex and comprehensive conceptual understandings of things that cannot be pinned down: how societies work, how organisations operate, why people interact in certain ways" (p. 631). All research should rely on a theoretical framework to guide the research process from the original ideas and selection of topic, the formation of research questions, the conceptualization of the literature review, the design approach and methods, analysis and

discussion. In other words, a theoretical framework carries the researcher through from start to finish and illuminates the findings and serves to anchor the recommendations.

According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), “the theoretical framework is the foundation from which all knowledge is constructed (metaphorically and literally) for a research study” (p. 12). Even early in the formation of this research study, I was mindful of the need to align both the questions and the purpose within a particular theoretical framework that would help me understand the complex socio-historical, cultural, economic and sociological elements that act with and upon people in adverse circumstances. Being drawn to critical social theory on the advice of my supervisor, I was unsure where and how to address concepts of advocacy, agency, poverty, disempowerment and inequality which were themes that first unfolded from my exploratory study and continued to dominate my observations in the field, constantly reoccurring both visibly in everyday life and at times concealed under layers of public image and pride. Social inequalities and hardships are the make-up of Sierra Leone and I realized that to investigate the current nature of early childhood education, I needed a more critical theoretical compass to guide my ethnographic case study. My own immersion into the life of people and society was overwhelmingly tragic and I had to manage my own perspective and balance the objective and subjective arrows that was a constant reminder of the human condition I was witnessing. As Hage (2003) points out, there is no escape from having a perspective and there is no view that is capable of non-perspective. I discuss this ‘perspective view’ using Bourdieu’s notions of critical reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990a) in the methodology chapter as this was another complex layer I had to manage as an ethnographer.

Critical social theory

Rooted in German philosopher Karl Marx's idealistic work on production and capitalism (Reeves et al., 2008) critical theory has evolved from the backdrop of Nazi Germany. Critical social theory advanced into a tradition of *intellectual rebellion* (Madison, 2005) where radical ideas defied regimes of power and this was demonstrated in social protest movements around the world. Critical social theory attempts to shift thought and practice in ways that can enact change with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge (Leonardo, 2004) whilst Thomas (1993) adds that *critical* describes both an activity and an ideology:

> As social activity, critical thinking implies a call to action that may range from modest rethinking of comfortable thoughts to more direct engagement that includes political activism. As ideology, critical thinking provides a shared body of principles about the relationship among knowledge, its consequences, and scholars' obligations to society (p. 17).

As ECDE in Sierra Leone is situated in contrasting contexts, critical social theory provides insight into such complex understandings of the tensions between past present and future. It considers the social, historical, and ideological forces and the structures which produce and constrain society but it does more than simply *consider*. It aims to critique in order to transform. Epistemologically, critical theory believes that the current way society is set up, is un-just, and suggests that research should empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities (Leonardo, 2004). For the researcher, it is a call to action whether theoretically or practically because research operating within this framework "must matter for the lives of others" (Calhoun, 2006, p. 3). In addition, an important element of critical theory is its heterogeneous approach to methodology which can be applied on a micro and macro scale (Reeves et al., 2008). My research involved different methods and having the flexibility to use multiple lenses regardless of quantity or approaches gave me flexibility and at the same time,

reassurance. As Thomas (1993) posits, all methods share thinking and writing styles that link elements of social descriptions, social organization, and social structure to action.

Critical theory provides a wide lens to look at complicated problems and social issues (Reeves et al., 2008) and examines common elements of social descriptions, social organization and social structure driving action (Thomas, 1993). In view of the key issues being explored in this study which have cultural, political, economic and social elements tied to questions surrounding early childhood education, I situate Bourdieu's critical social theory. Using his conceptual tools of habitus capital and field, I unpack themes and variables that impact on constraints and possibilities for ECDE using a more critical road map to guide the findings and illuminate the study as whole.

Pierre Bourdieu

Bourdieu's writing is not easy to decipher (Hage, 2013; Jenkins, 1992; Nash, 1990). In fact Jenkins (1992) regards it as, "a permanent struggle against ordinary language" (p. 2) and Hage (2003) claims that Bourdieu writes in a paranoid manner with endless long sentences resulting in frustration and misunderstanding. Perhaps as Hage (2003) asserts, Bourdieu cared to be misunderstood or maybe he thought it worthy for his readers to do battle with his concepts in the same way he saw the struggle for emancipation a worthwhile and noble battle. It is undeniable that I too struggled to decipher his writing and find ways to align his theory to my research questions. I was drawn to Bourdieu's philosophical struggles as a *novice* ethnographic researcher and realized his early field work in Algeria, was as much personal as it was a sociological pursuit. I identified with his observational experiences in Algeria, for I too was at odds with what I witnessed in Sierra Leone, yet like Bourdieu, deeply informed and affected by it (Bourdieu, 2012).

Bourdieu wanted to re-establish sociology based on the study of objectivity as well as subjectivity not as dualities but rather as an alternative third space to bridge the extremes of post-modernist subjectivity and positivist objectivity (Bourdieu, 1977). His theory of structure and agency was a framework that suited the investigation of this study due to the complex layers influencing and impacting on the way children are constantly positioned and repositioned to meet the cultural structure of family and kin and at the same time balancing agency possibilities as children grow up in changing economic and social times. In questioning many cherished paradigms, Bourdieu examined the dichotomous classifications of individual/society as well as structure/agency tensions, claiming they not only overlap (Calhoun, 2006) but offer the very contrasts that combine to create sociological insights (Hage, 2003). His push to bridge the structural divide between individuals and institutions and economy and sociology, which he believed neoliberalism divided based on a monetary value (Bourdieu, 1997) called for what he describes as "a renewal of critical sociology" (Mitrovic, 2005, p. 40). Bourdieu's structure and agency reconciliations served as a powerful framework in examining answers to the barriers and facilitators to ECDE on a micro and macro level, especially the impact of poverty on educational advancement and how the exclusivity of preschool serves to reproduce the status quo. Using a socio-critical lens to measure the worth and value of the stuff that make up an individual, which according to Bourdieu (1997) should not always be written in economic language, I was able to connect the relationship between practice (what we do in our immediate environment) and field (the larger parameters of power relations) to structure and agency thus determining what agents can and cannot achieve. This helped me identify which practices create barriers and which become facilitators to ECDE. Bourdieu explains his theory of practice through the conceptual tools of habitus, capital, and field, theorizing that it is the interplay between all three that enacts practice.

Bourdieu's conceptual tools

Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of capital, habitus, and field are compelling tools for analysis in a country such as Sierra Leone, embedded in poverty and social injustices. Themes emerging from the data analysis involved childhood narratives, values and education and the future. The themes helped situate the context and realities, revealing that despite how much children are valued they are rarely protected from the hardships of daily life. The study exposes the kind of structural constraints children, teachers, and families experience but at the same time this is fused with possibilities found in the form of agency social action and even government policy. Structure and agency serve to illuminate both the reproductive and transformative powers that habitus, capital and field have on the lives of children and their educational opportunities. A more detailed analysis of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts pertinent to this study follows.

Whilst I address habitus capital and field as separate entities, I have also connected them throughout this thesis because of the collective influence they have to both reproduce and transform. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of Bourdieu's three conceptual tools, demonstrating the broad definitions and inter-relational aspects between the three concepts and structure and agency. Social, cultural, economic and government structures determine the amount and types of choices agents can make and the level of agency they are able to mobilize through an individual and collective habitus and the accrual of capital determines positions of power within the fields of family/school/power/position. It is the combined forces of habitus capital and field that determine agency trajectories and it is structure that influences the outcomes.

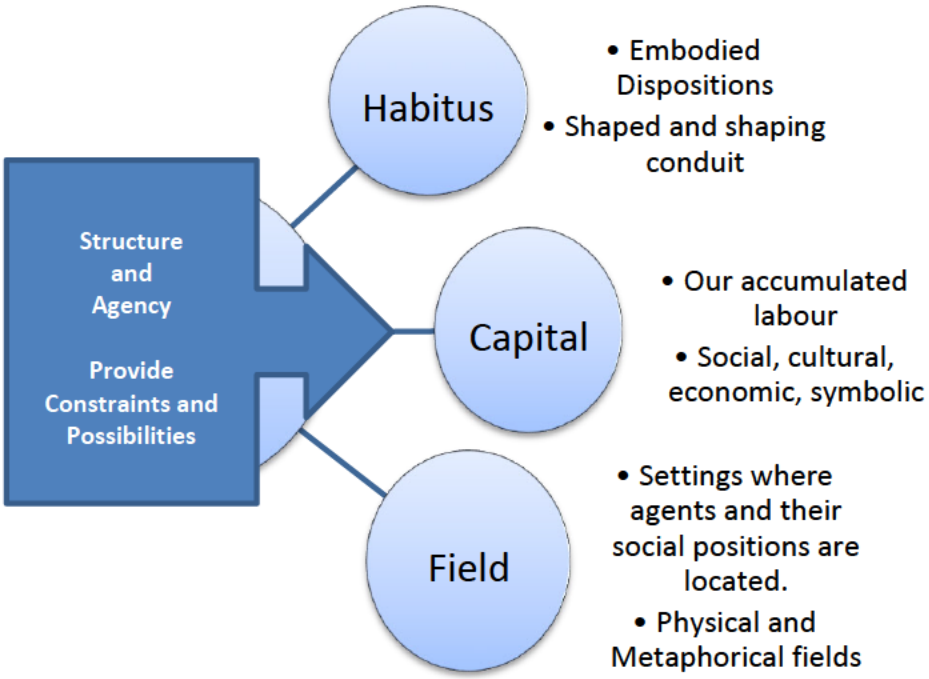

Figure 3.1. Application of Bourdieu's conceptual framework. "Agency" as the capacity of individuals to act independently and make choices and "structure" being the factors that influence/limit decisions and choices.

Habitus

Habitus is a set of internalized embodied social structures which are acquired over a life time and include beliefs, values, attitudes, and dispositions, all of which are drawn from our socio-historical and cultural history. Bourdieu's concept of habitus is embedded in a theory of human action (Swartz, 2002) shaping the way we understand, interpret, and act in everyday life. As Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002) point out: "Whilst the habitus allows us to respond in a variety of ways, the responses are largely determined –regulated by *where* and *who* we have been in culture (p. 36) which in turn determines a certain position in society.

The most recent definition of habitus by Bourdieu, found in his work *The logic of practice* (1990), states that habitus is:

> Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures pre-disposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (p. 53).

Obscure as this definition first appears, Lizardo (2004) sheds some light by distinguishing the two major uses of Bourdieu's concept of habitus: "The habitus as a perceptual and classifying structure and the habitus as a generative structure of practical action" (p .7). The first suggests anthropological and sociological thinking from Durkheim to Levi-Straus and the second suggests the proactive abilities of habitus functioning as an *organizing principle of action* (Bourdieu, 1990a). For Lizardo (2004) there is no tension between the two, as practice is produced through structure and it is through the habitus of practical action that larger structures are reproduced. It is this interplay between structure and agency that characterizes habitus.

Habitus and structure

It is important to discuss how habitus and structure operate in this study because it provides insights into how childhood is perceived in Sierra Leone and the way structures, people and experiences operate on habitus to reproduce and/or transform social inequality. Early childhood development and education can act as a transformational tool under the right circumstances as habitus is the setting of primary socialization (which begins in early childhood). Ecologically speaking, (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) we inherit a unique habitus that has formed from internalizing socialization experiences in the *mesosystem* of family. As the first social institution, the family shapes and positions us into a certain social structure within the immediate and extended family. Families all belong to some social class, racial and ethnic group and this is embodied and internalized during the socialization process described by Bourdieu as

"society written into the body" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 63). This embodiment is central to our self-formation because it is in the family that we first develop our understanding about the world and our place within it. As we enter the *exo-system* of community and school we begin to perceive our place in the world both as present and future. It is our habitus that predisposes us to a certain lifestyle (class identity) which can act to reproduce social and economic inequality (Bourdieu, 1984). Whilst the social structures determine our position they also shape the structuring process that is, our thoughts and actions (practice) and here lay both the constraints and possibilities, as different experiences and people act on the habitus. In Sierra Leone where children are surrounded by hardships, it is easy to see why experiences in family and community could internalize the belief that education is not attainable. However, this does not mean that our social, historical, and cultural history/past locks us into these structures, for we act upon them, in other words habitus, can serve to either "enslave or transform us" (Wacquant, 2006, p. 7). These important theoretical presuppositions are utilized in interpreting the interview data and field notes in this study, highlighting that the very hardships and struggles can either lock the habitus in, or act as a catalyst for transformational change in this way acting as a either a constraint or a possibility.

Capital

Broadly defined by Bourdieu (1986) capital is *accumulated labour and* relates to investment in one's upbringing and includes a range of physical and symbolic assets that one accrues over time and place. There are different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1989), for example e*conomic capital* which includes resources such as cash and assets and *cultural capital*, which involves accumulated high culture knowledge, academic success and dominant cultural values, and *social capital*, involving resources based on group membership, relationships, and network

supports and *symbolic capital*, which is the power granted to those who have sufficient recognition or prestige or position.

Capital is another theoretical concept that contributes to this study, especially in relation to the way it is accumulated and mobilized by children and adults and how that in turn can contribute to national development. Capital, offers a wide lens to view the way dominant classes retain their social position in society (Bourdieu, 1989) and how deep seated privilege structures date back (which I discussed earlier in this chapter). Whilst privilege continues to act upon impoverished children's educational opportunities at the same time the accumulation of capital accrued in early childhood can become a social equalizer, so long as it is the *right type* of capital that is agreed upon and made transparent to all.

Social and cultural capital

In examining social capital from a macro perspective, I cast my theoretical lens further afield to examine the ideas of Robert Putnam, James Coleman, as well as Pierre Bourdieu, comparing their ideas in relation to understandings about social capital. Putnam defines social capital as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Leonard, 2005, p. 606). Putnam's definition suggests a co-constructive relationship where civic community is built upon trust and this trust is a major factor behind economic and governmental effectiveness (Siisiainen, 2000). Coleman on the other hand, views social capital as a positive interactive force, existing as a resource that individuals can utilize in their relationships with others, (Leonard, 2005). For Coleman the family is the central location for social capital but he emphasizes that for children to flourish they need economic capital (financial security) and cultural capital (educated parents) claiming this to be the most optimum context for children to thrive (Leonard, 2005, p. 608). My data was indicating that social capital exists in different fields and children were able to locate and

accumulate it outside the family. Bourdieu (1986) takes a reductionist approach explaining that life is a struggle for power and actors are engaged in the pursuit of their own interests, in terms of accumulation of social capital. Bourdieu (1986) raises a critical point in claiming that the transformational value of social capital is only possible if one is able to transfer/exchange one form of capital (social) into another (economic). On the one hand the transformative abilities of capital espoused by both Coleman and Putnum claim that "social capital can be created and built up in communities where it is lacking and ultimately transformed into other forms of capital" (Leonard, 2005, p. 606) on the other hand, this is based on the assumption that trust, civic community, transparency, economic and family stability are in place. I found this not to be the reality of life in Sierra Leone where corruption has a long history of practice and childhood is not a stable state of being. All three ideas had something to offer my understanding of social capital but it was the exchangeability between the different forms of capital and the way child agency is enacted through children's competencies, which mobilizes children's capital and this served to highlight the powerful potentiality of social capital.

Cultural capital is equally powerful in relation to education posing both a constraint and possibility. It can yield very different educational advantages thus determining differences between groups (Webb et al., 2002). Children exposed to a certain type of *high cultured capital* at home are advantaged in schools and in Sierra Leone this type of capital can be found in educated parents who are fluent in the English language, who have food and housing security, have access to books, music, technology and a regular income. From the data, we see that in the field of pre-primary school, cultural capital is an elusive yet highly valued commodity which is branded and labelled by teachers and government unconsciously as 'school readiness.' Entrenched ideas about how one should conduct themselves at school, certain readiness traits including academic know how, social behaviours and conformity are highly valued and

rewarded because they fit the existing patterns of school norms in Sierra Leone. For those who have less, know less, and are seldom privy to the rules of the *high culture game* that exists, such competencies become barriers. As Webb et al. (2002) point out, "those who talk of equality of opportunity forget that social games – are not fair games" (p. 24). The interview data and field notes in this study suggest that there are times, when the *have not's* (children) are not even aware that there are any rules, let alone what they may be and are referred to as 'stubborn African children' because they do not conform to the rules of obedience. According to Tzanakis, (2011) this subjects the less privileged to a form of *symbolic violence* forcing them into a competitive mechanism that rewards only dominant cultural capital.

By taking Bourdieu's '*capital lens'* into the field of Sierra Leone, I was able to shed light on the tensions and contradictions surrounding the different forms of capital children acquire and how they attempt to accumulate and exchange it. The dichotomous functions of capital are important to this study especially given the way children are able to mobilize social capital through agency. The exchangeability of one form of capital (social) for another (cultural) and how it operates to facilitate or block educational opportunities for children and even teachers left me with even more questions regarding power and position.

Gate-keeping capital

Both cultural and symbolic capital can provide entry points into advantage (Webb et al., 2002) but there are gatekeepers in powerful positions that decide what the right *type* of capital is worthy of reproduction, especially in schools. Symbolic capital creates its own power and according to Siisiainen (2000), "it is symbolic capital that defines what forms and uses of capital are recognized as legitimate bases of social positions in a given society" (p. 13), making symbolic capital highly subjective. The idea that the more life means something the more

meaningful it becomes implies that its meaningfulness is determined by the accumulation of symbolic capital. Therefore, how one accumulates and what one accumulates is not only dependent on what is of value to self, but how it is communicated, recognized and valued by others. The *illuso* rests in being caught up in and by the game and investing in the game because it is perceived as worth pursuing (Bourdieu, 1998).

Preschool in Sierra Leone rests in a powerful but precarious position and is in danger of becoming a controlling albeit *misrecognized*, field (Webb et al., 2002) determined by symbolic and cultural capital with shifting entry points based not on social justice principles of access and equity but principles of prestige and currency. The struggle that poor parents face in sending their children to preschool despite the cost, suggests it is perceived (whether consciously or unconsciously) as a *struggle for distinction* (Siisiainen, 2000) where according to Bourdieu (1998) the interest is to simply focused on *being there* to participate where ones presence admits that the *game is worth playing* and that the stakes created in that game are worth investing in. Such tensions found in symbolic and cultural capital must be critically reflected upon as the different motivations in sending children to preschool could continue reproducing the status quo by positioning preschool as an exclusive educational institution, reserved only for those who carry the right type of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital into the field of preschool.

Field

The field is a structured system of social positions occupied by individuals and institutions and used by Bourdieu as a physical and spatial metaphor, described as a social site where agents and institutions come together and the type of habitus and capital accrued determines certain positions within the field (Bourdieu, 1998). Society according to Bourdieu is a combination of fields and Bourdieu uses the plural of field as an intellectual construct for understanding society (Hage, 2003). From this perspective, the field according to Bourdieu is

seen as a space of conflict and competition (Webb et al., 2002) a territory of war, where people struggle for recognition and the acquisition of capital and equity (Jenkins, 1992). Bourdieu's conceptual tool of field facilitated my analysis into power relations and positions within fields and the interdependence between capital and field. Bourdieu (1998) states:

> It is the space of relations of force between the different kinds of capital or, more precisely between the agents who possess a sufficient amount of one of the different kinds of capital to be in a position to dominate the corresponding field, whose struggles wherever the relative value of the different kinds of capital questioned (for example the exchange rate between cultural capital and economic capital (p. 34).

In examining the conflicts within the field of education I was able to understand from the interview data the silent struggle for equality and social justice and cast a more critical light on the field notes in relation to children's ability to accumulate and exchange one form of capital for another.

The field of schooling

Bourdieu's contribution to the sociology of education especially his account of social exclusion in education has left a legacy for debate and critique (Nash, 1990; Webb et al., 2002; Vandenbroek et al., 2010). The debate on such inequalities must continue, for as Nash (1990) points out, "the analogical, metaphorical nature of his core concepts has forced comparisons and connections that have been fruitful" (p. 446). In unpacking the barriers and facilitators to ECDE in Sierra Leone, the sociological dichotomy between *haves* and the *have nots* was ever present and appeared to be embedded in the psyche of its people, making social exclusion a worthy theoretical examination.

Bureaucratic and economic structures serve to reproduce certain inequalities in the field of schooling and agency to a certain extent, accepts this without considering alternatives. For example, from the data it was obvious that competition in the field of school involves a struggle for power (capital) but not everyone that was interviewed saw this as a worthy struggle or perceived they had any power to change the status quo. Symbolic domination (Webb et al., 2002) happens when people with less capital do not know the rules that exist in the field and are kept from knowing them; therefore, they are excluded from the field itself. Knowledge comes from knowing the game in the field and Bourdieu (1990b) describes this as:

> A perfect knowledge of the game, which has 'rules' – only for those who are excluded from it (and for that very reason). (p. 304)

As a result, the *doxa* of acceptance in the form of *"oh well, this my lot"* becomes internalized (illuso) maybe questioned but never challenged. The tensions in the combined fields of schooling and bureaucracy therefore, become structural barriers preventing advancement thus excluding those with less economic and cultural capital. The applicability of Bourdieu's claim that oppressive structures operate within societies in such a way as to legitimize class inequalities, preventing lower class students from gaining certain traits (Sullivan, 2002) appears to apply to certain adults in this study as well.

As for children, if they are fortunate enough to attend preschool, there is also the issue of what type of curriculum, pedagogy and practices are being reproduced across the country. Traditionally, schools are cultural institutions which embody and transmit the dominant culture of a society and they have the capacity and power to shape consciousness, over and above the power of the family (Nash, 1990). Initially, it was unclear to me what the dominant society of Sierra Leone was expecting from preschool education and what type of shaping was deemed

worthy of reproduction as the political rhetoric alluded to preparing children for formal schooling. Hinton (2009) in his review of pre and primary schools in Sierra Leone, points out:

> Nursery school is expected to further the socialization of children and assist them to develop values and mores of the society in which they live. In a country with such acute poverty, preparing children in nursery school is a big challenge. There is no exact profile of what a child who is ready for school should know and be able to do. (p. 81)

This raises questions about what types of knowledge bases and values should be reproduced in an African context and what exactly children embedded in poverty need to be prepared for. Schools control the field and determine what knowledge is considered legitimate (with the input from other fields (economic, political, government ministries etc.). In examining the collective nature of habitus and the way children socialize and learn which is communal and informal, a picture emerges of different forms of capital that young children contribute and bring to preschool. However, not all 'types' of capital developed in the fields of home and community appear to have power or influence as entry points into the field of preschool or value in pedagogical debate. In addition, as discussed in this thesis, preschool is not coordinated in a way that understands how African children think and learn and there is a lack of harmony in what core values national preschool should reproduce. In addition a fragmented approach to policy and practice surrounding ECDE adds to such dichotomous barriers.

If preschool is expected to reproduce the dominant culture of society it has to firstly stop reproducing the *hierarchies of the social world* (Harker et al., 1990). The field of preschool should not act to perpetuate cultural and economic privilege that requires certain mastery of codes of interpretation (Harker et al., 1990) privy to some but not the majority. The field of preschool must value and welcome the other fields that children come from (family, community, tribes, and biographies) and be cognisant of "who" children are when they enter preschool

(being), their ongoing attachments, and relationships (belonging), and the pace in which readiness operates – for success in school (becoming). This process cannot be hurried as children require time to master school based skills especially the official language of the country (which often makes English their third language). Bearing in mind that exclusion begins early and the education system is privileged by the very language it uses (Vandenbroek et al., 2010) implies that children who enter preschool speaking English, already start from a point of privilege and advantage because from observations in the field, this is what teachers value.

Success in the primary school system requires a certain amount of *schooling capital*, (even in Sierra Leone) which can be obtained in preschool – but not for everyone. For now, entry points into preschool are mostly driven by country wide economic principles.

Neoliberalism

Whilst the aim of this research study is focused on early childhood education, to fully explore the constraints and possibilities requires a much broader socio-political lens. Economic ideologies and country wide priorities can erode principles of social justice including access, equity, and provision. Whilst it is not my intent to discuss at length the many strands of Bourdieu's political and economic critiques, I find it necessary to briefly examine neoliberalism from a critical perspective as it is a powerful structured force that is driving economic competition and determining the position of preschool education in the country.

Bourdieu was critical of established patterns of power and privilege as well as of the politics that support them (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Publicly, he could not reconcile the break-up between economic and social (Bourdieu, 1997, 2012), and he was critical of the ideological illusion of social justice shrouding the real agenda of neoliberalism. He claimed that the tracking of human misery always results from economic decisions and neoliberal policies (Bourdieu, 1997). Bourdieu is not alone in his criticisms. Mitrovic (2005) states: "this ideology

declaratively refers to human rights and liberties while, in truth, it foregrounds the interests of the mega capital forces of transnational corporations" (p. 41). This is echoed by Giroux and Giroux (2006) who claim neoliberalism has waged an "incessant attack on democracy, public goods, the welfare state, and non-commodified values" (p. 22).

In Sierra Leone, the need for rapid transformation to assist the country's development has produced dominant discourses around public private partnerships (corroborated in the interview data) permeating in a push to increase privatization. Currently there are tensions between rhetoric and reality both in policy and funding with government gradually transferring control of economic priorities to the private sector (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013). This has implications for preschool provision given that out of 644 pre-primary schools operating in the country only 7% are publically operated (World Bank, 2013). Such statistics demonstrate the economic realities and government priorities which have an effect on families who cannot afford to send their children to preschool. For Sierra Leone, a country with the highest underfive mortality rate in the world (UNICEF, 2015) where low and no tax rates attract over US $1 billion in foreign investment annually (McDermott, 2016), the poor have yet to reap any dividends from neoliberal capitalism (Baxter, 2013). Consideration of such economic priorities helps in illuminating the bigger picture of where ECDE is currently situated and where it will be positioned into the future.

Social gravity

The structural barriers to early childhood education are well evidenced in this study however, under the right circumstances we see a number of variables such as advocacy and agency that can act as facilitators, which I discuss in chapter 6. The concept of *social gravity* illuminates how child agency can be a facilitator of transformation for the individual and potentially for society at large. Taking Bourdieu's view of transformation as a process involving

both knowledge and action (Siisiainen, 2000) shifted my thinking towards the powerful forces at work in relation to structure and agency and his idea of social subjects as 'subjects in motion' (Hage, 2011). In Sierra Leone, the concept of social gravity is manifested in the way child agency is mobilized so forcefully in the day to day lived experiences of childhood, operating in spite of structural constraints such as poverty and homelessness. Children's agency contributes to society, sometimes economically but mostly socially and uniquely culturally, coming from a place of personal interest and motivation. The idea that social gravity exists in the form of other non-economic goods provides a sociological lens to examine the way children contribute to their own development and the way society can begin to view the value of other forms of capital besides economic capital that young children have to offer.

Social gravity is used by Hage (2011) to describe and expand on Bourdieu's theory of practice. This notion of practice emphasizes lived experiences, conceiving the social in terms of motion and social agents as fields of forces. Hage (2011) defines social gravity as both: how seriously one takes the social world (the gravity of a situation) and the way social forces of the world pull us into this world (*in the Newtonian sense of the word*, p .6). Hage has expanded on Bourdieu's thinking of subjects in motion, where social agent's movement follows a 'class trajectory' (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words, class positions and advancements are measured in terms of volume of capital accumulated within a field but this is not necessarily a stationary social position. According to Bourdieu, one cannot assume that people passively occupy class positions based on capital relegated to them. Hage (2011) further expands this idea by adding that agents on a trajectory are developmentally capable of acting strategically *within* their class position. The data in this thesis points to such ideas, in the way impoverished parents still find ways to educate their children in spite of limited economic capital and children act strategically to accrue their own social capital and utilize informal skills and knowledge acquired in the home

and community to be think creatively, to care for others and to contribute (economically and domestically) to family well-being as well as solve their own problems.

Bourdieu facilitated a certain perspective of *other* non-economic objects which form value and can be accumulated for investment and distribution, where the lived experience involves a different mode of economy – that of a social being. As Calhoun (2006) explains:

> He did this not to suggest an alternative view of human nature in which competition did not matter so much as an alternative view of the social world in which other kinds of 'goods' and relationships were the objects of investment and accumulation. (p. 11)

Bourdieu has been criticized for being more reproductive than transformative (Nash, 1990; Jenkins, 2002) seeing individuals as having little power to change let alone transform their lives and individuals accepting that "things happen to people" Jenkins (1992, p. 91). This fatalistic idea that social agents cannot intervene in their individual and collective destinies (Jenkins, 2002) is not consistent with the data in this study. Mills (2008) claims that Bourdieu's ideas have been misrepresented and there is transformative potential in his theoretical constructs surrounding agency. Individuals may be limited in their agency but they can still "negotiate the rules, regulations, influences and imperatives that inform all cultural practice and delimit thought and action, precisely because fields dispose them to do so" Schirato and Webb (2003, as cited in Mills, 2008, p. 82) and this was evident on a micro scale where children demonstrated the ability to strategize and negotiate in the home and in the market place therefore in their own way influencing structures through their own circumstantial choices.

In the early years of a child's development, the mechanism for transformation of passivity into creative activity is already operating embedded in habitus and manifested in child agency but it requires further opportunities to flourish. If one invests in a specific path deemed worthy of our energy (*Illuso*) according to Hage (2011) the social forces of gravity co-conspire

to pull the agent into that part of society or that particular field of interest. If the field of preschool can harvest an agreed upon *Illuso* and facilitate the inherent motivation to learn (which has already been nurtured informally) then preschool can act as an educational force of gravity, pulling all children into the educational field. For children to feel a sense of belonging however, all forms of capital must be deemed equally worthy of reproduction, meaning that the field of preschool must reflect the home and community capital as well as the schooling capital.

As Hage (2011) explains:

> Social gravity is nothing other than the forces experienced by the social subject moving along its trajectory as it is exerting the force of its own presence on other subjects, meeting up with the social force of the field. (p. 9)

Social gravity has the potential to expand our understanding of the interplay between knowledge and social action, between structure and agency and this in turn can facilitate collective transformation. Whilst social gravity is enacted in Sierra Leone, it is yet to be seen if social gravity can pull all children into the same entitlement pool (preschool education). This would require collective agreement that equitable pathways to preschool education are a right for all children. It would also require teachers to understand the role that they play in collective transformation as powerful agents in their own right in spite of their own constraints. As Mills (2008) suggests:

> It is the transformative potential of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and field that suggest possibilities for schools and teachers to improve the educational outcomes of marginalized students. In the context of schooling, 'linking pedagogy to social change, connecting critical learning to the

> experiences and histories that students bring to the classroom, and engaging the space of schooling as a site of contestation, resistance and possibility' (Giroux 2003, 6) can lead to such transformation. (p. 87)

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a closer theoretical analysis into the broader ideas behind Bourdieu's critical social theory and how his conceptual thinking tools of habitus, capital, and field, serve to illuminate principles and concepts in this study, such as access and equity, reproduction and transformation and notions of accumulated capital. All of which, act to either restrict or mobilize educational opportunities for children.

Critical social theory provides the compass for examining the nature of early childhood development and education in Sierra Leone, how it is positioned socially, politically and economically, and the road blocks that serve to reproduce inequalities. The conceptual tools of habitus capital and field and the way they are integrally connected to each other provide a complex web of insights into the deeper characteristics and experiences of the people represented in the data and society at large. The focus has been on specific theoretical ideas from Bourdieu's theory that relate to answering the research questions and these ideas are weaved into the data, literature review, methodology, analysis, and discussions throughout this study.

Today, Bourdieu's critical social theory offers a dynamic relational multi-dimensional framework as a theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1990b). It represents many perspectives, many points of view, and values found in different types of capital that rest in both economic and, non-economic forms of capital. It also posits a theoretical assumption that there is a veil of exploitation reproducing social inequality which is "masked and perpetuated" (Calhoun, 2006

p. 8) by powerful structures, making the current *battle* for accumulation in Sierra Leone, not about *thriving* but about simply *surviving*.

CHAPTER 4 Methodology

This chapter contains the philosophical framework and theoretical underpinnings of my research methodology. It also contains the approach, design, methods and tools of data collection as well as the data analysis process. Critical reflexivity in the form of praxis (theory plus action) is a dominant discourse in this chapter, as all stages in the process of design and implementation warranted change (including myself). This chapter also draws upon my own lived experiences in order to demonstrate how this has positioned me and situated my thinking and praxis. As Gray (2003) points out, "we cannot speak from nowhere, but from where we are positioned, socially, culturally and politically" (p. 33). In essence, the philosophical unravellings behind this methodology chapter is a constant theme because it has guided the decisions and choices I have made.

It is pertinent at this early point, to note the distinction I have made between method and methodology because the methodology has determined the methods and materials I have used in the research process. Methodology, involves philosophical and theoretical underpinnings that guide the research plan as a whole, i.e. the action that is taken in order 'to do' research and the justification of the given research design (Lichtman, 2010). Methodology aims at the overall approaches and perspectives employed in the process of inquiry, for example the *why where* and *how* questions and the method involves the tools materials and strategies used to collect the data, for example, interviews, field work.

Philosophy and Framework

Definitions of research methodology invoke a plethora of descriptions, understandings, and opinions based on our experiences, our disciplines, and our philosophical and theoretical frameworks. According to Creswell (2003), a research framework is an important first step in

doing any research. It provides guidance throughout the research journey, from the initial philosophical ideas behind the inquiry to the methodology, methods of data collection, literature review and analysis process. Research is therefore, as much a practical endeavour as it is a systemic and theoretical inquiry, with the aim to understand, improve, modify, influence, and even according to O'Toole and Beckett (2010) *emancipate*. Pierre Bourdieu would also add that in the process of 'doing' research, an understanding of ourselves (*habitus*) and our position in the world (*field*) is equally important as it facilitates a better understanding of the reality of others (Bourdieu, 2003).

According to Darleston-Jones (2007), it is imperative to discover one's personal orientation, thus helping to frame the research design. While ontology is the study of what we know or *think we know*, epistemology is the study of how we achieve knowledge or *how we think we achieve knowledge* and so, reflecting critically upon my own ontological beliefs about social justice principles, human rights, ethics and notions of truth, I realized that I needed to *turn back on myself* as Madison (2005) puts it, as a first step. I had to understand why I was taking a particular position, how I came to take that position and how useful that would be in understanding the research terrain I was heading into. I also had to articulate the choices I have made in both the methodology and methods and consider how I was going to 'own up' to subjectivity, yet at the same time avoid becoming self –absorbed in it. According to Madison, (2005) this can be achieved by directing our attention beyond our subjective selves and applying it in relation to others.

Pushing, pulling, and positioning

Guba (1990) claims that all paradigms (past and present) can be categorized by the way in which they respond to three basic questions. The answers to these questions demonstrate the belief system/ paradigm one adopts.

1. *Ontological*: What is it that can be known? – In other words, what is knowable?
2. *Epistemological*: What is the relation of this to the knower and to the known?
3. *Methodological*: How do we find things out? (Guba, 1990, p. 18).

These questions refer us to aspects of social reality and our understanding of how one acquires knowledge, e.g. language, myth, art, religion, science, all representative of different ways of perceiving and making sense of the world (Lizardo, 2011). According to Gray (2007), this leads to assumptions we are willing to make about the nature of reality and in this instance self-questioning becomes a pathway for critical reflexivity. For example, what is my knowable space in this research project? How am I constructing this knowable space? How do I know what I know? Why am I taking a particular stance? These questions force us to identify our position and challenge us to explore our own experience as a way of knowing. Gray (2007) claims that "what we bring to our work, how our own knowledge and experience is brought to bear on the research itself, will certainly shape it" (p. 62).

Understanding my own personal history and how it has shaped my beliefs and values, is a way of understanding *others* and by others, I mean the participants and collaborators in this study. Bourdieu's philosophy of relational – to exist is to exist socially in relation to others (Wacquant, 2004), resonates here:

> One knows the world better and better as one knows oneself better, that scientific knowledge and knowledge of oneself and of one's own social unconscious advance hand in hand and that primary experience transformed in and through

> scientific practice transforms scientific practice and conversely. (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 289)

As researchers, we are a part of the research; we have *something at stake* as Hall (1992) puts it. Recognizing that there is always an element of self-interest in what we do is important. Bourdieu adds that it is more than owning up to our own self-interest. He views scholarly work as "intervention" rather than a form of "disinterested reflection" (Webb et al., 2002, p. 13). If scholarly work is intervention, then my role cannot be one of detached observer (which creates a false sense of reality) especially in this study. For how is it possible to stand back from a process that involves such culturally embedded collaborations with mothers and teachers (of which I am both) and a personal belief system of social justice principles?

In essence, these are philosophical and biological pulls that have given me direction, not only in the methodological process of *doing* but in the advancement of *being*. In essence, I am indeed vested; I am drawn into this project and intervening in the country, in the politics, in the lives of people. Bourdieu's guiding principle of research is that research must matter to the lives of others (Calhoun, 2006); indeed, what is the point if it doesn't?

Positioning my personal history in this research

In sharing a part of my early history, I wish to demonstrate how it helped me to better understand my research topic, as everything we try to understand is filtered through personal experience and our own way of seeing the world (O'Reilly, 2009). The critical praxis of drawing on my personal history in order to understand and better interpret what I observed and experienced in Sierra Leone, is something Bourdieu also exercised in his field work in Kabylia. Bourdieu claimed: "I was constantly drawing on my experiences of the Bearn society of my childhood, both to understand the practices I was observing and to defend myself against the interpretations that I spontaneously formed of them" (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 288).

I was born and raised in the East End of London, by a single mother with four other siblings. My parents were migrants from Cyprus who separated before my third birthday and my father remained absent from my childhood and adult life. My mother had two jobs and worked long hours and I grew up adopting western values (perhaps because I was cared for by others). Despite the strong Anglo-*pull*, I still felt an unexplained connection to my cultural roots, even though we did not live in the Cypriot suburbs of London, never attended Greek celebrations seldom attended church and I could not speak Greek. However, the habitus was forming internalized social experiences and master dispositions quite unconsciously. As I grew older, I began to identify myself the way my school and community defined me: "half Greek, half English". Adolescence was turbulent as my mother struggled to contain me in the culture of her past whilst living in a country she perceived as dangerous, corrupt and in opposition to her value base. I often refer to this period as the *cultural freeze*, where life stood still for many Greeks who migrated from Cyprus in the 1950's and 60's. The perception of life back home was romanticised despite the many changes (good and bad) that occurred in their absence. My mother in effect became a woman of the diaspora *frozen in time.* Living out the mentality of the homeland and being scandalized by the progress made there, she refused to incorporate any aspect of change into her reality. Unlike my younger sister, I was spirited, challenged the status quo and had an independent disposition. My mother saw her goal of raising "good Greek girls" slipping away and with the help of her brother in Cyprus a solution was devised. At fourteen years of age, I was sent (against my wishes) to live with my uncle and extended family in Cyprus where I was to finish my schooling. That decision was to impact on the course of my life for years to follow and influenced my understanding of the world.

I was unable to finish my schooling in Cyprus; instead, the extended family convinced my mother that an arranged marriage would better shape me, than an education. I was engaged

at fifteen years of age and married at seventeen to an employee of my uncle's. This experience threw me into a cultural context that I could never have learned by reading about my heritage, listening to folktales or even visiting Cyprus as a daughter of the diaspora. It was the *lived experience* that became my education not the scholastic experience. Three months into my fifteenth birthday, I had a full time job and was expected to save for my wedding and contribute to the dowry (promised to my future in-laws). I moved from the comfort of my uncle's city home, to my fiancée's village. Expectations changed as I transitioned from being a student in the city to a working bride-to-be in a village. In the first year, I resisted attempts from my in-laws and fiancée to *domesticate me* and battled for the right to express my own identity through my clothes, music, and food preferences. I became an exotic attraction to the youth, an affront to village folk and an embarrassment to my fiancée. Bourdieu would claim that I was unaware of the contexts (discourses, values, rules etc.) that produce attitudes and practices and this limited the cultural capital I could acquire (which in turn limited the position I held in the field). However, despite the naivety of context, I acquired what Bourdieu describes as dispositions through experience where one develops a *feel for the game* (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 53). I began to understand the rules of village and home life, to a point where I could strategize in order to survive and to some extent develop a sense of belonging. I learned to carefully observe the discourses of the community and learned to speak Greek-Cypriot. I developed a strong work ethic (which was highly valued) expanded my social networks and became both a participant and observer in the day to day experiences of village life. There were many domestic challenges to overcome in addition to cultural and linguistic. The village was primitive by my standards (no kitchen or running water) and my hygiene and diet suffered. Despite efforts to be heard, my voice was small. Girls were mostly raised to be wives, mothers, and work in the fields. The people were poor, and schooling was a luxury or a priority for boys. The village was also

political and was often referred to as “little Moscow”. My father-in-law was a socialist and during the war (at seventeen years of age) I was given the task of hiding guns in potato bags and burying them in the back yard (but that is another story).

I lived in Cyprus for five years and grew accustomed to the ways of the people. In 1974 when the Turkish invasion happened, I refused to leave. I had by this stage developed a deep sense of loyalty and attachment to the people and the country and I did not understand why I could leave because I had a British passport and others had to stay. It seemed unjust and elitist but I was sent back to London (against my wishes) when my mother intervened. My husband stayed on to fulfil his National service duty and after the war, he followed me to London.

In the years that followed, my education took a back seat whilst raising a family, working and balancing conflicting cultural expectations. Living with a traditional Greek male who could not accept the freedom women experienced in England (and later Australia) resulted in what Wacquant (2004), describes as a *clash of civilizations*, whereby two sociocultural systems “locked in asymmetrical relations of symbolic power” (p. 393) became a source of conflict and disempowerment as was the case in my situation.

In retrospect, these diverse cultural, social and political experiences gave me what Hall, (1987), describes as a *fluid identity* where personal history has served to shape the person I am today. This cognitive system of social structures internalized and acquired over the course of a life time that Bourdieu (1989) terms as *habitus*, includes beliefs, values, norms, attitudes, and dispositions. My habitus unfolded within the different social, historical, and cultural contexts in which I lived. However, as Wacquant (2006) states, we are not necessary locked into these structures because habitus is “durable and transposable” (p. 7). And so, it was that these very experiences of early childhood hardships in London, and adolescent village life in Cyprus that became sources to draw upon when conducting my research in Sierra Leone. Village life in

Cyprus provided a cultural compass for living and working in one of the poorest countries of the world. I realize now, how this experience has also impacted on my epistemology, in that I now believe that knowledge is subjective and experienced both theoretically and practically. I also realize that as a researcher, positioning myself within a certain paradigm is a highly emotive as well as intellectual endeavour.

In Search of a Research Paradigm

A paradigm is not an easy term to define as it can be used in many different ways (Darlaston-Jones, 2007; Guba, 1990; Lichtman, 2010; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). According to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), "a theoretical framework is also referred to as the paradigm" (p. 194) and the one that a researcher adopts, influences the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. Guba's (1990) stance, that the very nature of its complexity and flexibility enables us to refine the term as we go along, resonates. I view the intellectual process of a paradigm choice, a decision based on my beliefs but also based on how I look at and think about my research topic and the concepts and basic assumptions that the different paradigm's represent. Paradigms therefore, influence the choices a researcher makes and the framework in which they see and do research (Creswell, 2003; O'Toole & Beckett, 2010) and understanding them, helped me decide the best fit for my research.

Different paradigms

Whilst a positivist paradigm implies that knowledge can be replicated regardless of context (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), both positivist and post-positive paradigms operate under the assumption that the social world can be studied the same way as the natural world and that the observer is objective, the results tangible and also quantifiable (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). It usually follows a systematic process of experimentation, involving the collecting and logical analysis of information (data) to test or refute a hypothesis. Critics would also add that a

positivist and post positive criterion used to evaluate ones work reproduces “a certain kind of science that silences too many voices” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 9). This was something I wanted to avoid at all costs given my personal history and gender. Pragmatic paradigms on the other hand, identify a research problem and use a mixed method approach to investigate and understand the problem. It has according to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), no philosophical loyalty to any approach and can incorporate elements of other paradigms suited to the investigation. Pragmatists therefore, tend to link the choice of approach directly to the purpose of and the nature of the research question posed (Creswell, 2003) and are usually problem solving in nature.

Positivism claims that there is an objective truth to be discovered and often use quantitative methods with hypothesis testing but I was interested in capturing and interpreting social meanings. O’Toole and Beckett (2010) group descriptive and interpretative paradigms together stating that “as soon as we attempt to describe something we are making choices and decisions about what we want to describe, therefore we are in essence, interpreting what we know and acknowledging its subjectivity” (p. 43). Qualitative methods such as ethnography and case studies often come under this paradigm and so an interpretative paradigm aligned with my aim to understand the social reality of teachers, parents, and government and non-government participants. However, my research was more than just about the lived experiences of others. My quest was also about uncovering *if why* and *how* questions asked by constructivism.

Paradigms constructivist in nature, are driven by an attempt for deeper understanding of the human experience and exploration of the nuances not often available through positivist or postpositive paradigms (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). The researcher and the participants become co-constructors of knowledge whereby, values, motivations, and expectations influence both the methodology and the findings of research. This collaborative approach to sharing the research,

appealed to my philosophical leanings in terms of inclusiveness, empathy and collaboration. It also aligned with my original intent, to capture the voices of stake holders and explore what Bourdieu describes as the effects and limits of the social conditions of possibility found in critical reflexivity (Bourdieu, 2003).

During this selection process I experienced my own paradigm shift from a constructivist to a more transformative one. The contextual reality I was experiencing in Sierra Leone and the historical readings were pulling me backwards but at the same time forward, toward change. The transformative paradigm arose as a direct response to individuals who have been marginalized throughout history and who were "finding a means to bring their voices into the world of research" (Mertens, 2010, p. 3). Researchers using this framework believe that concepts of social justice and emancipatory reform are not adequately covered in the constructivist paradigm. Critical theories including feminism, post-structuralism and political advocacy all sit under this paradigm (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). According to Mertens (2010), "the transformative paradigm is put forward as a metaphysical umbrella that covers research and evaluation and is designed to challenge the status quo" (p. 41). Despite the fact that my research project was not political, it was critical, and elements of social justice lead me to this paradigm providing a framework that most suited the research approach I was undertaking.

A Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research is definitively complex yet broad enough to cross-cut disciplines, fields and subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It incorporates an amalgam of terms, concepts and assumptions that always point to a situated activity which engages beings. Lichtman (2010) casts a practical net on the definition by stating that qualitative research "is a way of knowing that assumes that the researcher gathers, organizes and interprets information with his or her own eyes and ears, as a filter" (p. 7). Another way to define qualitative is

Creswell's (2003) definition, which suggests that a qualitative approach is an ontological and epistemological endeavour:

> One in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based on constructivist perspectives (i.e. the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or, advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e. political/issue orientated, collaborative or change orientated) or both. (p. 18)

The purpose of this research was to investigate the current state of early childhood education in Sierra Leone and gain insights into the phenomenon of early childhood care, development and education. The methodological process was intended to describe, analyse and interpret and in so doing, identify the constraints and possibilities for early childhood education in the country. In discovering cultural patterns, such as how parents, teachers and society value young children, their hopes and dreams, how child rearing practices and beliefs are embedded in the past yet impact on the present and future, were at the forefront of my initial inquiry. This kind of up-close and personal investigation in search of answers relating to understandings, meanings, beliefs and experiences were not going to be found by collecting statistics and number crunching. They could only be understood through a qualitative critically and sociologically embedded approach, where interpretation of data goes through what Thomas (1993) describes as a "de-familiarization process, in which we revise what we have seen and translate it into something new" (p. 43). Qualitative research therefore, has the flexibility to do just that because it is heterogeneous in nature, incorporating a variety of philosophies, theories, tools and methods and relies on experience and knowledge of the researcher for analysis (Freeman, DeMarrais, Roulston, & Pierre, 2007).

Using a qualitative approach provides opportunities for rich descriptions, analysis and interpretation, and as Creswell (2003) states, a qualitative approach is needed when "the topic

is new, or the topic has never been addressed with a certain sample or group of people" (p. 22). This was the case in my study where questions about early childhood education had not been solicited in such a public way before and there was a sense of *newness* about it. The data I wanted to capture involved listening, thinking, letting people talk and making meaning from what I heard and saw (Lichtman, 2010). My exploratory pilot study which included field observations and focus groups provided valuable socio-historical and cultural perspectives that I was able to learn from, in preparation for the next phase of the research project.

The Exploratory Pilot Study

Qualitative research can be exploratory and is useful when the researcher has not confirmed the important variables to examine (Heese-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Again, this was the case for me. I naively went into the field to explore what people thought about early childhood education and began by arranging two focus groups of 10 early childhood student teachers at the teacher training college. I selected the participants by invitation and chose the place, day and times. The participants had been my students the previous semester and I knew them to be confident and outspoken. Themes emerged from the focus groups, such as the rights of teachers, disempowerment, inequality, issues of poverty, government lapses and corruption. I then concentrated on parent focus groups. The initial design was to have up to 10 parents for two focus groups. However on both occasions, whole villages turned up on the designated days to participate. It was a logistical nightmare. Over 80 people arrived to sign the consent forms. A student teacher at the college was helping me to facilitate the sessions, also acting as an interpreter. She explained the consent forms to everyone and began handing them out. I knew we would not have enough copies for all of them but I was unsure what to do. Most of the community members were illiterate and could not sign their name so she used ink from my felt pen to make an imprint on their finger, which they eagerly used to sign their consent form.

Everyone wanted and expected to be involved and not wanting to disappoint my helper who had arranged the focus groups or discourage the enthusiasm of the parents who wanted eagerly to share their views on early childhood development and learning, I decided to change tactics. I went ahead with the sessions more as community forums than focus groups and adapted the questions and sequence as we went along. All the children had been waiting eagerly for this event and I was greeted warmly upon arrival. I decided before we got started to dedicate some time to the children. My tape recorder proved useful here as I had nursery rhymes and songs recorded. I danced and sang with the children for about ten minutes. The parents observed supportively from a distance by cheering and clapping along. We then shared the refreshments I had taken before we began. The focus groups/public forums involved parents, grandparents and tribal leaders. They all spoke openly about their desire for early childhood programs, shared their hopes for their children's future and at the same time lamented the lack of access to preschool and the expense of sending children to primary school (school supplies, uniforms and levies).

Lessons learned from exploratory pilot study

Later as I critically reflected on my field notes through the process of journal writing, I was challenged by my own discoveries and presumptions not just the data but of myself. I realized the power and position I held as a former lecturer which could have distorted opinions and responses from the teacher focus groups. This was an important consideration for the future research project. My lack of theoretical reading and pre-planning before going out in the field (despite my excellent organizational skills) had left me feeling inadequate confused about how to manage the data once collected. Despite feelings of inadequacy, I pushed forward and evaluated how this experience was going to help in refining the procedures for the future research project. This exploratory pilot study helped in the following ways:

- It provided sociocultural in-sights into rural and city life as well as different participant perspectives and expectations about the research project itself.
- Helped identify the need for ready access to trilingual interpreters (covering Temne, Mendez and Krio dialects).
- I recognized the power I had to steer answers and the danger of directing and leading participants into answers that I wanted.
- It highlighted the need for key community informants as opposed to my initial intent of using the community snowball technique.

This exploratory study helped clarify and define my research topic, extended my own knowledge and understanding of exploratory research and enabled me to adapt my research design. I changed the method moving from focus groups to in-depth interviews as I questioned the validity of what I had *"collected and experienced"* and whether it could be validated in some way. My supervisor supported this decision. Stebbins (2001, p. 26) states that "exploration validity is more easily resolved, for example, by using different methods to examine the same group or activity (known as triangulation)". Although I could not use this data for triangulation my developing knowledge of critical reflexivity helped me put other rigorous strategies in place for this research study.

On the advice of the academic board, I used the key informant technique to identify four community members who could work more consistently with me throughout this project (I have explained who they were further on in this chapter). They in essence became professional collaborators and I was able to seek their advice on many culturally appropriate matters, delegate the choice of participants to shortlist and collaborate on the final participant list. They also guided me in unknown territory (physically and culturally) providing protocol and boundary knowledge for entry into certain fields and provided clarification and translation of transcripts.

In addition, before I began this study I went back to my exploratory transcripts to locate any recurrent themes from both parents and teachers and cross checked if these themes were still burning issues. I was unsure how much (if at all) the social and political landscape had changed after my first 9 month stay but having the freedom to adapt, modify and vary my questions, methods and strategies by going backwards proved to be a redeeming experience.

An Ethnographic Method

My research method for this study is ethnography and like Bourdieu, I felt that I was teaching myself about how to be a social scientist and especially a field worker (Bourdieu, 2012). Ethnographic research is complicated by the nature of the data, the research process and the conventions in the presentation of the findings and research traditions (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

The historical backdrop of ethnography can be traced back to ancient Greece (3rd century BC) when Herodotus travelled from one culture to another to document the traditions, cultural and socio-political practices in Persia (Clair, 2003). Today's ethnography has a western history and arose as a form of knowledge about distant cultures (typically non-western ones) which were "impenetrable to analysis, consisting only of fleeting contact or brief conversations" (Gubo, 2008, p. 3). The studies were mainly of European colonizer accounts of other people's lives (Taylor, 2002) from a personal if not geographic distance. Ethnography today deals with the complexities and ambiguities of people meanings and ways of knowing and doing and has been reinterpreted and decontextualised in order to deal with particular circumstances (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). It operates in a more up-close and personal way, providing an 'inside view' which produces situated knowledge rather than universals which cannot be generalized with the aim to interpret what people say or do (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Bourdieu understood ethnography to mean "everything that is intuitively understood,

selfevident, and unspoken, and which is difficult to objectify" (Lizardo, 2011, p. 26). Today's ethnography has taken on different shapes and forms and most recently life stories, analysis of letters, action research, photographs and even a few days in observation are all regarded as ethnography (Thomas, 1993; Taylor, 2002).

The design of my method focused on exploring the nature of a particular social phenomenon and I knew I would be working with unstructured data and investigating small indepth numbers. I also knew this would take time to *do*. During the period I spent in Sierra Leone

(three years in total) I became embedded in the everyday life of the local community. I received a small living allowance but no salary and shopped where locals shopped and ate what locals ate, experiencing the same electrical and technological challenges as most people. In essence, I could not help become a part of daily life with all its struggles and contradictions (but from an undeniable position of privilege). This period of just *being*, gave me time and space to reflect, think about my research design, collaborate with others and corroborate opinions, observations and anecdotes, adding to the rigour and reflexivity of the design method.

A critical slant

Critical ethnography is similar to conventional ethnography in that it attempts to illicit meanings and grasp participant points of view but it also has a political purpose and has been described as a form of what Thomas (1993) describes as *intellectual rebellion* (p. 3). Madison, (2005) adds that critical ethnography is the representation and analysis of social life for the political purpose of overcoming social oppression by "bringing together underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (p. 5). From an ontological point of view "critical ethnography begins with the premise that the structure and content of culture make life unnecessarily more nasty, brutish, and short for some people" (Thomas, 1993, p. 33). In essence critical ethnography

takes an explicitly political and ideological stance toward research which goes beyond simply understanding and explaining. It attempts to link the detailed analysis of ethnography to wider social structures and systems of power relationships (Harvey, 1990). What becomes important is that the probing of the subjects' meanings is not the end of the story. The subjects operate within a socio-historical landscape and are not independent of structural factors therefore meanings may appear to be group-centred but are mediated by structural concerns such as oppressions or power (Harvey, 1990). Critical ethnography has to stay alert to these structural elements and be mindful of the forces of socialization that alter one's place in the social structure.

My research topic was addressing one of many critical social structures, that of schooling. As I stated in chapter 1 early childhood education in Sierra Leone, is still a voice crying out in the wilderness. On paper (government policy) education is a basic human right and should be accessible to all children; however, this is not the case. Although I could see my subjectivity in terms of my own history unfolding here, the social structures inherent in this research were also influencing my decision making. As Thomas (1993) points out "it's not so much what we choose to study but 'how' we zoom aspects of the topic that distinguishes critical from non-critical research" (p. 37).

Owning up to the difficulties in balancing objectivity with subjectivity especially when *doing* ethnography became a constant, and I realized that as Taylor (2002) posits, I was "already entangled" (p. 4). Bourdieu's concurrent and parallel field studies in Algeria and France demonstrated that one can conduct *insider* ethnography but at the same time acknowledge the social embeddedness and split subjectivity of the inquirer without reducing ethnography to simple story telling or forsaking social theory with poetry (Wacquant, 2004). In addition recognizing as Duranti (1992) explains:

> We are *in* but not *of* the ethnography. Total empathy is professionally and practically impossible. It is precisely the constant reflecting, taking notes, asking questions, completing questionnaires, taking photographs, recording and then transcribing, translating and interpreting imposed upon us by our profession that prevent us from getting completely 'inside' the culture which we want to study. (Duranti,1992 as cited in Gubo, 2008, p. 9)

I was finding the critical slant of ethnographic research far reaching and powerful as it spread across my personal, theoretical and methodological epistemology and needed to be managed.

Managing the power in the field

I entered a country that was in a post war recovery state with a colonial past and I stayed for months at a time both before and after the Ebola crisis. As a white woman of privilege and to some degree educational status, this placed me (by default) in a position of power. In any position where one holds power there is the danger of exploitation and at best the possibility of unequal relationships and so researchers by the nature of their position are always in a position of power. They decide what to research, who to involve and in what capacity. Taylor (2002) claims that the relationship between researcher and researched is seldom one of equals and issues of power are prevalent in ethnographic research where people are *"positioned as other"* (p. 3). I had the added complexities of my professional position as a lecturer at the teacher training college to consider.

The method I chose to use was also steeped in power. Gubo (2008) claims that "despite its good intentions (to gain deeper understanding) ethnography is still a colonial method that must be de-colonialized" (p. 3). Indeed this attitude of colonial power was the catalyst for changes to anthropological studies involving ethnographic research in the past (Harker et al., 1990). The notion of power in the interview situation for example is relevant in this context for

this was not simply a data collection process but a social and political act. As a white lecturer in a local college, calling for voluntary participants and seeking answers to probing questions, it could be seen as a directive and not a voluntary call. Certain contrived answers could be generated as 'what is expected' from the participants. In Sierra Leone, westerners are generally perceived to be in a position of economic power, holding social, symbolic and economic capital. Therefore, the desire to volunteer as a participant could be perceived as a direct link to financial reward by the participants and social and professional opportunities. I needed to make room within the field of this research, to allow participants and informants entry but remain vigilant in my desire to manage metaphorical spaces that could contaminate the data. My work as a volunteer in the community placed me in a respectable position within the field but it was my position as a researcher, college lecturer, and my education and nationality that gave me symbolic capital. This combination warranted careful scrutiny of *self*.

It occurred to me that I needed a critical and reflexive lens to re-think the various conditions under which I was conducting ethnographic research. I needed to adopt a *critical intent* but what exactly did that involve? I agree with Bourdieu's argument that the researcher must resist notions of the detached observer, as he argues that this creates a false sense of reality. Refusing the notion of objectivity in his theory of practice, Bourdieu acknowledged that the observer is not a neutral presence but rather a *social actor* in his (her) own right (Wolfreys, 2000). How could I develop collaboration with others in my research and ensure that I did not see what I wanted to see and hear what I wanted to hear to serve my own agenda? Was my advocacy more about providing a voice for the participants or "raising the consciousness – or advancing an agenda for change" (Creswell, 2003, p. 10) and was that really my job as a researcher? According to Madison (2005) the inquisitive researcher will:

> Use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make accessible –to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defence of – the voices and experiences of subjects who stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach. (p. 5)

I had until then, not considered the interviews as an emancipatory tool. But the voices I wanted to capture spoke from a place that has until recently been silent and I did not want to contaminate these voices with leading questions or encourage scripted answers. I knew that my research inquiry was much more than simply descriptive, and I also knew that there was more at stake here. Even so, I felt it was more than simply a matter of capturing the *silent* voices. Pivotal to this method was the cognitive act of observation and the rigorous accountability that emerges from metacognitive thought. Guba (2008), claims that the researcher must do more than listen, ask questions and read relevant documents. For "what most distinguishes ethnography from other methodologies is the role of 'protagonist' assigned to observation" (p. 5). Bourdieu also influenced some of my own methodological tools especially the use of a research journal, inspiring me to retain my original thoughts and feelings in the field, as valuable raw data for critical reflexivity.

Bracketing

My case study involved an in-depth exploration from different participants providing different perspectives. I needed to understand the explicit and implied in both conversations and transcripts and be able to suspend my own experiences in Sierra Leone in order to look at the data as much as possible from a "fresh perspective" (Creswell, 2013, p. 59). This led me to Moustaka's (1994) psychological phenomenology which is best suited to the researcher whose intention is to understand several common or shared experiences of a phenomenon.

Hegel's concept of *Epoche,* an ancient Greek philosophical word describing the suspension of judgement, requires the "elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge

above every possible doubt" (Moustaka, 1994, p. 26). I was in search of a way to increase the rigour of this research project and at the same time protect myself from what Tufford and Newman (2010) refer to as "emotionally challenging materials" which can "skew the results and interpretations" (p. 81). I was being emotionally challenged by the suffering I was witnessing and I wanted what Moustaka (1994) describes as a new way of looking at things:

> In the *Epoche*, the everyday understandings, judgements and knowings set aside, and phenomena are revisited freshly, naively, in a wide open sense from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego. (p. 33)

Epoche, is commonly referred to as *Bracketing* due to its phenomenological roots, however, I was unsure how I could set aside the assumptions I held about poverty and inequality in Africa. Chan, Fung and Chien, (2013) suggest that once the researcher has identified bias, he/she can minimize the influence by bracketing. They recommend a reflexive diary to write down thoughts and feelings and perceptions claiming "it allows us as researchers to re-examine our positions when issues are raised that might affect the research process" (p. 3). Tufford and Newman (2010) suggest a series of self-reflective questions to answer in the process of writing a reflexive journal. By applying the strategies suggested, I realized that I was at times asking leading questions in my eagerness to hear about the challenges participants were experiencing. My assumption was that all participants were experiencing life challenges, but my first interview participant had not mentioned challenges at all. I then decided to refrain from asking questions related to structural and personal constraints unless the participant led me to that question through the narrative. This self-reflective method of bracketing enabled me to apply a multi-layered process to my methods giving me access to various levels of consciousness (Moustaka, 1994; Tufford & Newman 2010). I was able to recognize where my pre-existing bias values and

assumptions were positioned and to set aside (but not abandon them) in order to attend to the accounts I was privileged to hear with a more open and receptive mindset.

In an attempt to confront the politics of representation and address the power and status that I held as a researcher, I also designed the working model below (see Figure 4.1) as a guiding self-referencing tool. As O'Reily (2009) points out, "awareness of the potential for exploitation and the role of representation is a first step in trying to avoid it" (p. 59). I needed to consider that no matter how heroic my motives were, I had to question who I was really serving in doing this research and how much I would be influencing *the* outcomes.

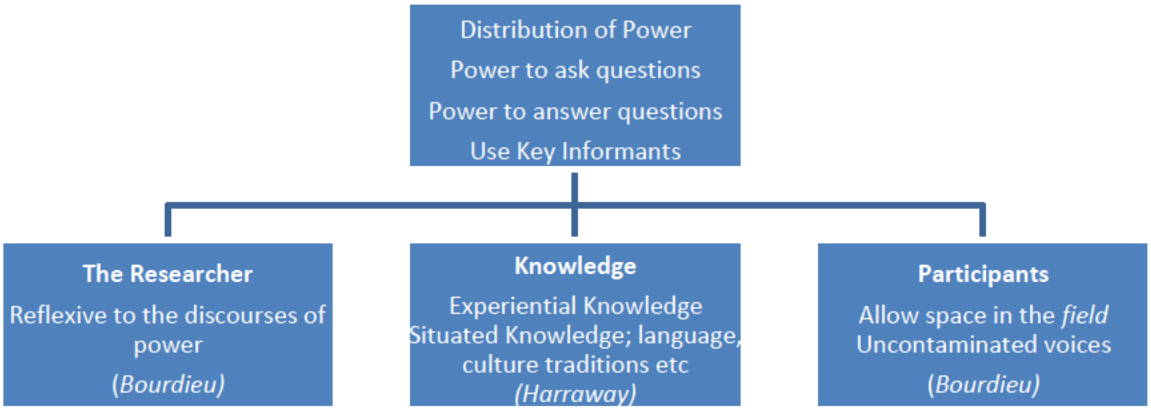

Figure 4.1. Working model of power and representation. Distribution of power, model for praxis:

Weaving the self and others.

The Case Study

Definitions of case study are based on different paradigms approaches and ideas (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Simmons, 2009; Yin, 2009). Broadly speaking, case study is the process of conducting systematic critical inquiry into a phenomenon of choice and generating understanding to contribute to cumulative public knowledge of the topic. Case studies can be quantitative, qualitative or mixed method and they can be descriptive, exploratory or explanatory. The choice for the researcher, as Dobson (1999) suggests rests on the type of theoretical framework which can require "explanation rather than solely description" (p. 260) as was the case with mine.

While sharing methods in common with classic ethnography such as participant observation and interviewing, critical ethnographic case studies focus on a *particular* project or program aspiring to understand the case in its socio-cultural context and with concepts of culture in mind. Yin's (2009) definition of case study as an "empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18) resonated. Simmons (2009) adds purpose and research focus in her definition stating:

> Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real life' context. It is research-based, inclusive of different methods and is evidence-led. The primary purpose is to generate in-depth understanding of a specific topic (as in a thesis), programme, policy, institution or system to generate knowledge and/or inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action. (p. 21)

In the designing on an ethnographic case study, there are many factors to consider and case studies as noted have their own definition, research design and challenges. Designing a

case study is a logical sequence that connects the data to the research question/s and ultimately to the analysis and conclusion (Yin, 2009). However, because it is (or should be) flexible it has to be adapted to the regular flow of decisions and unexpected events (Gubo, 2008) and this was put to the test throughout this study.

Steps in design

I have discussed the research purpose and research questions in chapter 1; however, I will draw on this information to describe the design of the case study undertaken. Every type of empirical research has an implicit, if not explicit, research design and requires careful consideration and planning. My design was based on suggestions taken from Yin (2009) which helped formulate a road map as well as a checklist to ensure I had covered what was needed to proceed with the research plan. My purpose was to describe, analyse, interpret and understand the essence of lived experiences of people engaged with early childhood education in some way, *within* a real-world context in natural settings. The criterion that connected all the participants was their interest in early childhood education, pedagogy, and/or practice.

Case studies can be individual and organizational and involve the specific and detailed study of a case or cases. I was unsure if I could capture all the questions in one individual case study or have several case studies (one for each participant group). As a researcher, one may determine whether to use study cases which are typical in some way or cases which are considered unique or exemplary. Lichtman (2010, pp. 81–82) proposes three types of case studies:

1. The Typical – in order to draw generalizations
2. Exemplary – the best or outstanding
3. Unique, unusual or special – something that is out of the ordinary

In the context of Sierra Leone, this study is unique in that early childhood education is in its infancy where many children do not experience any form of preschool education and research has not been carried out specifically in relation to early childhood education. I was attempting to describe and interpret a new and out of the ordinary phenomenon. One of the designs Yin (2012) posits is a single case study where the case is the main unit of analysis. The case study itself is holistic but has sub-units embedded within the overall design *which form multiple units of analysis* (p. 6). Whilst this design is more in line with descriptive case studies my intent was to go beyond description. I felt this design could bring together the participants, field notes and observations into one model without compromising the different perspective of participants from each group. So, this became a *unique 'single case study'* titled: Early Childhood Development and Education in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities.

Research Questions

Yin (2009) claims that "defining the research questions are probably the most important step to be taken in a research study" (p. 10) and that the research questions must have:

1. Substance – e.g. what is my study about?
2. Form – e.g. who, what, where, why, how, questions?

Jung (2013) in designing his own ethnographic case study continued revising his questions until the end of his study claiming this is necessary when conducting complex qualitative research: "because you can never clearly know ahead of time what your findings will be like and what your final written report will be like" (Jung, 2013, p. 17).

My research topic was broad and had many tangents and variables and there was a danger that I would get side tracked or focus more on the issues that interested me personally (or even politically). In addition, the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not always clearly evident and case studies are not linear but iterative requiring a review and re-

examination of former decisions (Yin, 2009). The need to repeatedly refer back to the purpose of the study and the questions in order to focus attention on where to look for evidence that will give answers, lead me backwards and forwards as I evaluated the relevance of subsequent questions in light of new knowledge unfolding. I settled on three research questions that are outlined in chapter 1 and summarized here.

1. What is the current nature of ECDE?
2. What are the barriers to and facilitators of early childhood education?
3. What role do children play in the country's national development?

The Research Process

Denzin and Lincoln (2000), identify a five phase approach to the research process where the biographically situated researcher claims a spot (in at least 4 of the phases). Below is a summary of each phase as set out by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, pp. 12–15), which also guided my design process.

Phase 1 – highlights the complexities of applying qualitative research into a socially situated context that the researcher enters. In this context the researcher has to confront ethics and the politics of research; it is naïve to assume value-free inquiry.

Phase 2 – the skills, assumptions, and practices employed as the researcher moves from chosen paradigm to the empirical world by putting the paradigm into motion.

Phase 3 – the research design begins with a clear focus on the research question/s and purpose of study. A flexible set of guidelines that connects the theoretical paradigm to a strategy of inquiry, and then to the collection of empirical materials.

Phase 4 – researchers have several methods for collecting empirical materials, interviews, direct observations and personal experiences. Large amounts of qualitative materials

require ways to manage and interpret documents e.g. data management, computer assisted models for analysis etc.

Phase 5 – a creative and interpretative as well complex process of writing up findings. Constructed creatively firstly as field text (field notes and documents from the field) where the writer as interpreter then moves from field text to a research text (notes and interpretations based on field text). This is then recreated as a working interpretative document incorporating the writer's initial attempts to make sense of what they have learned. The result is a critical public text.

Adaptation of the five-phase model

I adapted the original model by Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 12) to accommodate the decisions I made in relation to my own research process, the chosen design and the revolving reflexivity (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Adaptation of the Five-Phase Approach

Phase 1 The researcher as a culturally competent yet naïve subject – the need for *critical reflexivity*	Conceptions of self and others. Human to human relations Positionality. Collective meanings	History, traditions perceptions and values. Diversity, conflict, and power	The ethics and politics of entry into the research field
Phase 2 In search of theoretical paradigms and philosophical perspectives	Exploration of various paradigms and theories. Positivist and post positive, Interpretivist and constructivism	Transformative Paradigm as a framework for praxis. Qualitative research	Critical social theory Critical ethnography Critical reflexivity
Phase 3 Research questions Research purpose Strategies of inquiry	Approach and Design Connect: theory – praxis Critical ethnography Interview questions	Case Study Participant collaboration Field Observations Diary entries	Critical reflexivity Representation Legitimation
Phase 4 Methods of collection and analysis of data *Critical reflexivity*	Open-ended emerging data Interviewing Observing Personal experiences	incorporating the pilot project: – focus groups – field notes – journal entries	Coding and interpreting Textual analysis Computer and manually assisted analysis/categorizations
Phase 5 The art practices and politics of interpretation and evaluation *Critical Reflexivity*	Criteria for judging adequacy Practices and politics of interpretation Ethical considerations	Policy analysis Cultural and historical analysis Bourdieu's theoretical concepts *habitus, capital, field.*	Writing field notes Writing as interpretation Result: a critical public text

Note: A personal methodological road map adapted from Denzin & Lincoln (2000, p. 12).

Selecting the Participants

Local key informants acted as consultants throughout the field work, proving invaluable support on a range of issues including access to participants for interviews, access to premises, equity issues and logistics. They also provided socio-cultural advice and contextual background, and were consulted during the transcript phase and collaborated in the debriefing discussions after interviews. All three key informants were local Sierra Leoneans who lived and worked in the local community. Thomas (1993) reminds us of the importance of choosing the right people:

> Where and from whom we obtain data ultimately provides the meanings that shape the analysis. The task is to identify the best sources that bear most directly on the topic. It is crucial to identify the types of informants who are most likely to possess an 'insider's knowledge' of the research domain. (p. 37)

The three key informants were:

1. A proprietor of two private early childhood/primary schools. One in the provinces and one in the city of Freetown.
2. A retired registrar of a tertiary institution who had an administrative and educational background with strong local school and professional networks
3. A local social /welfare representative working for a faith based organization, which had political and government contacts in the community.

The short list for participants to be interviewed was conducted by local key informants.

Criteria for recruitment of participants

The criteria for recruiting participants was kept as inclusive as possible in that volunteers were sought through information sessions, flyers and newsletters and individual expressions of interest via invitations. All participants were short listed by the key informants and a meeting was held to discuss and agree on the final selection of participants. Participants were from urban and rural areas of Sierra Leone, most especially the capital city Freetown and the western area rural district of Waterloo, (which is one of the most ethnically diverse districts of Sierra Leone). The final representative group of participants is provided in Table 4.2.

Criteria included:

- Open to all ages and no gender restrictions.
- Parents with a child/ren under 10 years of age.
- Teachers working or having worked in kindergarten or lower primary school.
- A cross section of participants representing different tribal backgrounds.
- Representatives from urban and rural groups to ensure a broader and less homogenous grouping of participants.

Table 4.2

Participant overview: Participant Information Numbers and Methods Used

Participants	Method	Criteria	District	Number
Parents of young children	Unstructured Interviews	Parents of young children who may or may not be attending nursery or early childhood setting or lower primary school. Parents who are/have been actively involved in their child's early childhood education or demonstrated an interest in the value of early education. .	Western Rural (Waterloo) Western Urban (Freetown)	Two
Teachers of young children	Unstructured Interviews	Teachers currently working in private/public sector teaching early childhood/lower primary school. The teachers qualified or unqualified must have experience teaching.	Western Rural (Waterloo) Western Urban (Freetown)	Two
Non-Government or Faith Based Organizations (NGO)	Unstructured Interviews	Individuals representing their organization directly engaged in an early childhood care/education program in Sierra Leone; establishing ECE program or initiatives, or partnering with a local organization that is providing ECDE and care.	Western Rural	One
Government Local Council Ministerial	Semi-structured Interviews	Interviews will be conducted with two local or state government members involved in policy decision making relating to education (primary school) and care programs for early childhood.	Western Urban	One

In addition to the participants who were interviewed, two local informal participants emerged from my own networking: a locally based NGO and a rural community leader. Informal discussions took place by chance and valuable raw data was collected. Both informal interviews, they were not included in the six interviews. There were no recordings; however, notes from the meetings were referenced as anecdotal data taken from field.

Interviews

The two main methods of data collection chosen were interviews and observational field notes in the form of jottings, anecdotes and journal entries. I will address them consecutively.

Interviews have a distinct advantage in that they enable the researcher to establish rapport with participants and create a more collaborative approach to gain deeper in-sights. Face to face interviews allowed me to clarify ambiguous answers and if necessary go back and seek follow-up information. Quinn (2002) states that "interviews begin with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit" (p. 341), and this was also my assumption. According to Quinn (2002) in-depth interviewing has four major purposes.

1. To document the interviewee's perspective on the topic.
2. The active engagement and learning it promotes for both interviewer and interviewee in identifying and analysing issues.
3. The inherent flexibility it offers to change direction to pursue emergent issues, to probe a topic or deepen a response, and to engage in dialogue with participants.
4. The potential for uncovering and representing unobserved feeling and events that cannot be observed.

Formulating interview questions

Interview protocols were designed as well as a background information questionnaire that included personal information (see appendices). The questionnaire was conducted face to face to enable participants to ask the researcher questions. Fact Sheet Information was designed for the four participant groups (parents, teachers, and government and non-government agencies) and filed under group categories. Semi-structured interview questions were designed

for parents and teachers allowing more open-ended discussions to unfold. For the NGO and government participants some structured interview questions were included as I was sourcing more detailed information regarding policy issues.

The interview questions varied and some were generic involving perceptions of early childhood development and education, notions of formal, non-formal education and perceptions of education as part of nation building. Some questions were contextual; for example, for parents, questions focused on the hopes and dreams for their young children. For teachers, questions focused on pedagogy, practice and access issues. The Government and NGO questions related to new initiatives, government policies and existing ECDE programs. Interviews were conducted in English, lasting 50 – 60 minutes. There was one follow up interview involving a parent who was unable to express herself fully in English. An interpreter (and later translator) was used for the second interview. All six interviews were taped and transcribed.

How I managed the interviews

After each interview I recorded in my journal self-reflective notes on my interview style, questioning techniques and interjected responses to ensure that I was not prompting, hurrying the participants for a response or instigating with predetermined answers. I went back to the journal entries before every interview as a cross check to ensure power relations were not determining responses.

I taped all recordings (with permission) and they were transferred into MP3 files and transcribed verbatim over a period of 6 months. Each transcript was cross-checked by one of the key informants and verified for accuracy in translation and for any cultural idiosyncrasies. Jottings were added accordingly beside phrases, words or sentences on the transcripts. During the recorded interviews notes were also taken as a back-up due to power restrictions and possible

technical problems. They were later summarized and attached to each transcript. Direct transcript quotes used in both data presentation and discussion chapters were coded in a way that incorporated relevant details (initial of name, title, and district and line number).

1. Parent from Freetown: Juriatu/Parent/Freetown/ Line number/s Code: (JPF/L…)
2. Parent from Waterloo: Peter/Parent/Waterloo/ Line number/s Code: (PPW/L...)
3. Teacher from Freetown: Clara Teacher/Freetown/Line number/s Code (CTF/L...)
4. Teacher from Waterloo: Fatmata/Teacher/Waterloo/Line number/s Code (FTW/L...)
5. Government Representative: Dr D/Line number/s Code (DGOV/L…)
6. NGO Representative: Francis/NGO/Line number/s Code (FNGO/L…)

Observations in the Field

Direct observations in a field set the focus on human actions, physical environments, and according to Yin, (2009) provide the opportunity to observe distinctive features when conducting case studies. Bourdieu resisted notions of the detached observer arguing that it creates a false sense of reality e.g. something static subjective to norms and rules rather than something vague and fluid. He strived to develop a *reflective sociology* (Wolfreys, 2000) which took a step forward into the process of observation and owned up to the fact that an observer was not a neutral presence. There is certainly something honourable about situations where others have given you permission to get close-up to their experiences and I was indeed privileged to not only see, but to touch, hear smell and even taste experiences in the field.

Observations in the field (hand written as journal entries and/or typed as anecdotal notes) included special events labelled as such in the field notes. One such event was the annual "Day of the African Child" national celebration. I was invited to attend the primary school function and the theme was: *Eliminating harmful practices*. This event helped me in understanding the wider educational priorities, attitudes and values that schools placed on such a historical event

that commemorates the 1976 uprising in Soweto, when 10,000 school children in South Africa marched against apartheid –inspired education which resulted in the public shooting and killing of unarmed young protesters by police officials. Such an event was highly regarded by schools and parents across the country, lasting up to 3 hours. Having the opportunity to observe reactions, take photographs and notes as well as document the words of guest speakers and students (verbatim) became a rich source of observational data for understanding the important cultural and traditional practices valued by parents and schools.

Journal Entries

Reflective journal writing was a habit I had formed from my youth and I naively thought I could continue the same method in the same way, for this research project. I soon realized that this technique was in danger of becoming an indulgent biographical, albeit self-reflecting process. As the researcher, I was the instrument and my journal was the mouthpiece. But it needed to capture descriptions, explanations, reflections and the multiple perspectives of others in such a way that, as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) state, "did not squeeze the novelty and richness out of the experience" (p. 593) yet would still be subject to scrutiny and rigour. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) point out:

> There is a constant interplay between the personal and emotional on the one hand and the intellectual on the other. Private responses should be transformed by reflection and analysis, into potential public knowledge. The field work journal is the vehicle for this kind of transformation. (p. 151)

Realizing that my private observational notes could well become public text, I briefly considered finding a different technique for triangulation. After reading Bourdieu's "Picturing Algeria" (2012) however I reconsidered. As an ethnographic researcher in Algeria, Bourdieu was faced with overwhelming oppressive realities and kept *separate chaotic scraps* which

complicated his data collection. Bourdieu (2012) confessed that "one of the great mistakes I made was not to keep a diary" (p. 22). I therefore decided to keep the journal but transform it into something useful and valid. I adopted the following criteria for entering field notes into my journal:

- Writing the observational evidence along with a careful note about who the observation represented and the date.
- Recording what surprised or shocked me or assumptions in a different colour pen.
- Recorded speech and action in relation to who was present, where, what time and what circumstances and context.
- Identifying the 'voice' being represented (either participant from the interviews or member of the general community or colleague etc.).
- Trying to be as neutral and factual as possible OR own up to my subjectivity.
- Reading back and letting the data 'speak to me' by not imposing my own preferred meaning or prejudging.
- Recording text and noting different dimensions or perspectives of the same phenomenon.

Reflexivity as a validating process

Critical reflexivity is of value and relevance to thesis writing but also specifically to the process of methodology and method itself as Thomas (1993) states:

> As social activity, critical thinking implies a call to action that may range from modest rethinking of comfortable thoughts to more direct engagement that includes political activism. As ideology, critical thinking provides a shared body of principles about the relationship among knowledge, its consequences, and scholars' obligations to society. (p. 17)

Critical reflexivity cannot (and should not be) contained to a mere section of the research process or the writing of the end product. Bourdieu (2003) advised researchers to experiment using a *reflective devise* to carry out their own ethnographic research. He had what Wacquant, (2006) claims as an "obsessive insistence on reflexivity*"* (p. 12). Bourdieu's methodological approach to reflexivity demands a relentless self-questioning of method itself and a serious attempt to convey how subjectivity may be affecting interpretation and bias (Wacquant, 2006). I recognized that I was bringing to this research project my own notions of what Harraway (1988) describes as *standpoint epistemology* – in other words, a space where one speaks from a particular vantage point, as opposed to speaking from *nowhere* (Harraway, 1988). I was aware that I was speaking from an emancipatory standpoint but at the same time, yet I had to be critical in how I was going to manage this subjectivity. I revisited elements of my methodology to reassure myself that I was heading in the right direction. I was undertaking an ethnographic case study because my research topic needed to cover several variables and not just isolated ones, and was reliant on multiple sources of evidence drawn from natural surroundings. The context was a major part of the study so cultural patterns and perspectives of participants was very important but so was perspective. I was interested in how attitudes and views about education and young children had changed and what was preventing the progress in formalizing early childhood education. Even at the early juncture of this research project, I knew my ethnographic case study may move me in different directions and uncover variables of social life I was unprepared and unaware of and I anticipated that this project would be a significant milestone both for myself and the study.

Triangulation

The cyclical nature of data collection and the analysis process itself resulted in one type of data providing new information which in turn stimulated a further examination to elicit confirmation. I compared topics that emerged from observations, field notes/jornal entries with the transcript interviews seeking validity (where possible) and looking for similar ideas that were replicated. Asking multiple questions of myself in relation to the data results to see if I had acurately understood each situation and viewpoint. I compared the themes emerging from the interviews looking for patterns, consistencies and accuracy in my interpretations. Where this was not possible, I would go back review and revisit participants for clarifications and explanations always with the aim of uncovering deeper meaning from the data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis according to Simmons (2009) involves procedures like coding, categorizing, concept mapping, and theme generation in order to organize and make sense of the data and in order to produce themes that assist in the understanding of a case study. The analysis process involved examining meaningful and symbolic content from the interview transcripts, field observations and journal entries. The intent was to interpret and analyse the content, identify emerging themes that captured commonalities and then use Bourdieu's theoretical tools of field capital and habitus, for deeper theoretical analysis. Once a theme was identified it was interpreted in terms of its significance to the research questions and the conclusions that could be drawn. This sounds straight forward but as Ritchie and Lewis (2003) highlight, it is often "voluminous, messy and unwieldy" (p. 202). The process required finding a balance between being of the data (having so many personal lived experiences in Sierra Leone) and setting aside my own experiences, assumptions and prior knowledge (bracketing) in order to uncover pertinent and significant themes.

Using the interview transcripts, I began the initial coding of data by highlighting sections of text that described something familiar or new. I based my ideas of coding categories on the data that unfolded before me and kept asking myself *"what does she mean here…?"* and *"what are they saying about…?"* As I went backwards and forwards in attempting to answer my own questions, I found the pendulum swing confronting. I realized I was in danger of drawing conclusions too soon and stopped to enter and reflect on my journal entries and then took some time for further understanding of inductive and deductive coding techniques.

> Journal entry, March 2015
> *What am I looking for? The answer is I'm looking for underlying patterns. But I have to acknowledge my preconceptions, my readiness to simply jump in with my own conclusions. I need to set this aside (at this stage of the analysis). It is obvious that I have been looking through Bourdieu's lens of capital when words such as" poverty" keep showing up. So in essence despite using inductive coding, I seem to be doing deductive coding too I think it's ok to do both at this stage … Isn't it?*

Cyclical nature of data analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) was used to reduce the data collected into some form of explanation, understanding and interpretation. Not an easy task as Lichtman (2010) concurs:

> The goal of qualitative analysis is to take a large amount of data that may be cumbersome and without any clear meaning and interact with it in such a manner that you can make sense of what you gathered. You should not be surprised that there is no right way to do this. (p. 195)

The process of QDA usually involves two things, writing and the identification of themes and they happened simultaneously. Bearing in mind that QDA is iterative and progressive – I designed a data analysis cycle (see Figure 4.2) that gave me flexibility and

thinking space to sort through the data. In this way, I was not restricted by a linear process of categorizing first up, but a more fluid cyclical process where I could move backwards and forwards for both analysis and theme identification until I was satisfied.

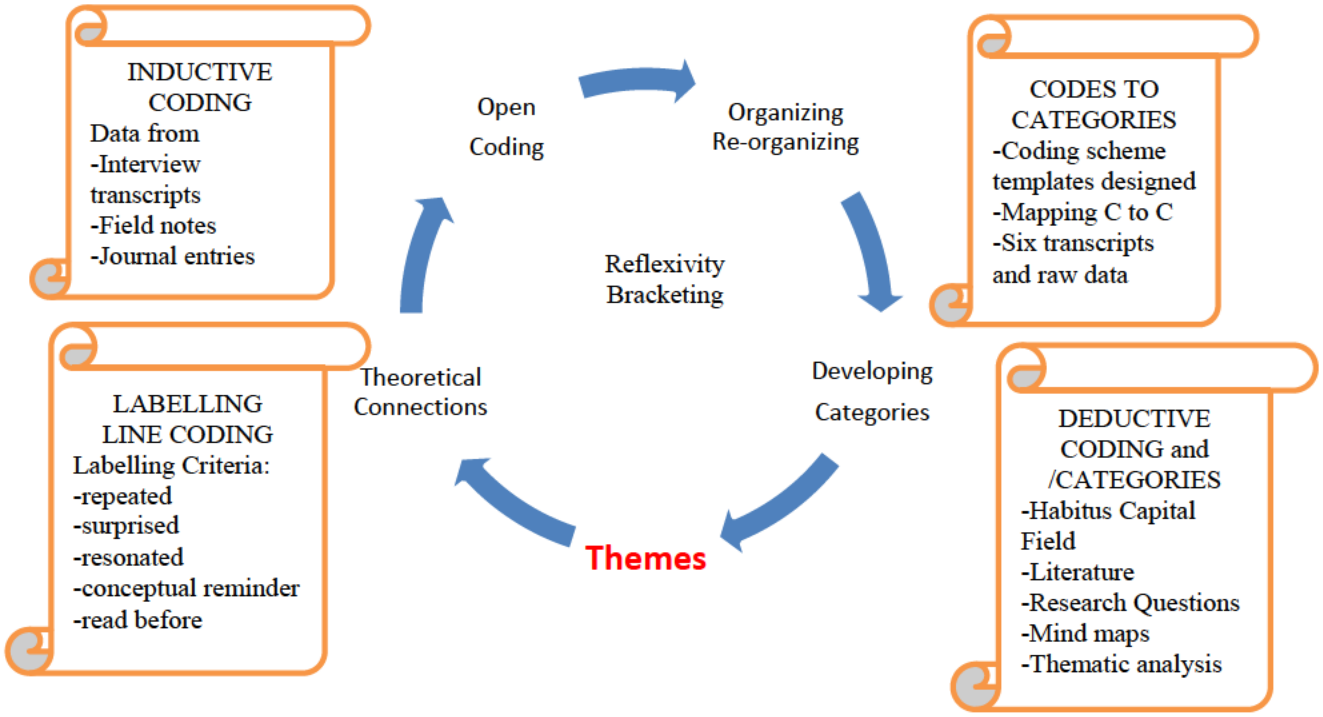

Figure 4.2. Qualitative data analysis cycle. Coding re-coding and creating themes for analysis using Bourdieu's theoretical concepts.

The steps taken

The three C's of data analysis recommended by Lichtman (2010, p. 196) provided a logical starting point for the analysis of interview data. I used "Coding and Categories" but replaced "Concept" with Themes.

Step 1: Inductive coding process

At this early stage, I decided to base my ideas of coding solely within the data. I browsed all transcripts, making notes on first impressions and recorded my thoughts through journal writing. I read the transcripts again summarizing large sections that captured the essence of the participant's thoughts and ideas and how they related to the interview questions.

Step 2: Criteria for labelling/coding

After identifying relevant phrases sentences, actions, opinions, by highlighting and circling specific words or phrases, I devised criteria for coding based upon the following:

- It was repeated in several places
- It surprised me in some way
- The participant emphasized it strongly
- I read something similar in previous articles/reports
- It reminded me of a theory or concept
- It resonated what another participant said

Step 3: Line coding

The criteria enabled me to go back and carry out line-coding with more rigour adding to the validity of the process. I was now able to see whole sentences, yet focus on specifics and at the same time this enabled me to still stay close to the data so as not to miss anything important. In the process of line coding, I did ended up with more codes. Some codes were initially labelled

as a phrase, a concept, an opinion, a perception which I later labelled as sub-categories. I was now looking for underlying patterns.

Step 4: From inductive to deductive coding

Once I was satisfied that I had captured the voices of the participants through the process of line coding, I began moving from inductive coding to deductive coding. Deductive coding was taken from Bourdieu's theoretical tools of habitus, capital and field but was also derived from the literature readings and my own research questions. To begin the analysis of data from codes to categories, I made redundant some codes and grouped others. I could see certain categories related to critical social theory such as disempowerment, child rights, inequality, power relations etc. By this stage I had over 70 codes and 30 categories as I have coded each transcript separately, I now had to deal with a culling process.

Step 5: Codes to categories

I combined some codes and labelled others as sub categories. Categories included objects, processes, concepts, and phrases. Once I had all the sub-categories complete I created mind maps on large sheets of paper, for each transcript incorporating all the codes and sub categories so I could visualize the relationships between codes, sub-categories and see how I was going to create future concept categories. I was able to compare and contrast each mind map (as I had one for each transcript).

Step 6: Coding scheme template

I designed a coding scheme template (word document) as I wanted to access the data readily and be able to move codes around more easily as I grouped and sorted. I created a coding scheme for each transcript and ended up with 8–10 categories for each transcript. Some

categories were similar in essence and some were very different. I then mapped the codes to the numbered transcript lines (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Sample of Coding Scheme Template

Lines	Participant	Code	Category	Notes
PFT/L-2 PFT/L 409	Parent Freetown (PFT)	Money matters Poverty	Economic capital	Same poverty category used for child rearing code – "neglect" see PFT/L29
PFT/L21 PFT/L22–23 PFT/L65–67	Parent Freetown (PFT)	Privilege	Access and equity	See transcript TW32 and PW same

During the process, I continued the praxis of reflexivity through journal entries, asking myself the following questions. As I was thinking about the first two questions, I was also going back to my original research questions and asking:

- *What is the relationship between the categories and can I regroup them?*
- *Do the categories say anything about habitus field and capital?*
- *What does ECDE look and feel like?*
- *What has hindered ECDE progress?*
- *How do stake holders perceive ECDE in terms of its place in national development?*

Step 7: Retrieval process

The data analysis process involved a retrieval system that brought all the data together including field observations, relevant journal entries, and the sub-categories from the interview transcripts. I was ready to examine the data more closely and had reduced the data by labelling, sorting coding and categorizing using both manual and computer software. Given the small scale of this qualitative case study, I decided to continue manually the next step. I photocopied several copies of each transcript and using the coded transcripts that I had previously labelled (line coded, phrases or words) as the guide. I wrote the categories as a heading for each envelope and after cutting the transcripts (line/word/phrase) one at a time, I placed them into the corresponding envelopes. Where the same line/phrase/word represented more than one category, I copied and placed it in accordingly. I had narrowed the categories down to ten at this stage.

Step 8: Thematic analysis

Having completed the process of gathering, labelling, organizing and asking questions about the data, I was now conceptualizing the data at a general abstract level and identifying the implicit and explicit meanings and ideas. I developed a theoretical criterion for analysis (see Table 4.4) which facilitated the theoretical analysis, as I moved away from the raw data and began looking for underlying patterns using the works of *habitus, capital* and *field* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Table 4.4

Theoretical Analysis

Theoretical analysis criteria	Data categories
Analysis of the position of the field in relation to the field of power	Neo-liberalism; Public Private Partnerships Access and equity
Obstacles in the Field	Preschools for profit Government 'will' and Priorities • Bureaucracy • Positioning of ECDE in Education • Fields of distribution
Mapping out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which the field is the site	Teacher disempowerment Privatization of preschools ECDE policy directions Perceived value of ECDE Competing resources Advocacy
Analysis of the habitus of agents	A habitus of poverty Children as social agents Hardships a given but not a keep-sake Cultural transmissions Parental expectations
Analysis of the forms of capital Those who are privileged within the field. Social and economic determinants	Culture of depravation Accrual of forms of capital Preschool affordability Structural forces and Agency Access and equity

Step 9: Mind maps of themes

Before using the themes for interpretation, the themes were once again mind mapped as central meeting points for theoretical categories referenced as struggles, distribution of capital, position, power and change agents etc.

This rigorous coding process helped me to develop implicit and explicit ideas captured the intricacies of meanings and, as a result, the following three themes emerged.

1. Childhood Narratives: A collective Habitus incorporating material, historical social experiences (influenced by economically embedded environmental structures).
2. Values and Education: The value and perceptions of children and education.
3. The Future: Structural and systemic forces and Agency: Benefits and prospects.

In conclusion, this data analysis process involved initial coding, revisiting of data and coding, the development of sub-categories and the culling of both codes and categories in order to move from categories to themes. This process required modifications, additional reading and constant reflexivity. Lichtman (2010) claims "there is less written about the mechanics of doing such analysis than any other topic in qualitative research" (p. 195), and I can understand why. Such an up-close and personal endeavour takes time, organization accurate documentation as well as due diligence. I believe it is such praxis that determines the quality of qualitative data analysis.

Limitations of the method

Every research method has its limitations and this case study was no exception. Typically, a single case study cannot generalize to the larger population, nor is it intended to do so (Yin, 2012). However, there were personal limitations such as my lack of inexperience working, living and researching in an African context. This impacted on the time it took to conduct the research as I was in effect learning 'on the job' in *unknown and naïve terrains.* In

addition, the subjectivity of the researcher is something I have discussed at length in this chapter and was an inevitable part of this qualitative ethnographic case study. Consciously deciding what field notes to keep, record, and focus on and the constant backwards and forwards to strategize, critique and evaluate created volumes of uncertainty but in retrospect, gave me much needed time to work through the data. It was through journal writing that I was able to identify some of the limitations of this case study and put measures in place to either reduce or come to terms with the limitations especially those out of my control. I have highlighted below, some of the limitations that became apparent through process of reflective praxis.

- An understanding of how intrusive case study research can be in the lives of others and the need to develop flexible timetables to meet the needs of others.
- Finding and conducting interviews in places accessible and convenient (transport wise) that were both private and confidential for parent participants.
- Recognition of the distorted picture the case study could give of the way things are, especially when locked in time (while the people in it had moved on).
- Challenges in entering certain fields for observation.
- Inability to access or corroborate government documents (they were not always publicly accessible and 'gifts' were expected to access documents).
- The constant to and fro of personal subjectivity as part of being in the field as a researcher
- The small numbers involved in the case study.
- Field notes were selective in that I could not capture everything
- The locations were limited to focus areas in close proximity to each other (2–3 hours' drive) due to transport logistics and six months of rainy season weather.
- Weather, transport and power supply constraints

Conclusion

This chapter took the reader on my journey as a researcher in the field. It set out both the philosophical *why* and the practical *how* questions organizing and doing the research and outlined the tools and procedures used in collecting and analysing the interview and field note data. The praxis of choosing a paradigm as part of the methodological process was an important addition to this chapter as it pulled me in certain directions (and not against my will). Westbrook's (2008) approach of ethnography of *present situations* resonated as he claims that reflexivity becomes *operationalised* "so that self-consciousness is not merely deployed as a critique of texts and stances after the fact, but is instead a part of the design from the beginning" (Westbrook, 2008 cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 717). Indeed this has been my experience in thinking about and planning this methodological experience.

Naturally, it is our audience that get to meet and learn about the experiences and the results of this research project. As a transmitter of information and interpreter, I am ever mindful that I should be presenting and representing the stories of others and this as Madison, (2005) points out is a privilege that comes with responsibility. Whilst I was able to apply critical reflexivity by evaluating my own purpose, intent and bias through reflexivity by moving backwards and forwards between field notes, readings and transcripts ultimately, I must own up as Madison (2005) reminds us, that I did this through my own *idiosyncratic lens* (p. 4).

CHAPTER 5 Data Presentation

This chapter presents the data collected during the ethnographic field work which consisted of interviews, field notes, and journal entries. Three themes emerged from the data analysis process and I have chosen to organize this chapter around them. Each of the themes addresses different topics some of which unfolded as a result of direct questions and some more organically through the narratives and my own field observations. A common thread amongst all three themes was the constraints and possibilities that directly impact on the lives of children.

The themes offer illuminating answers to the research questions and contribute to the overall findings as discussed in the following chapter. The three themes, Childhood Narratives, Values and Education and The Future, represent *the way we did, the way we do and the way we would like to do things here.* As such, they offer insights into the realities of past and present lives and convey hopes and challenges that are both personal and structural for the post-war development of early childhood in Sierra Leone.

Setting the Scene for Data Presentation

On a practical note, I have described biographical details of the participants in the methodology chapter but will refer back to those details to contextualize the voices of participants as necessary. I have also used the terms *preschool* to represent all early childhood environments and *early childhood education* (ECE) and *early childhood development and education* (ECDE) interchangeably in this chapter to represent all early learning programs.

The coding of transcripts is presented in the methodology chapter, however to guide the reader in the presentation of data, I have added additional information below.

- Jariatu (the parent from Freetown) required an interpreter to facilitate communication. At times, Jariatu would express her views in English and other times

in Krio. Knowing that I understood a little Krio, she would direct her answers at me on occasions and other times at the interpreter.

- Where the interpreter translates or I am asking a question or responding, I have simply put initials (I for interpreter) and R for myself (as the researcher).
- Where the interpreter has not added the corresponding translation and I have felt I represent the text, I have interpreted the Krio myself and added this to the text either below or beside the original text. No other participant needed an interpreter.

The themes are visually represented in Figures 5.1–5.3 as summary flow charts, and include subsequent sub-themes that unfolded from the data.

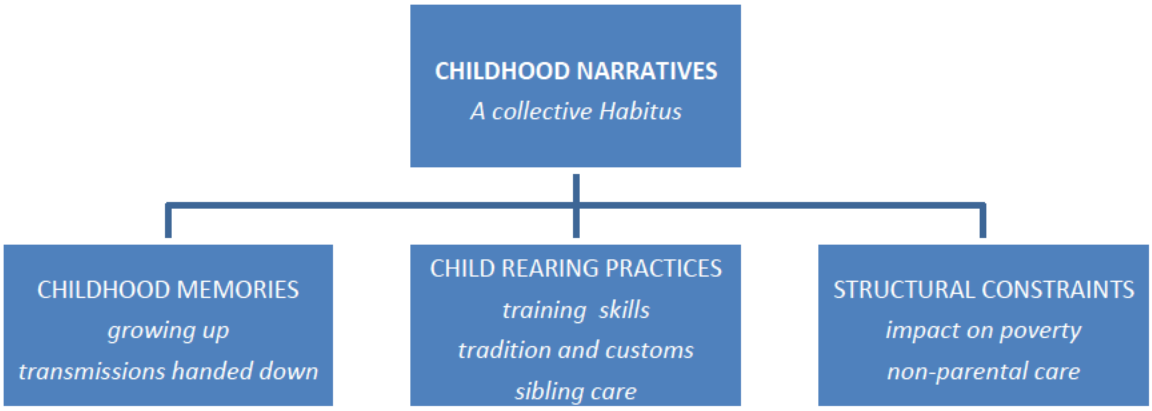

Figure 5.1. Childhood narratives.

Childhood Narratives and subsequent sub-themes of childhood memories, child rearing practices and constraints, demonstrate the complex and dynamic process of relationships between the individual, family and the sociocultural context in which growth and development occur. Through the narratives we begin to understand how the habitus develops as a

consequence of people's material and historical experiences and early childhood socialization (Sissiainen, 2000), and how it is influenced by economically embedded environmental structures (which will form part of the discussion in the following chapter). Through the narratives and field notes, a picture of what ECDE looks like in the home and at school begins to unfold illuminating the phenomenon of early childhood development care and education in Sierra Leone.

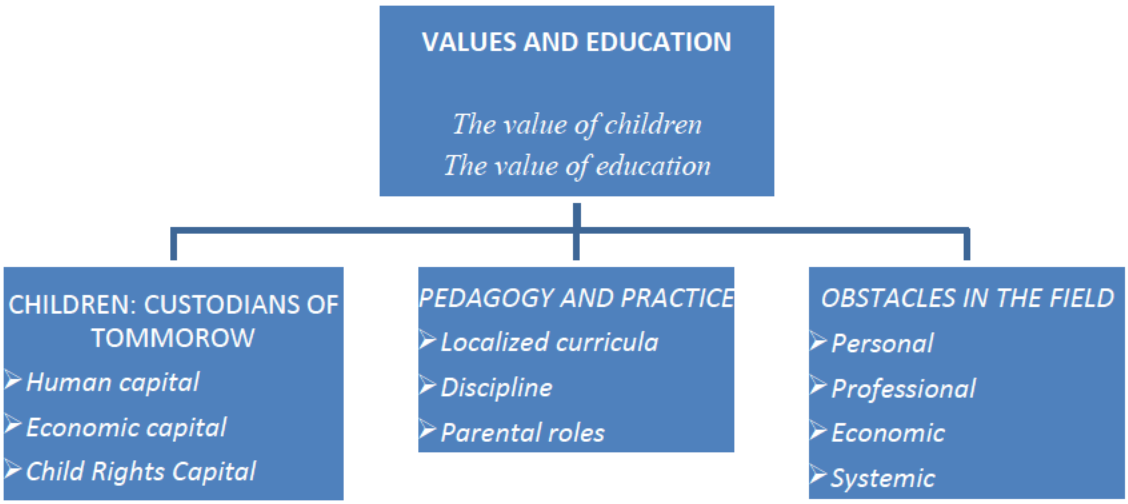

Figure 5.2. Values and education.

In the second theme, the value of children and the value of education are presented as a correlating theme. The value placed on young children and how much that corresponds with the level of commitment to education by individuals and society is considered. The data highlights the current state of ECDE and the different priorities, opportunities and outcomes that are individually driven but also systemically constrained as presented in the sub-themes: children as custodians of today and tomorrow, pedagogy and practice and obstacles in the field.

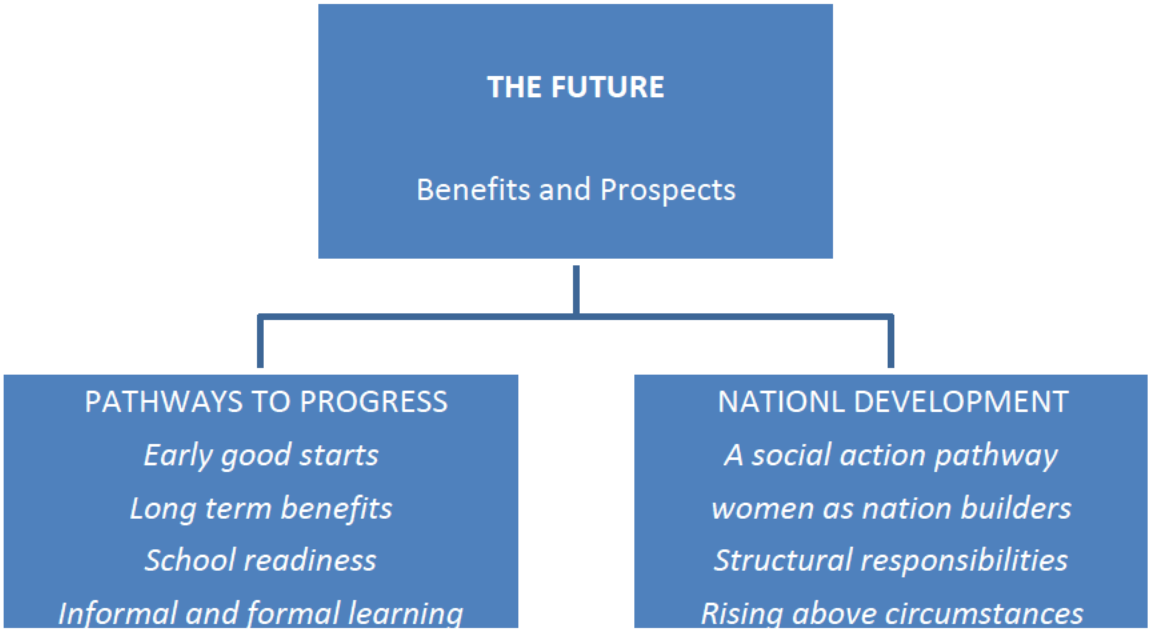

Figure 5.3. The future.

The final theme expresses the optimism, hope, and future prospects for a national vision of early childhood education, as seen through the eyes of individuals. The subthemes, pathways to progress and national development, suggest a growing mindfulness on the benefits of early learning and a willingness to move forward despite the constraints and offers insightful suggestions for incorporating early childhood education as a core component in national development.

Childhood Narratives

The findings in this theme, describe childhoods shaped by past events and experiences. The interviews permit us to glimpse into the lives of the participants: their beliefs, values, opinions and reflections, and the cultural and religious patterns that served to shape their current practices. It is important to note that the early development of habitus, which according to Bourdieu (1984) is both a direct result of free will and determined by structures that condition

our very perceptions, serve to shape our current view of the world. The diverse and comparable views and experiences expressed through the data, is an example of such conditions. In essence, this first theme provides insights into the reciprocal relationship between the participants' experiences and attitudes and the structures within, which they were and are still operating under. Bourdieu (1990) defines this interplay between external and internal embodiment as, "society written into the body, into the biological individual" (p. 63). An example most reflective of this interplay is presented in the following data from one of the participant. Peter is a father of four children who recalled with some emotion his experiences of boyhood initiation into the Poro secret society which left him feeling a *"victim"* resulting in his protectiveness of his own children. He states: *I don't allow them to get wood. I allow them to sweep and clean they do other areas in the house but I do not allow them to go out, I never allow them (L106–107).* Such childhood memories provide valuable insights into the nature of early childhood and its long reach effects on the human psyche.

Childhood memories

An important part of our personal history is our memory of growing up. It is an imprint that we carry with us throughout our lives and serves to shape, reproduce, or transform cultural patterns. For some interview participants it is evident that those early memories have influenced current child rearing practices (in the case of Peter) and even pedagogical practice (Francis' reflections which I discuss later in this chapter). For others, the narratives raise critical concerns about how children are reared in Sierra Leone. As Diptee and Klein (2010) point out, understanding the childhood experiences of participants "provides a greater context and a more holistic portrait of the human experience" (p. 3). Depending on who was interviewed, these memories were either pleasurable or painful. The parents interviewed proudly shared childhood memories of the skills they were taught as children and also the constraints they experienced

which for Peter, impacted on his education. I asked both parents what it was like growing up in Sierra Leone. Jariatu, the mother of two young children speaks of the *good training* in domestic duties that she received.

Jariatu recalls:

J: Good things … I taught how to cook, brook [do laundry], sweep, how to take care of house and they give me good training. (J/PL78–79)

Whilst Jariatu's childhood memories focus on *"good things"* (L78) she did share a less positive contemplative moment about her childhood, later in the interview. Turning to the interpreter in a quiet voice she expressed her current feelings about her family which the interpreter relayed back to me.

Interpreter: She said, only my mother is helping me, but when my father died all the other relatives went away. … They don't care. (JPF/L102)

Peter recalled sadder memories including the untimely death of his sponsor Fr Charles which was to become a catalyst for transformational change.

P: My Father [biological] was a just an ordinary farmer, it's a long story … I was loved by an ordinary Father [priest] but now he's dead (a long pause) He is dead. He was Fr Charles … taking care of me, especially taking care of my schooling, everything. I was just preparing to do my O Levels, when he had an accident and died. So I was just left like that … but that enticed me to go to college and do my … You know, my T.C [Teaching Certificate] (PP/WL 121–128).

Our discussions led Peter to disclose another painful childhood memory, his initiation into the Poro secret society. Peter reflected on how this ancient tribal practice involving a ceremonial rite of passage for boys took away his free will and left him feeling powerless. He vowed never to reproduce that practice in his own family.

P: I told them [his children] because when I was little I was you know just like them. As I was growing up my father took me you know to the village and then I was initiated into that society – Poro society – but it was against my wish. But then I was just a small boy. I am quite different I don't like this. But since this has happened none of my children will ever [long pause]. So you see I am a victim. (PP/WL 142–147)

For Peter, this harmful practice has impacted on the way he is now raising his own children and the parts of tradition he wants to reproduce and hand down to his own children. Whilst he has no objection to male circumcision, he is very protective of his daughters, refusing consent for them to enter the "Bondo society" which I later discovered was a secret women's society that still conducts female genital mutilation (Mgbako, Saxina, Anna, & Farjad, 2010). Sternly he explained that he has told his daughters:

P: In any shape or form I don't want you with any other person ESPECIALLY you know that traditional activities. (PPW/168–169)

P: You know, I try – we have a lot of traditions. We have a lot of traditions you see. I told my wife not to, you know, cover the children into this traditional initiation.
R: So you don't want them to– [interrupts]
P: No I don't. Only the boys because I am a Christian, I believe in the bible. I circumcised my boys. But the girls are just the same as they are, so I don't [allow]. (PP/WL 133–148)

In my interview with Francis, who is a local NGO representative working for the Catholic mission (who operate preschools) I wanted to find out if African culture has an important role to play in early childhood education. Her response instead, took us on a personal re-collective journey as she reminisced about her own childhood experiences. Like Jariatu,

Francis recalled a domestic training childhood involving routines, discipline, a collective responsibility to the well-being of the family and the development of certain life skills.

> *F: If you are from a home, where discipline exists … in the morning the mother is there, the father is there, they make sure you do your chores before you leave the house to go to school. Then you should always be ready to do it when you go to school. Because even if the child hasn't got work to do in the house, you should provide a child with a task … That was how I was brought up in my own setting, in my own family. Everybody has got a task to do in the morning before going to school, whether you are 13 years old, 3 year old, or 1 year old. That is one sign of responsibility that our parents instilled in us. (F/NGOL92–102)*

For Francis, good parenting involved raising children as contributing, responsible social agents. Being a child was not just about waiting to *become* an adult but about *being* in the here and now as in, being a capable and dependable member and contributor within the family.

From a child development perspective, Francis went on to share her views on the interdependence of child to mother but also the development of autonomy. The child is encouraged to do as much as she can herself first, and then the mother takes over.

> *F: In the morning, you get up, you must find water to wash, after washing you say 'I am through' come and wipe my body. When the mum goes there, she will look at you. And then, if she is not satisfied, she will do it for you [wash you] telling you that, this is the way you should do it. So, that is how we are brought up. (F/NGOL 104–108)*

Francis' comment *"you must find water to wash"* usually translates in Sierra Leone (for young children) as stepping outside their dwelling to see if the buckets are full and if not, going down to the communal taps (either down a hill or in the neighbouring compound) to fill buckets up as needed, which was observed from my own field data.

Memories of schooling and education were unanimously and fondly recollected by the parents interviewed, demonstrating the value they place of education. It was with some pride that Jariatu smiled and recalled the name of the high school she once attended even though she went on to share how she had to leave high school when her father died.

> *Interpreter: She attended, but when she lost her father, that the end of her education.*
> *R: How old, how old were you when you stop school?*
> *J: Me stop school, thirteen years (pause)*
> *J: Ar [I] go Wallace Johnson School, by Berry Street. (JPF/L164–171)*

Peter was also eager to share his educational background and was very proud about his qualifications and schooling success.

> *P: I attended St Francis secondary school at Makeni and I attended the St Francis Student Teachers College … We were the first students to get College. I am T.C. TEC [Teacher Elementary Certificate] trained. (PP/WL65–71)*

Both parents warmly recollected these schooling memories which suggest that they valued their educational achievements regardless of the level of completion and current job prospects.

Child-rearing practices

The data presented in this sub-theme, primarily focuses on explaining the existing ways parents raise their children and the nature of children's capabilities. The transmission of values and traditions and the industrious heritage handed down from adult to child continues to resonate beyond childhood memories. Family circumstances, societal customs, and cultural traditions, appear to impact on who contributes to raising and/or caring for children.

Training for life

The idea that children need to develop practical dispositions and skills at an early age in Sierra Leone, are deemed to be a necessity. One of the teacher participants who lives and works in the rural western district of Waterloo corroborates my anecdotal field notes which indicate that job prospects and money for food are even harder to come by in rural areas than in the city of Freetown. Fatmata pointed out that children have to learn domestic skills even at a young age, in order to survive without parental supervision, and they are sometimes left to take care of themselves.

> *F: Because of their parent poverty, am talking about poverty in this country, some of these kids, whenever, in fact let me say six o'clock, (morning) their parent move, leave them, leave them on bed then, they go. Some of them go and find money at Freetown, they sell, and they do business … they leave the children. Maybe, neither with the father, the father will not take care of the children.*
>
> *F:So they learn to cook, and whenever they, when they leave for the school, when they return home, maybe the father will not cook food for them, he will just give direction say, "do this" they will do, they will cook, for themselves. (FTW/L138–147)*

Peter, who lives in the same rural district of Waterloo as Fatmata concurs, this absence of parents and the importance of training children in life skills.

> *P:Well um if you come to look at it now it's very difficult especially this point in time. You are never with the children. (PPW/L4–5)*
> *P: The mother, in the morning she goes out find something to … you know to sell and at the end of the day we get. (PPW/L7–10)*

Whilst Peter, did not see it as his role to teach domestic duties, he went on to explain that domestic duties are important for all of his children regardless of gender.

P: She (wife) teaches them to launder [wash clothes] to seek water. You know all these areas … to clean the environment. R: She teaches the girls or the girls and the boys?
P: The girls and the boys together. (PP/WL 188–193)

With the mother leaving early to trade, Peter's responsibility is to supervise domestic duties and he expects his daughter to cook for the family. My observational field notes also indicate similar patterns of domestic responsibility.

R: Do they cook? Do they learn to cook?
P: Yes. The ten year (old) she can cook. Yes! (PP/WL 106–109)

Field Notes (27 June 2014)

It is 7am; I am at the Waterloo compound where I stayed overnight. Children are trickling into school early. The manager's son Abu has a straw broom and is sweeping around his house and the surrounding dwelling and picking up rubbish around the compound. He told me this is his "job" before going to school every day. Abu is in class 2 and is 8 years old. It took him 30 minutes to complete this task.

Francis expressed the importance of early skill development, not only for the present but for children's future survival.

F: Whatever these children are learning now, they should be able to use it in their life, in their later life … when they are old enough. (FNGO/L41–42)

Children in these examples are socialized into a daily routine that epitomizes a collective family responsibility embedded in every-day domestic life. Jariatu also shared the way child rearing extends beyond the parent on her compound.

Interpreter: At home they [people in the compound] give children good training. (JPF/L270–271)

R: In which way?

Interpreter: She said, they take care of her children when she is not around, they advise them, they give the children good directives, in case they want to do something wrong, they stop them from doing it. So they take care of them. (JPF/142–146)

Traditional hand-me-downs

Each generation will question and revise child rearing practices in order to juxtapose the past with present cultural practices and realities. I was in search of general answers to my first question especially, what early childhood might look, feel and sound like and how much that might be influenced by culture, religion, and/or tradition. I asked Peter what traditions, beliefs, and values he passed down to his children or held onto. Peter spoke of both cultural traditions and religious beliefs.

P: You know we have traditions like um um I meet somebody; we give birth we have to pass on that tradition … I am a party to it and if someone dies we go we pray and whatever we have to do we do it. We cook, we eat food. You know … um certain sacrifice you know. (PPW/L 153–156)

The *sacrifice* Peter was referring to was financial sacrifice as people in Sierra Leone give money to relatives and friends so they can finance funerals. I attended such a Muslim memorial service 40 days after a funeral and recorded my surprise at the abundance of food in my journal entry. People arrived with money envelopes and discreetly handed them to the relatives.

Journal Entry (June 22, 2014) A Muslim funeral

There was so much food. Women congregated inside the small courtyard and men outside. Both came and went but I was told that there was no customary reason for this division of genders. It was obvious that a lot of money was spent feeding everyone. There were at least 130 people and they also had take-home

food parcels in brown carry bags. I was given two packs with bread rolls sweet biscuits and a drink. I was told later by the driver, that because I was a special guest I was given two packs of take home food.

Another traditional hand-me-down was religion. Peter's expectation is that his children will follow in his religious footprints.

P: Well because (pause) like I am I'm a Christian I told them. I want you to follow my footsteps. Do not follow any other person's footsteps. My footsteps are your footsteps. (PPW/L166–161)

For Fatmata, as a teacher and mother of two children, there was a strong sense that children should be raised with traditional and moral values and most especially, modesty. This was reflected in her personal dress style and beliefs about clothing that exposed body parts. I had many opportunities after this interview to attend functions where Fatmata was present and she always dressed and interacted with others in an understated way.

F: We share, the beliefs of the culture that the people … the olden days people are belief … like you should not steal. Also when you are dressing, your dressing should show that you are a Sierra Leonean. But some of the people today, they dress the way they like to dress. But the time, some of us we have been to school we also taught about the way of dressing. You should not dress the way that people looking at you … you know the way that is not good. You always dress neat. You should not dress the way you feel to dress to please yourself alone. (FTW/L212–219)

Kinship care

Kinship care also termed non-parental care is when a child is placed into the care of others adults who may be related by blood or not for all or part of their childhood. Francis, as a supervisor of Catholic preschools in Sierra Leone, travels the country extensively and sees the

removal of children from their immediate family, to be relocated elsewhere as a socially accepted practice.

> *F: That is a transition period. I'm leaving my home to go and stay with my aunt. (FNGO/138–139)*

Francis explained that many young children have to develop a resilient disposition to cope with the changing environments they find themselves in.

> *F: [Children] Have to adapt it in the new environment that I find myself, because I never left my parent to go elsewhere, now am leaving my parent to go and stay with my aunt in another community. (FNGO/142–143)*
> *R: And the chances are that quite a number of children will live with different people?*
> *F:Yes that is it*
> *R: In their lives?*
> *F: In their lives … That is the African culture. (FNGO/146–150)*

This ability to adapt to a new environment is crucial for children's psychological survival as they have to navigate different communal rules and relationships. As Clara points out:

> *C: We live in different communities and every community has his or her own patterns. (CTF/152)*

Relocation of children for personal or socioeconomic gain is also a common practice according to Clara. Changing family structures such as divorce and remarriage and children handed over to relatives in the city in the hope their children will have a higher likelihood of prosperity are acceptable practices. According to Clara, good intentions do not translate into positive outcomes for children.

> C*: They are not interested. But there are some reasons, there are reasons.*
> *R: Please … go on.*

C: These reasons some them don't give birth to this children.
R: So they are like step-mother /step-father? Or aunty?
(Clara nods). (CTF/L325–329)

C: They go and take from the provinces bring them, and told them that they are going to put them to school, so when they come they forget about them, they don't ask if they get books, pencil or not. (CTF/L330–332) R: Why do they bring the children then?
C: Well, they promise to put them to school.
R: Ok, So they are trying to help?
C: Yes, they don't want to be offended, so they will send the children to school without asking, without knowing what the child is doing, they have enough problems. (CTF/L337–341)

Sibling care

Another child rearing practice that demonstrates the dynamic relationships within families is the responsibility given to older siblings in the home and in the community. Older children taking care of younger children is a phenomenon woven into the fabric of Sierra Leone society and is visible to everyone visiting or living in the country. Globally, there are different views about who is regarded as a sibling. In the case of Sierra Leone, sustained interdependence of siblings and cousins across the life span means that the responsibilities of child rearing can be shared within a large social network. According to Mweru (2011), (as cited in Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011) distant or far removed relatives are also regarded as siblings, acting as mentors and teachers for younger siblings. In my own observations, I would often become confused when introduced to "brothers" or "sisters" only to realize later, that this term applied to distant cousins as well as same mother and/or same father siblings

During an informal meeting with Mr Jalloh, the Director of a local NGO called Focus 1000 (that concentrates on the well-being of a child in the first 1,000 days of life) we discussed

the care and education of young children in the country. I was surprised to note a new term and definition of sibling care that I was unfamiliar with.

> Field Notes (23 July 2014)
> *Mr Jalloh and I were discussing sibling care and he mentioned the Sierra Leonean term 'Kombra' which he told me is a caring and nurturing term used in Temne indigenous language.*
> *He explained that 'Kombra' isn't just about the mother and child but about anyone who takes care of the child. This he stated is its original meaning. The emphasis he explained has been on mother care and traditionally, men and husbands are often left out. FOCUS 1000 is emphasizing male participation in maternal and newborn health issues, and highlighting the need for the "Man Kombra" as well as the "Woman Kombra" to work together to improve the quality of life of children.*

In Jariatu's case where she lives communally, her husband's younger brother could be regarded as *Man Kombra* as he acts in the role of a sibling carer/teacher.

> *Interpreter: For now she does not go to preschool but she learns ABC.*
> *J: Mi man e brother.*
> *Interpreter – My husband's brother.*
> *R: Is he a teacher?*
> *J: No but e bi go school.*
> *Interpreter: No but he was once a school boy. (JPF/L150–157)*

The fact that Jariatu's young brother-in-law once attended school indicates he is perceived to have authority and expertise on the matter of education which positions him in a position of trust and respect as a significant other. I was later informed by the interpreter that the boy acts as a teacher to other young children on the compound as well.

Peter responded to my question surrounding sibling care, pragmatically:

P: Yes, of course. When the woman is not there, if the elder one is there she takes care of the little ones until she comes back. (PPW/L113–114)

Fatmata describes the role of a five year old sibling as being a baby minder but not a primary care-giver, indicating that families use age appropriate criteria for the allocation of responsibilities.

R: What responsibility will be given to a five year old?
F: Ah, the parent, they give the responsibility to these kids, to look after their younger ones. Just to sit by them side. Because, there is five years of age cannot take care of baby (giggles). So just to sit by the side of the baby to look after him or her. (FTW/L161–168)

Taking this sub-theme of sibling care into the preschool settings, I asked Francis about the mixed age grouping philosophy that is prevalent in Catholic preschools in Sierra Leone.

F: We teach them … how to take care of their younger ones. That's why our own system of operation is mixed age group. That is how we operate in Africa … And when the mother is away the elder ones take care of the siblings at home. (FNGO/L 53–62)

This reflects the importance placed on older children to take care of younger ones within the African culture and at the same time, reflects the way preschool can contribute to dispositions of resilience and adaptability as part of its preschool program.

The theme of childhood narratives concludes with evidence of the way poverty is both an individual and environmental structure that impacts on the care and protection of children.

The impact of poverty

The realities for most people in Sierra Leone are harsh and parents/guardians raising children face additional challenges due to the responsibility they have in providing basic food,

shelter, and education for their children. The data here, describes factors that impact on childhood such as poverty, the lack of industry development and child labour. The data also describes social and cultural realities that may well position children in a way that pre-disposes them to a life of poverty. The need for care and protection are common elements identified as necessary for the well-being of children and this role extends to teachers.

For Jaraitu and Peter, financial hardship is a common everyday reality. During the interviews, both parents unashamedly asked me for financial help and I was presented with a preschool tuition fee invoice by one parent and a verbal request from the other.

> Jariatu stated:
> *Yes ma, I want you to help my child, help me, because for now my husband is not working, and I am not working too, and we don't have money. I am just staying home, even what to eat is difficult. That why I come to you to help me, because I want to send my child to school [preschool]. (JPF/L9–11)*

The week before, Jariatu's husband came to see me when he discovered I was interviewing his wife. He explained that he had limited schooling opportunities as a child and was determined that his children would get an early education, as described in this extract from my journal notes.

> Journal Notes (7 July 2014)
> *What was interesting today is that they* (Sami and Jariatu*) are struggling so hard to get together the money to send their daughter Samuela to preschool despite so many financial constraints. When all is said and done surely having a roof over their heads a meal every day and clothes is a more important goal? Yet Sami brings me an invoice of fees from the preschool, pleading for help to get his daughter into this early education program. I ask him how he is going to pay for it if I cannot help them and he replies, "I have small small jobs Miss Eleni and I will save for it."*

Peter, during our interview also requested help to educate his children overseas (Australia) when they complete both primary and high school.

P: I would like to hear that my children at least have passages to go over there
R: Passages?
P: To go over and be taken care of … Please! (PPWL230–232)

Fatmata was concerned about the impact poverty had on the lives of children and how the lack of money prevented parents from raising their children the way they should.

F: They cannot able to afford to take care of the children. (FTW/L17)
F:Some of them, they are not growing in a good way, because of the environment they find themselves and also maybe let me say the homes, because of too much poverty some of the parent they are not paying attention to the children, always leave them they go, they go away! So they grow in a bad manner, the bad way. (FTW/L 431–435)

Francis also expressed concern that children are suffering hardships through parental neglect. She explained how some parents (including teenage mothers) are not only neglecting their children but using them as child labour.

F: As far as I'm concerned children are not as valued as expected of parents to do to their children. They are on the streets hawking … late at night 11or 12pm hawking for their parents and that should not be the case (pause). I can't blame them much because some of these parents who own these children are teenage mothers (FNGO/L 8–15).
*F: The mothers should go out to the streets to fend for these children. Because if we sit down and watch … all of us have gone through the childhood stage. Nobody sent letters to their parents "I want you to become my parent" or "I want you to care for me". I think i*t is their utmost *responsibility to take care of them. (FNGO/L23–26)*

Whilst Francis remained critical of the lack of parental care, she did justify some of the actions of teenage mothers, making reference to the common societal practice of ostracizing pregnant teenage girls, by sending them away so as not to shame the family. Francis stated *"Maybe the parents who were taking care of the mother, decided to send them packing" (FNGO/L19).* This practice of social exclusion adds a further burden to young mothers who are sent away until they give birth and cannot complete their education. The government of Sierra Leone excludes pregnant teenagers from attending school and exams, as they are deemed to be a bad example to other girls.

Clara echoes Francis' opinions in relation to the missed educational opportunities of primary school children who are street hawking instead of being at school and the loss of their right to an education.

> *C: Last week, I saw some police men going around, holding the child, those that are selling (traders), they are holding them, during school hours, because, they are supposed to be in school. So last week I saw them at Congo market … They have some these children, holding them at police station. Yes, because they are supposed to be in school … Their right to [school] … this is child labour. (CTF/L342–353)*

There are certain systemic forces in Sierra Leone that appear influence and shape the lives of individuals independent of their own intentions. This includes unemployment and the lack of industrial development. Whilst it is not the purpose of this chapter to analyse such forces, they do impact on the lives of parents and the narratives suggest a pattern of economic hardship that has stripped the ability of parents to provide for the basic needs of their children. Peter speaks of the desire for a regular job and the lack of industry which perpetuates a day to day survival mentality and an inability to plan ahead.

P: Yes … If you look at it, we don't have factories here, just streets. (PPW/L340)

P: All the people can do is this casual job … But the money finish within the month. Where do you think we can get? This is the problem. Otherwise big big anger. As for me sitting here now I am not working. I have my TC, I have it but I am still sitting here. (PPW/L341–345)

Begging is a weekly necessity for many parents as is the case for this couple who have added challenges of being disabled, having a young child, and needing to commute from rural district to navigate the congested capital city in order to survive. The infant travels the 4-hour round trip on her disabled mother's back, and it can be argued that the child becomes embedded into the daily life of survival too.

Waterloo Journal Notes (27 June 2014)

It's 7am. Residents from the disabled compound, Haru and wife Maria are packed up with baby on her back – heading to Freetown. Today is Friday – begging day. They are both disabled (but can walk with assistance) and do small jobs e.g. planting to get a little money during the week but rely on the extra money from begging for food. They came to say goodbye to me on their way out and the smiles on their faces when I gave them bread for breakfast was priceless.

The impact of such social forces means the burden of responsibility rests on the whole community and the data suggests that teachers form part of that collective responsibility.

Teachers: beyond the call of duty

Whilst the data appears to be critical of parental neglect, there is also a genuine acknowledgment of the structural constraints facing parents. It could be argued that Clara and Fatmata as teachers present their own form of social action (praxis) thus becoming part of the solution. Both teacher's regard their roles as both educator and caregiver in the lives of young children and appear to willingly accept this dual responsibility. Clara calls teaching a sacrificial job which requires empathy and action.

C: God will have to bless us for this job, because this job is a sacrificial job. (CTF/L217)

Clara cites examples where she has had to plait children's hair, take care of hygiene matters and dress children appropriately claiming: *These children these African children, you have to do a lot for them (CTF/L308).*

Both Fatmata and Clara also provide resources for children; Fatmata gives them food and Clara provides pencils. It is evident that both teachers act in pseudo parental roles.

F: They came without food, so I encourage them, I always like to ask my children. When I see them sitting sad, I will call them ask, what is your problem, and some them they share the problem with me. I provide, I give them food, for them to feel happy, for them to feel, you know, to have courage. (FTW/306–309)

C: We are going to teach them all those ethics they don't know at home, even their parents. Even their parent don't know it … so all we do, they go and teach their parents. (CTF/314–315)

C: Yes, we understand them and their problems and then, we meet their needs. (CTF/L443)

F: In fact, like our own children they always like to come around us. Like Saturdays, they leave their houses and come to my house. Just to come and sit with me, discuss … sometime I record their voices. (FTW/295–297)

Peter's perceptions corroborate this notion of dual roles, suggesting it is expected that teachers support the role of parents not just in academic endeavours.

P: It is the responsibility of the teachers to take care of the children. Yes, to teach them more than us. (PPW/L201–203)

The data further suggests that schools operate as a protective structure, serving to not only educate but protect children. Clara became quite emotional as she expressed that children who are neglected at home, are better off at school as they are less exposed to the bad language and behaviour in the home and in the local community.

C: When they left them at home they will start to hear all sorts of words, things that are not important to them. They will become 'spoiled'. So it is better to be in school.

R: What do you mean when you say spoilt?

C: Spoiled. Those African they don't have good tongues. They just speak, they don't know if there are children, or not especially the drunkers are all around.

R: So they hearing words they shouldn't be hearing and they repeat them? C: Yes. They should not be hearing as children, [because] they will do it! So is better to put them in school at that time to learn em … em em … seriously. (CTF/L262–270)

The narratives presented in this first theme provide insights into the cultural patterns and social forces that impact on the lives of adults and children in the country. The data embodies both the internal and external factors impacting on childhood and demonstrates the durability and adaptability of the habitus but also the way social and cultural norms become inherited structures deeply rooted in the collective way children's lives are attuned to the rhythm of daily life. The second theme describes perceptions of the value of children and schooling and obstacles in the field of those values for early childhood education.

Values and Education

The second theme and subsequent sub-themes emerged from my investigation into the way children are valued and I wanted to understand how education is manifested in that value. Hoffman and Hoffman (1973, as cited in Nauck & Klaus, 2007) began by asking similar questions aimed at parents: "What purpose do children serve and what need do they fulfill for parents?" (p. 488). Whilst this case study extended wider than parents, I too was interested in uncovering perceptions and purpose in order to understand position and priorities. The data in this theme reveals how the participants perceive the value of young children and how that value

is manifested and translated into pedagogy and practice and the role that parents play. The data also gives pedagogical insights into curriculum and teaching practices.

The value of children and schooling

As anticipated, there were diverse views on the capital value of children. Some valued young children as human capital; others valued children as rights bearing citizens, still others as economic capital or future capital in terms of what they can contribute to in the future. Dr D in describing the diverse ways in which children are valued, included their value as human capital, the personal and economic value they bring to families and their value as custodians of tomorrow.

> *D: Some are valued with regard to their potential to bring improvements to the wellbeing of the family. Some are valued just as children. Issues of family, kinship, ethnic group. In some communities in the broader context beyond that of the nuclear family, so you know the extended family and the ethnic groups. (DGOV/L5–8)*
> *D: Carrying on the genetic line in one respect, but also carrying on the country … particular with which the people will link their identity. (DGOV/L 10–11)*

Whilst both parents expressed love for their children and spent time in human capital investment – *shared time together* – it was not prioritized or expressed in the same way. Peter valued schooling and perhaps his own life experience as a teacher was why he spent time talking to his children about their school day and his interactions always steered their shared time towards educational outcomes. Jariatu's children have not started formal schooling and her shared time with her children, revolved more around life tasks and routines but she too spent time with her daughter in academic 'training'. The investment in education was highly valued by both parents.

Peter shared how he valued his children and the priority he placed on the education of his children as demonstrated in his daily interactions with them.

> *P: Well we parents we see our children and we love them. And we are very particular very, very particular R: In what way?*
> *P: Well sending them to school in order to achieve what we … WE the parents have never achieved. (PPW/L20–24)*
> *P: Well at least after school when they go home I have to ask them "what did you think you taught today at school" They will tell me "oh papa we learn"… And then I say "now let's sit down and see what we can discuss". (PPW/L58–61)*

I asked Jariatu how she thought children are valued in Sierra Leone. She responded on a personal level, once through the interpreter and once directly to me.

> *J: I Den value to wi.*
> *Interpreter: They are valued to me. (JPF/L20) And*
> *later again:*
> *J: R De [they] important to me, den value to me. (JPF/L34)*

I asked what sort of things she did with her children. Time with her children involved observational learning and informal academic learning.

> *Interpreter: She said, when she is cooking she [daughter] go close to her and watching. (JPF/L76–79)*
> *Interpreter: I teach her to read. I teach ABC.*
> *R: How do you do that?*
> *Interpreter – I get a small blackboard R:*
> *I see. So do you write the letters?*
> *J: Yes, small small [a little].*
> *Interpreter: I write for them and they read a little. Then I show them this is letter A. (JPF/L173–186)*

Jariatu also values her children as economic capital, sharing how she anticipated the investment in the education of her children would bring her returns in the future.

> *Interpreter: They will be of value to me tomorrow when I am old they will help me. (JPF/L35)*

Both teachers considered the girl child in their responses to how children are valued. On the surface, Fatmata's claim that girls pay more attention than boys indicates she herself values certain types of behaviours and has a bias toward girls. However, it could be argued that the limited choices for girls have prioritized her attention in order to support their right to an education.

> *F: They [girls] pay more attention. Because some of these boys, they say even if I don't learn, I will go and join criminals. I will go to the street to be a criminal. To be one of the criminal. So even if I don't learn I will still survive. But the girl child because, she have to get marry, and she want to give, a good children, for the children to take a good footstep of hers … so she will pay attention. (FTW/L418–422)*

It is suggested here, that girls/women have the responsibility to raise good citizens, thus contributing to national development and even crime reduction. This focus on girl child education is further corroborated in my journal entry taken during a radio program to commemorate the Day of the African child.

> Field Notes, radio program: "Day of the African Child 16th June"
> *The notion that "When you educate a girl child, you educate a nation" was highlighted today by the presenter. Some people being interviewed said it is a SAD DAY. One said this anniversary was a time to mourn the school children who lost their lives in Soweto. A time when 20,000 marched and many lost their lives, many of them girls … Another said, the day of the African child is an opportunity to reflect on the progress that has been made in Africa.*

Clara identified government policy that has led to a girl child's right to an education and women's empowerment.

> *C: I think because the way we see things, women are moving forward now. Women are developing they are more resourceful we need more women especially the children to be educated and become somebody in the future.*
> *E: Do you think the government is helping?*
> *C: Yes the government is helping R:*
> *In what way?*
> *C: By sending more children to school supporting them. Some schools where girls don't pay for education. Give them free education so that they will know more. (CTF/L22–29)*

The data from the teachers focuses on how children are (or should be) valued, from an historical and national perspective. Fatmata reminisced on the positives of the past and the harsh realities of the present. She hoped the government would provide more in terms of children's education. Clara, on the other hand expressed a more optimistic picture of current progress citing the increased number of schools, as a sign of how much children are valued in Sierra Leone.

> *F: Many years ago according to our parent, our first our ancestors according to the information they are given us, they said this country was a very good country for education but because of poverty now the country is very lack, is very lack in education. So government is trying to put things in order so that he (the President) will see how he can be able to help these children in education. (FTW/L29–32)*
> *F: Like the Present when he went to another country, when he see how they valued children, so he now trying to put things in order, so that, he is trying to talk to people so that to take care of the children. (FTW/L23–25)*
> *C: Well they value children in this country that is why they have a lot of schools for them, so that they too can be educated – that's the way we value them – with education. (CTF/L9–10)*

Whilst there were diverse views on the types of values held regarding children per se, the correlation between valuing children and valuing education was evident from the interview data. However, one participant saw that children's education was not valued by parents. Francis proudly acknowledged that she is *"a child's rights activist"* (L10) and strongly advocated for children's educational rights.

> *F: As far as I'm concerned children are not as valued as expected … as expected of parents to do to their children. (FNGO/L8–9)*
> *F: I walk around, see children hawking the streets, time for school they are not going to school; they are not given the opportunity to go to school. No time to study at home. (FNGO/L 11–15)*

Curriculum pedagogy and practice

This sub-theme unfolded during the data analysis in the process of seeking specific answers relating to barriers and facilitators of early childhood education. Given the organizational and physical structure of primary schools and the Gbanamja (2010) White Paper recommendation to establish preschool classes in primary schools, I was curious to find out how primary schools were positioned to transition preschool children into formal primary school but this remained a gap in the data as other topics unfolded, related to localized curricula and classroom discipline became more dominant discourses.

The data revealed remnants of post-colonial schooling as Clara proudly shared her familiarity with the British system of syllabus planning: 'scheme of work' which is a highly structured plan where the 'scheme' is mapped out every term and then translated on a weekly basis to content. This is a government assisted school and my own field notes (below) indicate that the British style is the most commonly used approach by government schools in Sierra Leone. In essence, the scheme of work provides a structure for guiding the school syllabus but there is scope for inclusion of local history and traditions.

R: And then you decide … ok this week we will concentrate on this … next week this?

C: Yes

R: Are you involved in that or is it just the Heads of Dept.?

C: We are involved because when they give us the scheme, we are involved … weekly program the weekly focus [weekly forecast].

R: So last week what was your weekly focus?

C: For every subject … um say word building and sounds R:

And in mathematics what would you do?

C: In mathematics we would do fractions. (CTF/L49–61)

There appears to be some flexibility in topics as Clara stated: *"For teacher … can add more if she wants to"* (CTF/L65) but from my own anecdotal observations over a period of one month at her school, there was no evidence of additions and no indication that content was chosen based on the interests of the children.

Field notes (13 June 2014: HTC Teaching Curriculum subject: 1 hour tutorial)
We discussed with students the notion of an Afrocentric curriculum. All teaching students are currently using mostly a British content style of curriculum in pre and nursery schools. They had never heard the term an Afrocentric curriculum and said they focus on what they are told to teach e.g. colours words shapes etc. Yet when I provoked discussion and we brainstormed, they come up with many ideas about what that might look like. They also debated if young children should be taught 'history' about Anglo countries (as was suggested by one student teacher). When I asked if there was a need to begin with a child's own cultural identity they agreed. I asked how that could be possible with so many tribes, values, beliefs. One student suggested you find out the tribes in your class and teach toward that. Another group said "NO you just integrate all tribal traditions into your teaching.

Currently in Sierra Leone, there is no standardized national Preschool curriculum so for Fatmata who teaches in a non-profit mission preschool, the curriculum is more eclectic.

F: Well for now the curriculum we are using for the preschool is not the same, because government don't have preschool. They only have primary upwards.

R: So where is the curriculum that you use come from?

F: It is from the other schools, some come from private schools. (FTW/L240–245)

Despite the differences between primary and preschool syllabus and curriculum structure, similarities in primary school syllabus topics, such as *Water* was a common study in both class 1 (6 year olds) and nursery school classes 1, 2, and 3 (3–5/6 years).

Fatmata explained:

F: For here, we teach children how to use water. Where the water came from. But for you over there, (Australia*) most of you know about the water from home. But for us here, parents do not teach children about it. So when they come to school, we teach them, for them to understand how we use water. We use water to wash our body daily, we use water to drink, and cook. You know all these things.*

R: And where it comes from – like the different supplies?

F: Yes. We teach them about the sources of water. It comes from the tap water, the Well water, rain water. (FTW/L257–264)

Clara also referred to the water topic, when explaining the environmental studies in primary school syllabus.

C: And also in the other area in the community, places, what we have at these places like taps, Well … the sources where we get water from, they know it in class one, they start knowing. (CTF/L181–185)

In comparison, Francis shared aspects of the Catholic education preschool curriculum, which she described as more practical. Preschool content involves guiding children with gardening, environmental studies, 'training' of children and life skills. These she claimed are important features of catholic preschools.

F: Then our school garden, most of this children their grand-parent are farmers or back yard gardeners, they work, they follow them to this garden after school. They see them working, we try to teach them that, in this garden they don't just go there to work, but whatever they are planting, from those vegetables they do grow they take it to the market, we get them, and buy them and we prepare good food and eat…… So the best thing they can do is to train, inculcating them that habit of planting and then making sure that when they plant, they should, and there is a time to harvest (FNGO/L162–176)

It can be argued that this curriculum is socio-culturally appropriate and reflects the values and realities of society. Francis claims that the Catholic ECH curriculum is loosely based on the draft national curriculum, (which she had major input into). According to Francis, values practical day to day living and survival skills and advocates a child-centred approach.

F: That's why our own curriculum we developed is purely African. Because everything we use, learning for life, all the learning activities have been within the Sierra Leonean context. (Pause) Like, the first, we started with the first set of curriculum we developed. The teachers around the country, we had 8 Didactic Units Learning for Life. Under this Learning for Life, we have New Children in Preschool, My Family and I, Good Food, Accidents, Diarrhea, My Neighbourhood, Malaria, and … our school garden. And this, when you look at these 8 didactic units, they are all centred on the child. (FNGO/L108–116)

Once again, we see the "training" aspect of early learning that was described earlier in child rearing practices, as being highly valued.

F: We train them. Even in school when they go to school we do give them … tasks to perform. Like sweeping of the classroom, we allow them to do it themselves. Because we are training them, not for today but for their future. life (FNGO/L33–37)

F: Learning for life. So it is mandatory on us that we teach them to sweep, wash their cups after using them, we provide water for them , know how to wash their hands, we teach them how to wash their hands, we teach them how to wipe the floor ,provide moppers for them to do it. Provide so many things for them as far as it is concerned pertaining to house chores. (FNGO/L45–50)

Francis goes as far as to say the Catholic preschool curriculum, is not an academic curriculum but a practical one. This she claims is reflected in the decisions made about class groupings, where the intent is to reproduce family and community life as much as possible.

F: When you look at the home, the whole world we are living is mix age group. (FNGO/L243)
F: Step by step, everywhere is mixed age group whether people like it or not is mixed age group. These children have been living in the house in mixed age group why when they come you put them in age bracket? Three years, four years, five years … five years going to six they the ones preparing for class one. (FNGO/L250–253)

In the city, the language of instruction in class 1 appears to be English and according to Clara she places English as a priority. In discussing the first term of primary school and whether children are taught in Krio or English Clara states:

The first term, we are not going to leave them, that first term. If we leave them, we will not catch them again – to speak English.
E: Ahhhhh.
C:Yes! So we capture them at the first term! Started speaking English to them whether they understand or not, we are going to speak it, if they don't understand we relate it to Krio. (CTF/L279–282)

Discipline

In the discussions surrounding pedagogy and practice, the issue of discipline emerged quite by accident. The use of physical punishment is a common practice in the home and the

community and from my data, on occasions it is still practiced in schools. In Sierra Leone, corporal punishment is unlawful as a sentence for crime (article 3 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, 1926 and article 33(2) of the Child Rights Act (2007) but it is lawful in other settings, such as the home and schools. The practice of physical punishment varies from school to school and even from teacher to teacher.

Fatmata, teaches 4–5 year olds and has 32 children in her class with no assistant. She is completing the last year of a 3 year Higher Teaching Certificate (ECH). This is a new course of study which specializes in early childhood development and education and her new knowledge on behaviour guidance strategies may well have influenced her current approach to discipline. Here, Fatmata is referring to the teaching strategies she uses for 4–5 year olds:

> *F: Hmm, some them they are very stubborn, (giggles) well as for me, I will, I always handle the situation. Some of them I call them outside, they stand up just for a minute then I allow them to go back to go to their seat. (FTW/L315–317)*
> *F: But we don't use cane on them because, some of them they are afraid of cane, and when you cane them every day, some of them will not like to come to school … they will tell their parent today am not going to school, because my teacher always beats me. So we don't use cane, especially for this little kids they don't need cane, sometimes you give them punishment, as for me, sometimes, I said go to bed, they lie down on the table they sleep [giggle]. (FTW/L321–326)*

In my meeting with Mr Jalloh, we were discussing his perceptions on the lack of "care" for children post war he referred to the common term of *stubborn*, stating:

> Field notes (23 July 2014)
> *I asked Mr Jalloh, What has changed post war?*
> *He replied: Before the war, children were nurtured after, the war introduced a lot of negative perceptions e.g. "children became hardened and are perceived as stubborn".*

Clara teaches class 1 primary and has a Primary Teaching Certificate (TC). This is her second year teaching the first graders and prior to this, she was teaching middle primary school. She stated that she has up to 60 children and no assistant. My observations when visiting her class, revealed approximately 35 children and no assistant.

> *C: Well those children if you don't cane them they will not learn fast***.** *You have to use the stick. You have to show them the stick. Not always to use it to cane them but you use it to fear them … you can show them and they can keep quiet. They will listen to you. They will learn fast. BUT without the stick they will not. These children … ahh these African children. (CTF/L88–91)*
>
> *C:The moment when you take the stick they keep quiet. (CTF/L92–93)*

Whilst Clara did not necessarily advocate the use of the cane, she did not hesitate in seeing its value as a disciplinary tool to threaten or control children. Structural constraints and lack of knowledge concerning other classroom strategies to manage children's behaviour may be at play too. Clara's comment that *"everybody just come in the government school" (CTF/L131)* relates to the unwritten policy of government schools where there is no restriction on the number of children enrolled at any time of the year. This erratic enrolment pattern is also corroborated by Dr D when discussing some of the systemic challenges for ECE which I will present later in this chapter.

The role of parents in education

The data mostly suggests that the input of parents in the formal education of young children is highly valued, as expressed by Francis, Fatmata, and Peter. Clara did not share the same view. My field notes below also indicate that parents are valued as educators and Mr Jalloh suggests there needs for community acceptance that parents are the first teachers of children and a closer synergy between care and early childhood education should exist.

Field notes from meeting with Mr J: (23 July 2014)

Mr J has a clear definition of education and says it must be combined with care for example: Early Childhood Care and Development. He says this starts with the parents: "they are the first educators for kids". He goes on to say "the country needs ECE but more important it needs ECCare".

Fatmata and Peter both belong to the same school (although Fatmata does not teach any of Peter's children). Fatmata valued the input of parents and saw it as her duty to work not just with children but with the parents, in order to benefit the country.

F: Well, I think even we as a teacher, we need to involve, encouraging parents as well as children. We have to involve them, to bring these people together, so that education will be good, good for us in this country. (FTW/L70–72)

Peter expressed the relationship with the school as cordial and was excited to discuss the partnership that exists between him and the school.

P: The connection with the school is completely cordial … very very cordial … the relationship, these people are very (pause) they are very cool. They are very accommodating.
R: So there like is a respect?
P: Yes that's good R: Do
they respect you?
P: Too much too much
R: And you respect them?
P: I do, yes, that is why they call me. Without cause I have to run and come if there is any trouble … they say … but we need you. Because I give them advice and they give me advice and whatever happens they run to my house. I say ok let us put things straight.
R: So it sounds like a good partnership
P: Very good. Very good partnership (PPW/L206–223).

Clara's city experiences were not the same.

C: It is few! There are few parents who will come to the school to see their children at work. (TCF/324)
C: There are some who ... who, they are not interested. But there are some reasons, there are reasons. (TCF/L326–327)

Clara's reference to 'reasons' refers back to the previous issue of non-parental care, where children are being raised by kin or other non-biological adults.

C: Some of them ... well, don't give birth to these children. (CTF/L329)

Francis shared how valued parental partnerships are, reiterating the importance of parent and preschool relationships. The sense of belonging and ownership appears to extend at least philosophically to parents.

F: For our own part, the parent we do involve them in whatever we do. We don't push them aside we involve them, we allow them to take the forefront and then we stand at the back and watch them. (FNGO/L420–422)
F: School belongs to you people. YOU own the school, these children, the school is not like first time everything is done by the missionary, now you own the school, you [parents] need to support us. (FNGO/L399–400)

The data alludes to a strong commitment (at least by some) towards communal partnership goals. The value of early education is highly regarded and the participants saw themselves as having a role to play in developing children and education, despite the challenges, as presented below.

Obstacles in the field of teaching

The final sub-theme in values and education concerns the challenges facing progress, and the recruitment, promotions and professional development of teachers as well as systemic and bureaucratic obstacles leading to delays and corrupt practices.

Fatmata, perceived the obstacles in terms of her own professional development, requesting additional support to be able to teach local and global themes.

> *F: Well, the only thing I like to share with you is, like, because, some of us we are not, we are not in Australian, and we don't know some of this things you are doing at Australian. I always like you to come around us and teach us about your own curriculum at Australia, we as, we as the teachers we need to impact this knowledge to the children because not only for this country they need to know about … other countries as the others do. (FTW/L469–473)*

For Clara, her desire to be a head teacher has been thwarted by bureaucratic road blocks. She expressed frustration that her career path is obstructed because she needs *"to be special"*. This implies that she does not have the kind of cultural capital (found in networks and connections) needed to secure a promotion.

> *C: This atmosphere we are having in the school at times, we just fed up with the job, because of the atmosphere. Atmosphere in the sense, there are times like this promotion, waiting for it for so long! Because, when we debuted, [graduated] we waiting six years, they interview teachers. (CTF/L401–403)*
> *C: And again the ten years, they are going to be senior teacher. They have already been ten years last years, nobody care or going to ask. The head teacher supposed to recommend you, I ask for some ideas but when I went there, there was no "yes", so I forget about it. This year … I will sorry to be said but, I will not have that promotion. Some have already got that paper, I need to be special. (CTF/L405–409)*

Francis agreed there were delays especially in the process for teacher recruitment, claiming government bureaucracy was the issue.

> *F: Ahh, because now the recruitment process is so long and it involves lots and lots of bureaucratic processes. (FNGO/L300–306)*

In addition to her role to oversee catholic preschools, Francis is also a member of Sierra Leone Nursery School's Association and is responsible for the monitoring of registered nursery schools in the country (at the time this research). This position is a ministerial appointment which she claims is undervalued and provides little remuneration. From Francis' initial explanation on the process of recruitment, one gets the impression that there is a transparent procedure in place. However, bureaucratic power is expressed in diverse and subtle ways as seen here where the decisions rest at the discretion of the education ministry.

> *F: If you want to teach in Government school you can apply through education office City Council. They invite you for an interview. You go through their interview, then they will recruit you. You come with your papers, everything; they process your documents and send them to the Minister. (FNGO/L318–321)*
> *F: When you go to them they say "the Minister says this, the Minister said we should not make like this". Everything is done by the Minister. (FNGO/L335–336)*

Francis was quite open about her frustrations at the delays in processing applications. She explained the recruitment forms lay dormant for some years and have yet to be processed.

> *F: I have been to his office (Minister of Education). You see all the recruitment forms scattered, his room is bigger than your office, like this whole apartment. And then you see one little corner all the ECE forms are there. Then, (pause) … he doesn't recruit*
> *R: The ECD forms? The application forms?*
> *F: The education, ED 11 Forms.*
> *R: What are those forms?*
> *F: Education 11 forms. They are forms wherein you enter your name … government register … they have sent to them for approval, they are laying down there.*
> *R: How long would you have to wait?*

F: Hmm, that is why I said no matter how long the night … the day is sure to come. (FNGO/L337–348)

Such obstacles have constrained the advancement of teachers and have wider implications in the field of government priorities and teacher practices.

Government delays

Obstacles in the field of preschool are presented below with reasons for the delays. As a government representative, Dr D states that the government value ECE, viewing it as a priority but he too posits systemic challenges that have constrained progress. He makes no reference to administrative or bureaucratic delays but suggests that delays in progressing ECE are due to a lack and loss of expertise in the government resource pool.

D: Let me say first of all, we also (the government) realize ECH education is a priority (DGOV/L60)
D: … Well at the end of the day as I said, it comes down to resources (DGOV/L42)
D: The delay has been simply because of staff changes. We have been trying to get someone to come in and work in that area … We are having great difficulties not just having the quality of staff but getting staff that we would like it. For about a year and we couldn't get staff in certain positions (DGOV/L100–104)
D: There are more attractive options out there, so that's the challenge. Seeing how we can make things more attractive. It is a matter of first of all getting someone there and then even in terms of the curriculum … Some others have retired or gone on to greener pastures. We have lost virtually all of them and getting others to come again has proven to be rather challenging. (DGOV/L105–109)

From Francis' point of view there have been recommendations made but they have not been considered.

F: There are silent recommendations given to Ministry of Education in what they should do. They don't do it. (FNGO/L437–439)

I asked Dr D why there were no national ECDE standards and what was delaying the progress of a national curriculum (my field notes and literature review indicated the draft document has remained stagnant for several years). Again the issue of resources was explained as constraint.

R: So I know one of the strategies was to provide national standards … which will be used across the sector … I am wondering if you know how far that has progressed. (R/L71–72)
D: We will not come out with the final stage just yet because when you come out of that you have to be prepared to make sure there are resources to support that and the other things that should go along with that. (DGOV/L78–80)

According to Dr D the roll out of national standards cannot happen unless other policies and resources are also in place.

D: Oh yes but you cannot have the standards alone. I know that resources have not gone quite far in that but I feel the occasional paperwork is very nice in the ministry if it results in something concrete. (DGOV/87–89)

I moved my questioning from the standards to the draft national ECH curriculum as my literature review and field notes indicated this was another delayed document thwarting the advancement of ECE.

R: Do you see something like the draft national ECDE curriculum as being a next step, to have endorsed and ratified? (RL/90–91)
D: Well you know what we are trying to do … I would want to see now the curriculum at the various stages is interrelated more. As you know, there is work going on … I want to see how this dove tails with what is going on um in the

primary and nursery curriculum … And also [pauses] ok let's stick to that. (DGOV/L92–95)

Dr D went on to identify obstacles in the field of teaching. He cited over-crowded classrooms, students bringing younger siblings into class which stems from community pressure to send all children to school. This unwritten open-door policy with no control of numbers, ages etc. concurs with Clara's earlier comment in this chapter, on the topic of the continuous year round enrolment of children, regardless of time, age or class sizes.

D: If you go to primary class one, you will find a whole lot of 3–4 year old 5 year olds with 8 or 9 year olds sitting there and some will sit there for next 3 years until they reach the official age. Just because pressured by chiefs and everyone around so much to send their children to school. But there are 6, 7, and 8, 9 year olds that take care of the younger siblings and so take them along to school. This is not ideal. (DGOV/L147–153)

Corrupt practices

The data suggests that bribery has become a common practice perhaps attributed to the delays in recruitment and lack of monitoring. For example, unless a teacher's application is processed, he/she will not be paid, which results in many teachers working without salary in the hope they may be recruited later. Schools are often forced to charge additional fees *on the side* (corroborated in my field notes below) in order to support teachers who are not on government salary. Francis states:

F: Oooh, the teaching profession is now competitive and people are finding it difficult.
R: Difficult to be registered?
F: To be recruited.
R: So if you're not recruited you are not getting a salary?

F: You will not get salary from Government unless the person who employs you starts paying you. (FNGO/L323–327)

This systemic teacher recruitment crisis appears to be impacting not only on teacher motivation as expressed by Clara earlier, but is forcing corrupt practices as Fatmata alludes to in her statement:

F: Yes! It cost money, children you know some of the teachers, the government teachers some of them work for how many years, some work for five years, there is no salary, so unless they ask money, to give, to collect money from these children so that they, they will survive … so without that – no way (FTW/L81–84).

From my own experience working with high school students in Sierra Leone, it appears that charging extra *"ancillary"* fees is a customary and accepted practice, despite the moral dilemma and compulsory payment, it is justified as *gift giving* by teachers and school administration.

Field notes (10 April 2013)

Abubakar gave me a letter requesting some help with clothes etc. He asked for shoes especially for school. He also asked for Thanks-giving ceremony money which he explained was for teachers who were not on salary as a gift. Without that extra money, the teacher has told him he will withhold his end of semester test results.

Field notes (14 April 2013)

I received another letter this time from Joseph also requesting money to buy black shoes for Thanksgiving ceremony. Last month his parents managed to pay the school fees. I paid for his uniform and some extra ancillary charges. When I asked for the receipt he told me he could not bring me a receipt for the ancillary payment given to the school only for the school uniform and said the school will not issue receipts for <u>extra</u> ancillary payments.

Fatmata revealed that in her experiences moving between different schools, she observed the common practice of schools charging *extra* fees to parents.

> *F: Well, to my own idea, even when I move to different schools, the education we are now facing, it depends when you have money … They [school] still take money, they still collected money from the parent, from the children's. (FTW/L74–77)*

The Future

This final theme, looking into the future, presents both constraints and possibilities. Accessibility and affordability constraints (which the data seems to constantly allude to) and optimistic pathways towards the advancement of ECE including the benefits of early learning both formally and informally are presented. The data suggests ways that ECDE can contribute to national development when a collective approach is taken. The interviews express hope that things will improve in the future and gives specific suggestions on how those improvements could be implemented despite constraints.

Preschool affordability and access

In Sierra Leone, preschool, nursery, and other early childhood services are private and costly. There are limited choices especially for those without or little money and the absence of a regulatory framework has led to what Francis describes as *mushroom ECE services* across the country driven by free market forces.

> *F: Mushroom (pre)schools are just coming up here and there, left and right because of the awareness that has been created, more especially Gbanamja Commission white paper on education which states that every pre-school, every primary school should have a pre-school attached. So people are now they just sitting in one room and a parlour they said, "I am going to start an ECD centre".*

BUT they don't have the facilities, they don't have the equipment, there is no standard. We must have minimum standards for setting up preschools. And, the reason why some of them are only doing it for money making. (FNGO/L253–259)

For Jariatu, finding the money to pay the preschool fees is a priority. I was given the invoice for Term 1 of preschool fees, in anticipation that I could help pay at least for the first term. The total amount of 380,000 Leones (for three terms) is quite low compared to other preschool fees in the city. This fee is approximately $130 AUD. According to World Health Organization the majority of Sierra Leoneans are still living on approximately $1.30 AUD a day. If they are fortunate enough to have a regular job the minimum wage (not always paid to employees) is 500, 00 Le per month.

R: These fees are very high, how would you pay for these fees?
Interpreter: Yes I know, first term they want two hundred thousand and second term ninety thousand, then third term they want ninety thousand. They want and want.
R: So how will you pay?
Interpreter: She said that is why she come to you to help her.
R: Okay, if I cannot help, how will Samuella go to preschool?
J: Wi dae try. Wi dae try [we will try]. (JPF/L364–374)

For Peter, preschool fees were affordable as the mission school did not charge any fees (including ancillary fees).

P: Opportunities now it's great
R: Why are there now more now opportunities?
P: Well why? Now we can send children to school where we don't pay. But especially when my children are coming here (St Jacobs Dream school). It's the big opportunities. Very very big. You know when you think of other schools you

have to pay, you have to pay this you have to do that. Here it's a big blessing in disguise. (PPW/L40–45)

Fatmata's advocacy plea for more donor support implies the high costs of preschool education require additional support from outside the country.

F: Well I have something to say. If there is any help, in any country, concerning the children that are living here, I want them to make a help for us. (FTW/L53–55)

Dr D saw the accessibility of preschool as being linked to affordability but also to privilege. He also saw that private enterprises would not take up the challenge of establishing preschools in rural areas as there was no cost benefit, He suggested that the little money available in the ministry should be directed toward supporting private public partnerships.

D: Now I see education holistically as one stage, in a process and that is sometimes missed out for various reasons. I see the benefits to be had … sometimes early childhood education seems to be taken up more by privilege in areas, [they] have distinct advantages, where the poor were growing in their rural areas. (DGOV/L19–23)

D: In terms of the resources, um I think that increasingly we have to be looking at PPP's – private public partnerships – to see if there are private enterprises out there with some support to start to expand. It's not going to be too attractive however, for privates outside of the urban areas. It's not going to be too successful in Sierra Leone in the poorer areas … More of government resources should be focused to support of PPP's. (DGOV/L64–69)

To date, the data reveals a less than positive picture of the current affordability of preschool and little progress in public funded preschools. Dr D also saw that private public partnerships (PPP) could further save the education ministry money.

D: More P.P.P in many instances it could save the ministry from certain costs. (DGOV/L134–136)

Long-term benefits of early education

The affordability and corresponding accessibility to preschool did not dampen the enthusiasm for early learning and its long reach benefits. The data suggests that there is advocacy for early childhood education both formally and informally.

Formal learning

For Jariatu, despite leaving school at 13 years of age, she has high hopes for her daughter's education and sees the benefit of early good starts. The perception that an ECE program will teach her daughter more and better, highlights the priority and value she places on formal early learning.

> *Interpreter: I want her to go to school, not sit at the house and I want her to learn good. (JPF/L196)*
> *J: Learn them ABCD, for count for write (JPF/216).*
> *Interpreter: She said yes, she do teach her at home but she want her to learn more at nursery school. (JPF/235–236)*

Jariatu also views formal preschool as a place with social as well as academic benefits. Her response below indicates that she views preschool as a place to develop life-long social skills – that is, making friends for the future.

> *Interpreter: She said "friends not just for today but for tomorrow". (JPF/220–222)*

Fatmata also saw the social benefits of pre-school environments but related it more to the immediate benefits for children.

> *F: When the child involve ,interact with others, he will feel good of himself or herself, so that make the children you know, happy to come to [nursery] school, because they always interact with their colleagues, it make them, socialize. (FTW/L465–467)*

Looking at the long-term benefits of early childhood education, Francis recollects the differences between her own son who attended an early childhood program and her other sons who did not. Dispositions of independence, creativity, and problem solving skills were identified.

> *F: Even my younger son, my last son I have, whom I reared through the ECD program, ooh, that one doesn't ask me for anything, he knows how to solve his own situation, and he is always creative. (FNGO/L353–355)*
> *F: Yes! There is vast different between him and his elder brothers and sisters. (FNGOL/359)*
> *F: He is always thinking fast. (FNGO/L362)*

Clara compared her past experience as a student with the abilities of current students who have been to preschool. Clara saw that children are now rapid learners and bring prereading and writing skills as well as social skills. These early good starts, Clara professes, make her work much easier.

> *C: Yes! Yes, yes can remember when I was, when I was five years, I go to class one, but at that time we were dull, but these children now they are fast, they are faster. They are three, three in nursery, by the time they came to class one, they are doing more, some of them will started spelling their names, writing it. (CTF/L356–35)*
> *R: Can you tell me some of the things you have noticed?*
> *C: Well some of them who been to nursery before coming to this school they compose themselves they know how to compose. The others just came into the school they just do things out of the way … that is one of the differences between them. (CTF/L114–117)*

Clara's reference to *composure* indicates that children who attend formal preschool are already socialized into a school culture and suggests that they bring with them social capital that enables them to adapt more easily to the expectations and cultural norms of schooling.

C: Well … now in Sierra Leone. At first, children at 5 don't talk. But now children at 3, they talk like parrots. Whatever they see they will talk, whatever feel they will talk. (CTF/L258–260)

C: That period is important because, here is where they get their basic, they start to write, they start to read, everything they do … It's their beginning. (CTF/L245–246)

R: And does that make your job easier when they have a little bit of understanding?

C: Oh YES … yes, yes it is easier. (CTF/L122–123)

Fatmata also saw younger children as being able to learn faster and better at an earlier age, if they are stimulated. She alluded to the neuro-scientific term of synapses 'brain wiring' in describing the benefits of early stimulation and malleability in early brain development.

F: Early childhood is very, very important, because, when the child start to learn at the age of three, it grow faster in learning than the others.

R: hmm. When you say grow faster what do you mean?

F: The way, the things they taught them when they are three years above, that makes them to learn faster, because the brain is young and that time that particular time when they start to, impart knowledge in them the brain will develop faster than the others sitting at home, some of them they sit for good six years before they started going to school. (FTW/L340–347)

Fatmata added that early learning begins in-utero stating *"They have already got the womb … the informal teaching" (FWT/L227).* This opinion is shared by the local NGO Mr J. whose comments were presented earlier in this chapter. FOCUS 1000 concentrates on the first 1000 days of life, beginning in-utero.

Under the tree learning

It is evident that early good starts are hopes for the future and the data highlights that this involves formal and informal learning. The rich descriptions of informal learning offered by Clara as *under the tree* learning, references learning in the home, and in the environment.

> *C: The formal we are doing them at school … This informal at home – under the tree … they have it at home. They have that under the tree education at home. (CTF/L74–76)*

Clara found that children who were exposed to *under the tree* learning also demonstrated more confidence, have better language and literacy skills when entering class one even if they have not attended formal preschool.

> *C: Some of them will talk. Some of them coming for the first time can do it. Some of them their writing, because they have informal teaching.*
> *R: At home?*
> *C: Yes at home. (CTF/L57)*
> *C: They will come with these picture books, I saw them, they will call friends, busy reading it … That is all on the skill, even the little the skill. (CTF/L231–233)*
> *C: Even reading skills some of them will be reading, talking! Whether it is right or wrong or they will start talking, reading, or singing. (CTF/L239–240)*

As parents, both Peter and Jariatu see the value of teaching at home in readiness or to support the learning at school. Rudimentary as it is, Jariatu spends time with her 4 year old daughter teaching her academics using a black board she purchased.

> *Interpreter: They learn to read.*
> *R: How do they read? What do they have to read?*
> *Interpreter: I get a small blackboard … I write for them to read small small [little by little]. I show her this is A. (JPF/L174–185)* Peter said:

P: When they go home I ask them what do you think you learned? At least they tell me, they show me. They bring their books. I have certain books with me. Then I open the books, bring them together, and then teach them. This is almost the same as what you done there so I want you to continue with this. (PPW/L76–79)

For Fatmata, children are learning to label objects and count whilst still at home.

F: Because they started learning from parent, from the parent, from the home.
E: So what kinds of things?
F: Well, let me say children learn through counting, they count, they start counting at home, they start to call things on their own before they start coming to school. (FTW/L90–94)

Descriptions by Fatmata also include the importance of informal learning in the outdoor environment. She describes children playing and practicing games and even creating their own games with rules.

F: Well, children learn let me say football, they learn to play football … they learn to play games like tins, they use tins, tin cups … they learn at home how to play them.
R: So they create their own games?
F: Yes, yes … on their own.
R: What do they do with tin cups?
F: They park them by groups, and they use balls to send, to send them to the tins so that the tins will scatter, and, they come together and gather it again … And then they knock them down. They practicing this at home. (FTW/L97–113)
F: They also a draw circle, they learn to draw circle in the pond, out of the pond. They learn all these things at home. (FTW/L119–120)
F: … they learn to play, you know, they use this sticks to make high-jumps. (FTW/L117)

Early good starts are explained as beginning in the womb, existing in the home or under the tree (informally) and in formal early childhood environments. The long term benefits of an

ECE program were unanimously echoed as a pathway to national development as explained below.

National development

The final sub-theme in this data presentation suggests that education is vital to the national development of the country and it would appear that there is undisputed hope in the investment of children therefore investment into the future. Dr D's view related to the way education contributes to nation building.

> *D: Well education values children as a means of further developing the society, further developing the nation … So education looks at the children, not just from the individualistic point of view but how things can be made better for the nation as a whole, given the present development. (DGOV/L13–16)*
> *For Peter, formal education has already improved greatly in Sierra Leone. P: I believe the formal education for now … is greater … is greater than the former one. I believe I prefer the formal education now. (PPW/L51–52)*

For the teachers, the role of women and education is a pathway not just to emancipation but for the betterment of the nation. Clara saw women as highly capable and advocated equal job prospects as a way forward. Fatmata referenced the wife of the current president who has been instrumental in helping girls re-enter schooling, thus contributing to the development of the country. Fatmata went on to claim that women are nation builders, role models and are even capable of influencing men.

> *C: I think because the way we see things, women are moving forward now. Women are developing they are more resourceful we need more women especially the children to be educated and become somebody in the future. (CTF/L22–24)*
> *F: For example the president wife, she is a woman, and because she educated, and she marry to a president, you know, the home the parent, happy, they feel*

happy (Pause) In fact the home of that particular woman have been rectified,[transformed].Some parent said, instead of given birth to a boy child, I prefer to give a birth to a girl child, because, a girl child when she grow up and with a good conduct, she will marry to a good man, and the nation will profit. She is trying to gather the entire girl child that are drop out, because she find out that in other country, when the girl, grow up with a good manner, with good education, it brings more! More development in the country. (FTW/L390–400)

Francis saw future prospects for the advancement of ECE as resting in structural responsibilities which should be taken up by the government. She shared some of her own hopes for the future, suggesting a need for an ECD position in the ministry.

F: And I would love to see that day when the government will approve the new curriculum that we have developed. I would be happy. And then let them open a desk for ECD centre at the Ministry there. (FNGO/L432–434)

Fatmata suggested that the government should play a stronger role and had teacher training suggestions for the government.

F: Well, the government has more role to play to put things in order, especially for this early childhood we have already started. Government need to train teachers and send them all over the country, because it is very important. (FTW/L369–37)

Fatmata had further suggestions on how ECE curriculum could be improved to incorporate a global perspective to better prepare children for the future.

F: The things that are out, we need them in the curriculum. Let me say the differences between other countries. As for me, (pause) I need them in the curriculum because we believe some of these children will be somebody in the future tomorrow. So they need to know some of the things are out, outside country. (FTW/L262–273)

Clara felt that educating locally benefitted the development of the country rather than searching for overseas expertise. This approach was also shared by Dr D.

> *C: Well … (pause) the time we were running to go to other countries to go and find this expertise, we already have it here. If we educate them fine … We will not go out to find expertise to come here we have them here already in this country. (CTF/L390–394)*
>
> *Dr D: The country can't rely on something taken from Nigeria or Ghana. (DGOV/L143)*

Clara also suggested that counselling students to value education would also support school retention rates and benefit long term national development.

> *C: Most of them to have values, children need, they need proper guidance, counselling, they need more of counselling these children.*
>
> *R: What kind of counselling?*
>
> *C: For education … tell them the important of education in their lives. Some will go on, not all of them, but most of them will go. (CTF/L368–375)*

Both teachers viewed early learning as a training ground for good citizenship and this long term benefit begins as part of a preschool education.

> *F: Because they find out (in Liberia) that early childhood is very important. It very important when the child start going to school, at the age of three years in fact , he will learn MORE things when he grow up, he will not depart from that particular thing. They will learn, teach how to take care of themselves, how to obey at home, how to do things that will not harm them, will not lead them to street. So I think it is good, early childhood, it good for us. (FTW/L377–381)*
>
> *C: To be a useful society em … useful member of society, when they grow up because of our encouragement. (CTF/L213)*

Perhaps Fatmata's closing remarks captures the essence of the anticipation for the future of education in Sierra Leone.

F: Well my own hopes and dreams for the young children, I hope that this nation will change from bad to good – for the young children to develop the way that they will grow, in good way. (FTW/L428–429)

Rising above circumstances

The data from this theme so far, suggests strong advocacy for early childhood education and a social action pathway towards transformational change. My field notes below suggest a growing mindfulness at a grass roots level of critical reflection and an attitude of optimism with a call to rise *above* circumstances yet at the same time, a demand for continued investment in human capital.

Field Notes (10–12 June 2014)

A public Facebook discussion regarding national development between myself and a Sierra Leonean colleague, Mr S. Kapa (not his real name) resulted in a reply by an unknown source (to me). He posted the following:

The West measures true national development with a bottom up approach methodology. That's what the Aussie (myself) was alluding to in her comments. The West places their pride and energy in developing its people as its greatest resources as a nation before its natural mineral resources. The minerals are seen as secondary that God give them as a bonus to achieve unparalleled sustainable competitive advantages.
That said, true development begins and ends in the persons mind. It is not an event or series of events.

His potent remark *true development begins and ends in the persons mind* resonates with my experiences in the field and corroborated by some of the participants interviewed. Regardless of their status, economic position, or current situation, the participants generally perceived themselves as contributing agents for social change and placed high priority on the value of education as a pathway to progress. The data from this sub-theme does not attempt to answer

questions about whether education acts to transform or simply reproduce society however, Dr D's response related to early childhood research infers that social action is a collaborative endeavor between people and structures (education and government).

> *D: You know the more informed decisions we are able to make, the better. Early childhood can just add to our knowledge – informed you know … that can help us to make the difficult decisions that we need to make. So we welcome research in our own experiences [Sierra Leone context] and early formal education. (DGOV/L138–141)*

In addition, Francis and Fatmata as child advocates see parents are crucial stake holders in the education of their children, demonstrating the possibilities for parent advocacy and revealing that some parents will take notice, become involved and show interest despite their hardships.

> Fatmata states:
> *F: Well, some of them are interested, because we have some of them, those who are interested whenever they call meeting, parent meeting, they like to be in that meeting to know what is going on, especially for this community.*
> *F: Some of them they don't care, they … always emphasize poverty, poverty, but some of them they are poor, but they also have interest. (FTW/L442–448)* Francis concurs:
> *F: The parent are aware, the population is aware, the awareness has been created.*
> *And people are now eager to send their children … They will; they will make the sacrifice … for their children. (FNGO/L380–383).*

Poverty and hardship are realities but it could be argued that the poor are the very social agents for the kind of change needed in Sierra Leone. Evidence in this final sub theme indicates such potential.

Conclusion

The data in this chapter has served to describe, explain, and offer insights into the nature of early childhood education and development in Sierra Leone. The three themes were: Childhood Narratives, Values and Education, Future prospects. Childhood Narratives involved the sharing of personal childhood memories, child rearing practices, and structural constraints that impact on parenting. Values and Education explored opinions pedagogy and practice as well as obstacles experienced by individuals in the field of education, in preschool and life in general. The Future, suggests pathways to progress and the role that early good starts can contribute to national development. The data suggests that the landscape for early childhood education is fertile due to advocacy from all participants but raised questions as to its viability and sustainability given the constraints. An interpretation of the data using critical social theory and the conceptual tools of Bourdieu's habit, capital, and field (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) will be examined in the following chapter where I will discuss the findings in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER 6 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current state of early childhood education and development (ECDE) in Sierra Leone which facilitated insights into the nature of early childhood and identified the current constraints and possibilities into the future. Data from face to face interviews, anecdotal field notes and journal entries were collected in order to understand the essence of lived experiences of people engaged with early childhood within a real world context in natural and institutional settings. To examine this phenomenon, a critical ethnographic case study was used. This chapter brings the research findings together, discussing them in light of the three research questions and using Pierre
Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to illuminate the findings. Weaving practice with theory, I will follow Bourdieu's lead in addressing structure and agency in this discussion, not as a dichotomy but rather as an interdependent and relational process, that serves to both reproduce and transform.

Question 1. What is the current nature of ECDE in Sierra Leone?

It is not possible to discuss the nature of early childhood development and education outside of the socio-historical and cultural context of the country in which it is situated. Notions of diverse childhoods, childrearing and care arrangements, demonstrate how children are raised, valued and positioned in society. It is important to explore such variables in order to gain a better understanding of the wider context in which ECDE exists and operates. In the process of investigating this question, the voices of participants became a crucial back-drop for understanding what childhood development and learning *looks, feels* and *sounds* like and how it is expressed and enacted in Sierra Leone.

The way we do things here

Day to day living in Sierra Leone is structured largely around the lives of its people, with children ever present and involved. Children represent hope and continuity, as they absorb the traditions, rituals, routines, and develop strategies designed to secure their survival and future prosperity. From the data, we can see that children are embedded in the context of family, community, and wider society and their development is intricately tied to everyday practices (Monk, 2010; Rogoff, 2003). They are regarded as crucial to family survival, in that they help maintain household economies through their domestic labor in the home the enactment of communal responsibilities and even in street trade as evidenced in the roles, responsibilities and expectations evidenced in this study. Whilst children from this perspective are economically placed within the structure of society, the data suggests their position is tenuous and at times society is perceived to have failed them in terms of providing adequate care and protection (as suggested by teacher and child rights advocates, Clara and Francis).

Children's experiences yield different childhoods (James & Prout, 1997; 2015; Morrow, 2011) and different intelligences (Super et al., 2011) thus different biographies. Changes to the social structure of a society have a profound effect on children, and Sierra Leone like many African countries has experienced changes that have shifted both thinking and practice in relation to childhood. Whilst there is not scope in this thesis to discuss the historical evolution of childhood and the many and wider implications of colonialism on the lives of people and society (Tuhawai, 1999) colonial division of the African continent imposed different world views and a foreign social structure that replaced existing institutions (Kanu, 2007; Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011; Tuhawai, 1999). This is evident in the ways children are perceived, valued, positioned, prioritized, and even educated in Sierra Leone.

Perception and position

The data in this study provided insights into the different ways children are viewed and positioned and the value and priority they are given. From my field observations which corroborate the interview data, it would appear children are generally highly valued (with the exception of one participant, who identified poverty as the reason children are not valued [neglected]). Some valued children for what they bring to the family in the here and now (emotional and social capital) and some for what they can become or contribute to, in the future (economic and cultural capital).

Changing parenting decisions

In this study, I was surprised to note that economic forces may influence perceptions of children and to what extent women will reconsider their decision to have children, weighing up the burden and economic responsibility involved in raising and educating them. During my interview with Fatmata she stated:

> *Because of poverty some of the women decide not to give (birth) children, because there is not … opportunity to take care of children … and those who decide to have children, they just decide to have few, maybe let me say like two or one. They stop. They decide to take prevention not to give children. They cannot able to afford to take care of the children, because when you give birth you have to take care of that particular child. You have to take care of the schooling. Maybe … you will not like your child stay at home whilst the others are going to school, so you have to take care of that. But if you don't have money to take care of your child you will decide not to give birth. (FTW/L11–20).*

Historically, the literature supports changing economic paradigms related to children, which may impact on parental priorities. Boakye-Boateng (2010) draws on the way colonialism transformed the economy in Ghana, resulting in a different perception of children. Boakye-

Boateng (2010) posit that children in Ghana, pre-colonization, were seen as an economic asset and having more children was regarded as a positive contribution to society and even to one's wealth. Colonialism and the introduction of globalization, resulted in a new economy of being which now deems children as an economic liability (Boakye-Boateng, 2010). In other words, in the push for a progressive economic future, children have now become a financial burden to families.

The decision to reduce the family size or simply not have children is becoming a global phenomenon which has already begun repositioning children in households that now have more aging adults and fewer children. Changing priorities in OECD countries (associated with economic and educational opportunities for women) show a decrease in childbirth, thus reducing the average household size (OECD, 2011). This decline has resulted in almost no OECD country maintaining a total fertility rate above the population replacement rate of two children per women (p. 48). Whilst such declining birth rates are not as yet a growing trend in Africa, priorities may be shifting decision–making – not from a *Rights-based* approach but rather from a *mitigating circumstantial* approach, in order to cope with family poverty and the financial burden of raising and educating children. It can be argued that some women in Sierra Leone demonstrate the extent to which they value children by reducing the number of children they choose to have.

Whilst changing economic and societal patterns continue to reposition children, cultural traditions are also impacting on the way children are raised. Results from the interview with Peter indicate how his own childhood experiences (habitus) influenced his child rearing practices as a parent. Bourdieu states that habitus is visible through the ways we enact practice (Swartz, 2002) and this is evident in Peter's narrative where he shared his experiences of boyhood initiation into the Poro secret society (which occurred against his wishes). This

traditional cultural practice left him with a deep sense of disempowerment declaring several times throughout our interview, *"I am a victim".* At the same time, the habitus served as a catalyst for transformational change. Peter's rejection of what in essence, is a historically and cultural embedded structure, was not blindly reproduced. By choosing not to transmit this harmful practice, he was acting upon his own habitus to transform the childhood experiences from his past into better childhoods for his children. Peter stated: *"I am quite different, I don't like this. But since this has happened, none of my children will EVER … so you see"* (*PPW/L145–146).* Looking at Peter's example through a Bourdieuian lens of habitus as deeply internalized dispositions, mental schemas, skills, perceptions, and expectations that correspond to the structuring properties of early socialization (Swartz, 2002) does not imply that one is locked into such early childhood structuring *structures* that correspond to the expectations of society in adulthood. A person is not an automaton, for there exists flexibility and action through habitus and this can be empowering as was the case for Peter. As individuals we internalize and externalize habitus and we have the capacity to produce new things, transforming passivity into activity through determination and self-will (Hage, 2011). In Peter's case, Bourdieu's idea that "actors act strategically and practically rather than as conformists to external sets of rule" (Swartz, 2002, p. 625) resonates with notions of *social gravity* (Hage, 2011) where practice is the lived experience and social agents are not passive receptors but agents in motion pushing forward.

Kinship care and a collective habitus

The concept of kinship care is an important factor relevant to the growing narrative of early childhood in Sierra Leone, shedding light on the nature of relationships, the formation of a collective habitus and how children's resilience and adaptability can mobilize capital. Kinship

care is understood differently throughout the world but Nandy, Selwyn, Farmer, and Vaisey's (2011) definition best describes kinship care as it exists in Sierra Leone:

> In western societies biogenetic inheritance plays an important part in defining who kin are: the idea that kin are defined by 'shared blood'. In other parts of the world, this view does not hold. Godparents, clans, and even neighbours can all be seen as kin (Nandy et al., 2011, p. 2).

Kinship care is not just a west African practice. It is common among many AfricanAmerican communities; Scannapico and Jackson (1996, as cited in Kang, 2007) in the United

Kingdom (Nandy et al., 2011), South Africa (Assim, 2013) as well as Australia (Kiraly & Huphreys, 2011). In Australia, for example, non-parental care has been informally embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture for centuries with a growing increase in kinship care in indigenous communities (Kiraly & Huphreys, 2011) and not always for positive reasons. Whilst there are increasing debates on the moral and protective obligations of caring for children who are orphaned, displaced or in extremely vulnerable circumstances (Save the Children UK, 2007) especially within an African legal and socio-historical framework (Assim, 2013) the data in this study has viewed it from a sociological lens, which is reliant on the structures of relationships (Kang, 2007).

Studies such as Boakye-Boateng's (2010) analysis of traditional child rearing practices in Ghana demonstrate support for this traditional practice. Children were left in the care of nonparental caretakers, and "one can request a child from a sister to alleviate loneliness" (p. 110).

In Sierra Leone, Francis who oversees the Catholic preschools in both urban and rural districts explains this countrywide phenomenon in the interview data:

> *Because in the African setting, maybe my Aunt will come, she needed me, she has not been … she has not been fortunate to have a child and when she comes, maybe my mother have 5 of us, then she ask her to give me to her. That is a transition period. I'm leaving my home to go and stay with my aunt. (FNGO/L136–139)*

Being cared for by other kin is deemed an acceptable practice in Sierra Leone and so it becomes crucial for young children to develop enduring and durable dispositions which can incline them to better adapt to such changing life circumstances. Francis advocates that early childhood is the most optimum time to acquire such dispositions and children should be socialized to adapt to such changing social structures in preschool (FNGO/L142–145).

Despite Francis adamantly stating, that she is a *"child rights activist"* (FNGO/ L10) she did not view this practice as a negative or un-regulated system of care requiring institutional intervention or even child protection. Neither did she see this as a matter of simply choice. The individual agent (in this case the child) develops a habitus in response to the objective conditions (structures) it encounters, therefore, social life cannot be understood as simply the aggregate of individual behaviour (Jenkins, 1992) neither can it be viewed as an individual totally autonomous habitus. As Bourdieu states:

> The lines of action suggested by habitus may very well be accompanied by a strategic calculation of costs and benefits which tend to carry out at a conscious level the operations which habitus carries out in its own way. We can always say that individuals have choices as long as we do not forget that they do not choose the principles of these choices. (Jenkins, 1992, p. 77)

Decisions surrounding kinship care are therefore, made on the basis of others selfinterests, and can be argued as meeting both a strategic and/or socio-emotional or economic need that according to Webb et al. (2002) is more than just in the individual's best interest. If we view the habitus as operating on a kind of developmental continuum, then such choices

coupled with changing priorities for parents, diverse family structures such as step parenting (described in the interview with Clara) are shaping different developmental biographies for young children which clearly do not neatly fit into Article 25 of the Childs Right Act (2007) that declares *every child has the right to grow with up with their parents.* Such decisions are based on historical traditions from the past as well as emerging priorities in the present. As Bourdieu adds (as cited in Reay, 2004), "the subject is not instantaneous ego of a sort of singular cogito, but the individual trace of an entire history" (p. 434). This movement backwards and forwards (past and present) appears not to be at odds with society's expectations of children as they are positioned and repositioned to meet the needs of their extended family and community. For children in Sierra Leone, different biographies do yield different habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) however, the individual habitus is "never more than a deviation from a collective habitus" (Swartz, 2002, p. 645). Although Bourdieu was referring to classes of experiences and classes of habitus, we can infer from this complex inter-play that children absorb a sense of place in the social order of life *(belonging*) and develop an understanding of inclusive and exclusive variances (*positions)* in social hierarchy which according to Swartz (2002) are internalized from a young age. One's position in life expressed in Fatmata's remark: *"But for the girl child … she have to get marry"* exemplifies the doxical variances not made at a conscious level but rather the taken for granted, inherently natural and generally shared by the society as a whole (Siisiainon, 2000) kind of way that collective habitus operates.

We can therefore, conclude that early childhood in Sierra Leone incorporates a collective habitus which is a product of early childhood experiences and a particular form of socialization within the family and immediate community (James & Prout; 1997, Morrow, 2011; Qvortrup, 1997). We can also infer that this collective habitus, is not always driven by the self-interest of the parent/s or simply a struggle for one's own survival but rather a collective

way of being (Ebrahim, 2012) within a community of practice (Monk, 2010). The child from this perspective is born into a much broader socio-historical environment and socialized into a communal way of existing in society (Diptee & Klein, 2010). This was well evidenced in this study and observed in my role as youth leader where teenagers were constantly moving between uncles, aunties, and neighbours households. Such variances according to Reay (2004) make the habitus a compilation of both collective and individual trajectories driven biologically and environmentally through the body and social experiences.

Kinship care and capital

Kinship ties can contribute to certain forms of capital, whereby the physiological bond, the feeling of closeness to other significant adults creates not only emotional capital but a wider human network of resources which children can draw upon in the accumulation of social capital and use to their advantage in later life (Siisiainen, 2000). Through a Bourdieuian lens, it can be argued that kinship care can serve to facilitate the accumulation of emotional and social capital. For example, the motivation of a childless aunt to take on the care of a child as discussed earlier would require a certain amount of investment, such as time, emotion, energy and resources in the child's development. Existing in a habitual state of readiness for change not only reflects a closer transmission of the dominant cultural and social expectations of society in Sierra Leone, but at the same time, "individuals connected with dense social networks are more likely to hoard social capital" (Kang, 2007, p. 576).

Kinship care despite its limitations, not only extends connections with other extended family and community members, in the process it mobilizes capital. It can also act as a protective mechanism in readiness for change and mitigating life circumstances such as death and homelessness, thus once again, providing evidence of the diverse childhoods of children

experienced by children in Sierra Leone. There are however, concerns associated with kinship care.

Tensions in kinship care

Kinship care arrangements do not always produce positive outcomes for children. Whilst they may support the notion of w*ee-ness,* involving shared meanings in and through family practices (Monk, 2010) and such arrangements connect children to places and things beyond the immediate nuclear family, there are tensions associated with kinship care. As stated in the previous chapter, the communal emphasis of others taking care of children described in Temne language as *Kombra* does not always imply the practice is in the best interests of the child. On the one hand, the reciprocal carer/child relationship, where reliance on emotional, social and domestic needs are mutually met, expands children's social networks and helps develop dispositions of flexibility and resilience and can even secure protection, should the loss of parents leave them orphaned. On the other hand, kinship care arrangements can create constraints for children. Clara spoke of the challenges of children coming to school without basic writing materials because the adults caring for them *"are not interested"* and so neglect unravels. Clara explained that at times adults from the city take on the care of children from the country reluctantly as they are not always in a position to financially support the child but will not refuse the request due to societal expectations.

> *They go and take from the provinces bring them, and told them that they are going to put them to school, so when they come they forget about them, they don't ask if they get books, pencil or not (CTF/330–332).*

As Reay (2004) states "current circumstances are not just there to be acted upon, but are internalized and become yet another layer to add to those of early socialization" (p. 434). As such, children are expected to adapt to their changing circumstances whether they derive

positive or negative outcomes and such experiences remain embedded in the ongoing biographies of childhood.

Industrious childhoods

For many children in Sierra Leone the need to develop a habitus rooted in industrious life-skills is a must, not only as preparation for the future (*becoming)* but as a survival skill for the present (*being*). Cultural historical and economic structures have influenced the individual agent (the child) who is steeped in traditional practices. The impact of modernization is now shifting priorities in Sierra Leone, paving the way for parents whose aim is more than just day to day survival, to actively participate in changing economic and social systems. The need to develop new skills in order to manage cash economies, urban migration, and the expectation that children must attend schooling (with all its expenses) has an impact on parental priorities and children contribute to these new priorities.

Defined by Nsamenang, (2011) as "child's work" (p. 238) an industrious childhood is highly valued in Sierra Leone and the data shows this reoccurring narrative, found in the interviews from both urban and rural western district. The word *"training"* was frequently used by the participants to describe the skills children were developing and is further corroborated by examples from my field notes, where domestic duties and social responsibility are a collective obligation both at home and at school.

> Field notes (31 July 2014)
> *I watched from the bridge as young children some as young as five, went down to the stream and filled their buckets with water placing them on their tiny heads perfectly balanced as they made their way back to their compound.*
> *My observation from last week where grade 2 children at waterloo school pumped water from the well to wash the lunch plates surprised me. I was thinking*

in terms of wasted school time to do chores that adults should do so children can study more.

The literature concurs that in Africa, industrious childhoods are part of children's training for responsibilities they will be expected to play in future as adults and parents in society (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011). In Sierra Leone, responsibility training that puts children in charge of tasks (including the care of younger siblings) is not viewed as child labor despite some parts of western societies viewing it as such (Feeny & Boyden, 2004; Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011). Neither is it a breach of the Convention on the Rights of the child (1989) and the African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child (Organization of African Unity, 1999) which actively supports children's participation at different levels. The perception of children as competent and capable beings able to take on responsible roles at an early age, with the primary orientating disposition to learning, being participatory not instructional (Garcia, Pence, & Evans, 2008) is a highly valued way of learning for children in Sierra Leone.

Under the tree learning

Another way of learning, described by one participant as "under-the-tree learning" recognizes that young children develop competence in certain skills through informal learning. This type of learning occurs alongside knowledgeable others (adults and peers) and has Vygotskian undertones (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Fatmata describes process orientated hands on experiences as common rural practices:

Children will learn with their, with their parent, or with other children … they use sticks to plant, to make them like mat, some of them use knife to split them, make them flatter and they spread them use rope, especially the ups area (rural),

they make these things like mat, use rope on them … children like six years of age. (FTWL 150–156)

Results from other interviews show the way industry is enacted in children's lives through practical, cognitive, and creative experiences. Children learn to cook *(FTW/L138–147)* to wash their own clothes *(PPW/L188–193*) to peddle goods in the street *(CTF/L346–348, FNGO/L11–12)* to clean *(FNGO/L47–50)* and to carry and draw water *(FN 31/7/2014)* and still find time to devise their own games to play *(FTW/L100–104.* Despite the fact that a picture of young children as competent, capable, creative, and intelligent social agents is unfolding, this picture of children is not evident in school systems. Rather as Clara posits, it exists in the home and community (which she defines as *"under-the-tree learning")*. Enmeshed in socially responsible intelligence and social cognition (Serpell, 1984), Afrocentric knowledge and skill bases are yet to be accepted and appropriately weaved into a global science of human development (Serpell, 1984; Super et al., 2011) and in the case of Sierra Leone they have yet to be incorporated into mainstream formal pre and lower primary curriculum. It appears that situated intelligence rests in indigenous and industrious knowledge, creativity; hands-on process-driven activities and collaborative learning appear to be relegated more to home and community than to formal schooling.

Consideration of the way young African children think and learn which is accrued from rich socio-historical fusions in the here and now, should be enmeshed into all preschool curriculum, pedagogy and practices thus creating a bridge between informal and formal learning, not a road block. There were gaps between what Francis described as *purely practical* preschool curriculum and my own classroom observations in pre-lower primary schools. I observed few opportunities for practical active learning tasks and topics such as culture and society and environment, were derived from social studies primary school syllabus. Whilst early

childhood teachers adapted their instructional approaches they were still expecting children to rote learn as young as three years of age, in preparation for end of term "tests".

Pedagogical Insights

The current nature of formal early childhood education is further discussed here in relation to past/ present tensions in curriculum content and teacher goals and priorities. In particular, I focus upon my interview with Francis as it highlighted the contrasts between formal and informal learning and how the habitus internalizes master dispositions that carry into the present. Francis, who oversees catholic preschools, is not aware that she carries symbolic capital in the field of formal early education due to her position or how her habitus (a consequence of material experiences and early socialization) has shaped her present pedagogy and practice. As habitus develops, structure and agency become a co-dependent system involving a cognitive/mental system of structures embedded within collective ways of knowing and doing (Ebrahim, 2012). This can serve to transform or enslave both the individual and society at large but the shaping of citizens so they can shape society is not simply a matter of repetition or reproduction. Bourdieu for example, is careful to stress both the inherited and innovative relationship of habitus (Swarz, 2002) which can act to both reproduce and transform. It could be argued that the habitus acts as either a constraint or a possibility.

For Francis, who spent most of her life '*up-country'* and raised her own children and grandchildren in Waterloo district, she has been shaped by an internalized early childhood habitus which influenced her own parenting style and her pedagogical practices as a preschool teacher and administrator. She travels to urban and rural districts overseeing catholic preschools and explains at length the catholic *"purely African"* preschool curriculum that she had major influence in designing. Francis explains that it is a country-wide curriculum: *"we created it – launched it in 2002 and we are using it all over the country" (FNGO/L185–186*). It is as Francis

describes, *a non-academic curriculum* that reflects *the learning for life skills* that she claims are very much a part of early childhood education and care. In explaining why the curriculum is not focused on academics she stated: *"Because our work is not academic, it is more practical orientated"* (NGO/L207–209). Francis further explains that any catholic preschool whether in the city or country will teach the same content in the same way indicating homogeny in both content and practice.

It could be argued that Francis is unconsciously and habitually reproducing a preschool curriculum (in catholic preschools at least) resting in the past, without considering the evolving needs and priorities of a developing country and the global trends in educative sciences. Francis' approach fails to consider the "social conditions of possibility" (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 282) that can emerge from mobilizing one's social past through self-socio-analysis. Whilst a curriculum for transformation must be meaningful and reflect the lived experiences of children, it must also consider the *effects and limits* of those lived experiences. In other words, a curriculum designed to reflect children's histories and biographies but also their geographies, within a global and ever moving landscape can facilitate possibilities for transformation on a personal and a structural level.

Despite the cultural and social capital that Francis holds to influence curriculum design, she has not used her power and position in the field of preschool education to critically challenge existing structures or reflect on the possibilities for incorporating other curriculum models. This is mainly because she is unaware she even holds such power. The unquestioning *doxa* that continues to maintain the socially acceptable misconception that *this is the way we do things here* (Wacquant, 2006) operates at an unconscious level and so never disrupts the status quo, unless awakened to alternatives. As Agbenyega, (2015) states: "people in rural communities come to new understandings through examining their own habitus, capital and fields and it is

this examination that leads to action, that confronts existing dominant societal structures, institutional and technocratic knowledge" (p. 28). Educators such as Francis fail to activate change because they accept the *illuso* unquestionably believing that her preschool model is worthy of reproduction in rural and urban preschools. Whilst it can be argued that in rural areas it is necessary to design and implement a curriculum that reflects the current needs and realities of society, whether it be domestic chores, gardening, planting, weaving, and other practical skills (described in the data), preschool education can and should, offer such content but much more. Curriculum must produce diverse forms of cultural capital derived from learning experiences that enact education for transformation or children will have difficulty navigating cultural capital in fields of education into the future. This can be achieved by drawing on the cultural and symbolic capital of the local community (Agbenyega, 2015) and reflecting on ways of adopting a generative curriculum (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011) where content learning and process learning are complimentary, culturally and contextually meaningful, and relevant and at the same time encompass global knowledge bases. This would require critical reflexivity (Bourdieu, 2003) in order to bring the unconscious habitus to a conscious level (Webb et al., 2002) in order to challenge the *doxa* that preschool has to be purely practical or purely academic.

If we compare Francis' views with those of Fatmata below (who is also from Waterloo) we begin to see Fatmata demonstrating a changing habitus consistent with Bourdieu's notion that the habitus can be transformed by changed circumstances, expectations and/or aspirations (Jenkins, 2002). Fatmata's desire to gain cultural capital through professional practices and increased knowledge bases demonstrates she is on a developmental trajectory. Fatmata reflects on her own needs for professional development, content knowledge, and teaching resources:

I am just saying we need more encouragement; we need more teaching, because some of us we are lack of knowledge, so we need people to come around and teach us, so that we know what to do (FTWL/170–176).

Our own curriculum is different from other countries: we don't have opportunity for computers, we don't have you know, toys, because some of them [children] using toys when they are young they use these things to [be] creative, to develop their brains. But for us here we don't have, we only use manual things (FWT/L 186–190).

Shifting priorities in the country are demanding more from ECDE programs. Africa's unique social ecology must be integrated into school curricula and weaved into formal education in a way that African values can be used to explore universal foundational skills such as reading, writing, science, mathematics etc. One structure or type of education (practical) should not be at the expense of the other (academic) and one type of intelligence (social cognition) should not be less valued than another type (science cognition). This is best achieved when the co-existence of tradition and innovation, communication and adaptability and group responsibility are all valued and deemed necessary for academic success within a global community (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011). Such structure and agency synergies, characterized by a shared perspective on the world and a common set of values which Bourdieu defines as a *collective habitus* (Webb et al., 2002) suggests possibilities for educational transformation in Sierra Leone.

In summarizing the question on the nature of early childhood development and education the findings conclude that childhood is steeped in traditional practices, routines and industrious skills and knowledge is embedded within the context of family, kinship ties, and community. Childhood on the ground in Sierra Leone is relational and intergenerational. Roles and responsibilities assigned to children enable them to actively participate and contribute to the wellbeing of the family even though at times this is at the expense of their own wellbeing. It is these very roles, responsibilities and dispositions, shaped through a collective habitus that shed

light on the nature of what ECDE looks feels and sounds like. Informal learning contributes greatly to the developmental process of learning and the acquisition of skills, abilities, and situated knowledge bases but they are yet to be woven into formal learning and early childhood curriculum.

Question 2. What are the facilitators and barriers to early childhood education in Sierra Leone?

One of the key focuses of this study has been to identify the barriers and facilitators to early childhood development and education. Whilst I have categorized both under separate headings, the data indicates that facilitators can also act as barriers and vice versa, meaning the discussion does not always fit neatly under the two categories.

Facilitators

The findings in this study show that human capital exists in the form of children and adults who are facilitators of ECDE. Children as active social agents are able to mobilize their own agency and contribute to their own learning and development. The participants interviewed expressed advocacy for children and for preschool education and some demonstrated how they are individual change agents. In addition educational reforms both globally and locally have helped raise the profile of ECDE in the country acting as a facilitator toward the advancement of ECDE (on paper) in spite of constraints due to policy and implementation gaps.

Child agency

Child agency not only acts as a facilitator for learning and development it has influenced the way international educational reforms recognize the important role children can play as facilitators of change. The data in this study also indicates that child agency mobilizes social capital, suggesting it has potential to be converted into other forms of capital, under the right conditions.

Child agency is being recognized globally as an agent of change. The new Sustainability Development Goals (2015) have targeted ECDE as a priority into the 21st century, recognizing that children are agents of change who have the ability to channel their competencies in order to contribute and drive transformation in the world. ECDE programs can facilitate that change as the United Nations Secretary-General (Ki-moon, 2015) states: "The Sustainable Development Goals recognize that early childhood development can help drive the transformation we hope to achieve over the next 15 years" (p. 1). Children in Sierra Leone are already making their mark as discussed in question 1 and are very much participants sharing in the constraints, challenges and possibilities of every-day life in Sierra Leone. Embedded in a collective habitus of *being* and *belonging* and valued by some, as custodians of tomorrow, they are both powerful and powerless. The data in this study, strongly suggests that child agency embodies traditions handed down through family, culture and society and through active participation in society, children are able to mobilize social capital.

For Africa, the sociology of children as capable agents has been in existence since civilization (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011) however, it is only recently that a new sociology of childhood has emerged in the West, (James & Prout, 1997; Morrow, 2011; Sorin, 2005; Woodrow & Press, 2007) which emphasizes children's agency and explains the various ways through which their interactions with adults and each other "produces, reproduces, challenges, and transforms the nature of childhood and society" (Leonard, 2005 p. 607). In sociology, this has been codified as a *'new paradigm of childhood'* (James & Prout 1997), where children are perceived as social actors shaping as well as being shaped by their circumstances and environment, as such, viewed not as future potentials but as valuable contributors in the here and now (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998).

Whilst I have discussed various strands of child agency in chapters 2 and 3, the data in chapter 5 has added to such ideas, found in both child rearing and pedagogical practice. The interviews and field notes revealed that it is in early childhood that children learn to become active and helpful members of society, where *pitching in* is a normal daily practice (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009). Such localized practices have international frameworks. Ebrahim (2012) claims the notion of child participation is grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the child (1989) and this "promotes the *being* view of children, where they are seen and respected as social actors in their lives" (p. 84). This sense of *being* related to what a child feels and does, is woven into the fabric of *belonging* based on attachments and social ties which emerged from the kinship and sibling care data. We begin to see how child agency acts as a facilitator in the field of ECDE and as a vessel in the acquisition of social capital, which in itself becomes a facilitator of social development.

Social capital

Discussions on social capital have predominantly focused on the acquisition of social capital accumulated by adults (Bourdieu, 1986; Leonard, 2005; Siisiainen, 2000). Changing paradigms of childhood however, are illuminating our understanding of children as active social agents *in their own right* (Diptee & Klein, 2010; Feeny & Boyden, 2004; James & Prout, 1997; Woodrow & Press, 2007) thus raising pertinent questions as to whether children have the ability to mobilize their own social capital and quite independent of adults. Whilst children in the western world may not be able to acquire large amounts of their own social capital independent of adults because they are restricted by society (protective laws, child regulations, parental restrictions etc.) in Sierra Leone, children have different opportunities to extend their social networks outside the traditional family settings and are given freedom to do so, as in the case of Fatmata's Saturday visit to her home by 4 year olds (FTW/295–297) discussed in chapter 5.

The examples below from the field notes demonstrate how children are pro-active and resourceful locators of their own social capital.

Field notes (20 June 2015)

A group of 15 children (ages 4–12) have been regularly attending the church at Syke Street in Freetown. When I enquired as to their parents, I was told by several different sources that the children do not come with adults. They arrive every Sunday morning at 9am, sit through the 1.5 hour service, and stay on for a cooked lunch afterwards. Children as young as four years of age come unattended by even an older sibling (which is a more usual tradition) and they are clean and well groomed. I asked the younger children if their parents get them ready in the morning and they proudly explained that they lay their clothes out at night, wake up and wash and dress themselves and make their own way to church. Around 1pm they make their way out of the compound un-accompanied.

Competent and capable, (perhaps due to circumstances) of sourcing their own networks, they can become facilitators in their own right to social capital which (on this occasion) can be transferred into economic and educational capital.

Field notes (28 July 2015)

Some of the youth fellowship kids appear to quite resourceful since they joined the group. James (16 years) cooks and sells food to me and also offers lessons in karate for a small fee at his compound. Juliana (17 years) washes clothes for the volunteers for a fee of 20,000 Leones and Nicholas (15 years) appears to be quite resourceful in convincing others to help with his school fees (Joanna from Australia).

Bourdieu's claim that social capital is never pursued for its intrinsic value but for its ability to be converted into other more highly desirable forms of capital (Leonard, 2005) may be true in the case of the children from my field notes. The motivation to attend church services, to belong to a youth group etc. may be driven by their desire for other materialistic and economic resources, such as clothes, food, school supplies and money as well as educational opportunities

to attend the mission schools. The data certainly suggests that children are able to expand their social networks much wider than the family, in order to access different resources and this is quite independent of their parents/guardians. Whether children can easily convert or exchange one form of capital for another – for example, social capital for economic capital – is not evident from this data. Globally, discussions surrounding social capital in the field of early childhood studies (Kang, 2007; Leonard, 2005; Morrow, 2011; Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011) demonstrating the short-term social emotional benefits, which could lead to longer-term cultural and educational benefits under the right structural conditions.

Advocates

In spite of a lack of organized social action, another facilitator of ECDE is advocacy. The data shows that early childhood education is highly valued and philosophically there is support for preschool education despite the many constraints in provision. Taking Bourdieu's lead that social action should be more than philosophical speculation, I will discuss advocacy as a form of praxis acting to transform the current state of ECDE, beginning with human capital as evidenced by the participants in this study.

All the participants interviewed, saw the value of early good starts, and advocated for the advancement of formal early learning programs. During the interviews, parents shared their experiences and recollections of childhood memories in relation to their own educational hardships, suggesting that these very constraints have driven their advocacy in advancing education for their own children. The comments from parents show that they value ECDE and demonstrated the efforts they would go to ensure educational outcomes for their children thus portraying their intent as individual agents of change for their own children. Teachers mostly perceived that parents were interested in forming home school partnerships and parents interviewed demonstrated how they acted as facilitators between formal and informal learning.

Jariatu weaved formal learning into home life by using her social networks (her brother-in-law) who was *"once a school boy"* to support her child's early academic learning. Peter expressed advocacy for education in the way he supported the home school relationship and encouraged his children to share and revise what they had learned at school. Teachers were strong advocates of young children perceiving themselves as both educators and caregivers (validated by Peter), spending time in and out of pre/primary school with children, and providing them with food and school supplies. This suggests that teachers see their work as a worthy cause with Clara defining it as *a sacrificial job* involving the care education and the protection of children.

Both parents had high hopes for their children, valuing the benefits of early education for the child and the family. Peter, stated his preference for the current formal pre-primary school program (at his school) where there are educational materials and play equipment and qualified (TC and HTC) teachers, stating *"I believe the formal education for now is greater than the former one. I prefer the formal education now" (PWP/L51–52.* Jariatu's perception was that her 3 year old child can learn more at preschool stating, *"I want her to gain little knowledge when she goes [preschool] she will gain knowledge in the head before school". (JPF/L212).* In order to ensure her daughter had the best educational head start, she was even prepared to make basic food sacrifices: *"even what to eat is difficult because I want to send my child to school" [preschool] (JPF/L9–11).*

The teachers also advocated for preschool. Clara commented on the benefits she observed as a grade 1 teacher, comparing children who attended preschool prior to primary school. She valued their social/emotional conduct and conformity. In other words, early education meant they were better able to adjust to the behavioural expectations of primary school.

Well some of them who been to nursery before coming to this school they compose themselves they know how to compose. The others just came into the school, they just do things out of the way – that is one of the differences between them (CTF/L115–117).

Fatmata, on the other hand, focused her advocacy more on parental inclusion and collaboration, viewing this as a vital ingredient for ownership and belonging. A family's level of social capital and socio-economic position affects how they engage with their children's school and Nash (1990) points out that "success at school is directly linked to the cultural capital transmitted by the family milieu" (p. 438). Fatmata saw nursery school as belonging to the parents and the role of teachers was to support them in belonging as it benefits not just the child but the community and the nation *(FTW/L70–72).* Fatmata was demonstrating in her own way how she can be a change agent within her own nursery class.

The public/private structural divide

Whilst the profile of ECDE has been raised through local as well as international blueprints (discussed in chapter 2) advocacy took on a more political slant for some participants. Although this can be regarded as a barrier in terms of the structural gaps between government policy and government action, Francis as a self-confessed *child advocate* gave voice to such critiques because social justice and equity principles were uppermost in her mind. Francis was critical of the lack of systemic monitoring and supervision of what she defined as *"mushroom"* private preschools. Her advocacy was for stricter regulatory guidelines and the introduction of National Standards to control the growth of the for-profit sector and improve the quality of ECDE *(FNGOL: 258–264*). However, economic constraints and market forces are pushing the government toward more private partnerships (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013) and corroborated by Dr D, indicating conflicting priorities between the public and private domains

of advocacy. The data shows a structural divide between two agenda priorities: one advocating neo-liberal principles and the other social justice principles. Dr D points out:

> *I think that increasingly we have to be looking at private/ public partnerships to see if there are private enterprises out there with some support to start to expand [preschool]. It's not going to be too attractive however, for privates outside of the urban areas. It's not going to be too successful in Sierra Leone in the poorer areas (DDGOVL: 64–69).*

The data has shown how early childhood education in Sierra Leone, and to some extent, ECDE advocates, find themselves in an intermediate social space which has been historically grounded between the private and public sectors (Vandenbroek et al., 2010). People are considered as partners in an ongoing dialogue but at the same time can act as "buffers between public and private spheres, silencing people" (p. 149). As such we see that public advocates have a voice but it cannot be heard without a platform. In Sierra Leone, the private sector appears to hold the economic capital which relegates the not-for profit sector to predominantly focusing on the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. As such it is the poor that are silenced and become voiceless (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). According to Soto (2000) there is a push to keep politics out of early childhood education despite the great divides of inequality and she claims that children "are the innocent victims caught in the trap of neoliberal economic policies and a parading social unconsciousness" (p. 75). Many teachers, parents and early childhood advocates in Sierra Leone, have yet to be provided with opportunities to participate in broad dialogue or consultation, which can facilitate a heightened consciousness about ECDE and this, renders them powerless to influence change. One could argue that preschool education is currently nothing more than *a voice crying out in the wilderness.*

The advancement of ECDE in Sierra Leone can only happen if the polarities between structure and agency and public and private, narrow. Advocacy raises awareness but that takes

time to evolve into action. Even one of the most advanced quality early education countries in the world such as New Zealand, ranked 6th in the Economist Intelligent Unit (EIU) quality index (Fisher, 2012, p. 28) needed systemic and collaborative synergies between advocates from government public and private sectors. New Zealand's current model of education is a partnership of community/private management and government support and regulation. Early childhood education sits under the policy responsibilities of the Department of Education and is incorporated into the education structure of the country with the starting age defined as 3–5years (Kamerman, 2005). The government sets education policy and the Ministry of Education develops and oversees the education system, develops curriculum and assessment standards, provides funding and leads cross-government initiatives. This system has according to May (2006) taken *decades of persuasion* involving:

> Periods of effective and cohesive advocacy, that has not been afraid to take its case to the streets, alongside the usual strategies of persuasion, personal presence and pen (p. 3).

The data in this study provides a platform for advocates from public, private and government sectors to investigate models such as the New Zealand example. For transformation to occur however, it requires more than collaboration. To break down the conditions in which symbolic powers act to reproduce dominant structures such as privilege and poverty, Bourdieu argues that actors and their social movements require "both knowledge and subsequent action" (Siisiainen, 2000, p. 17) and in this case study it would seem that structure and agency are also requisites in transforming barriers to facilitators.

Barriers

There are many personal and structural barriers to ECDE that involve children, parents, teachers, and government. Poverty impacts on a personal and systemic level and its relationship

to different forms of capital will be discussed. Despite an abundance of social capital derived from relationships and connections in family community and society, lack of economic capital and an inability to accrue the right *type* of capital disempowers and systemically constrains the individual in the field of education. The current state of countrywide poverty and the lack of public spending on preschool also acts as a barrier to service provision. In addition the current structural constraints found in government that have held back the advancement of ECE will also be discussed.

Poverty and economic capital

Structural poverty and the lack of personal economic capital are major barriers to schooling and life opportunities for children in Sierra Leone. Parents attempt to find ways to overcome economic constraints but strategies are not always in the best interest of the child. Laws preventing the exploitation of child labour, as found in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ratified in Sierra Leone in 2002) and the Child Right Act (2007) provide limited protection for children in Sierra Leone. Child advocates like Francis, Fatmata and Clara were concerned about the level of neglect toward children by parents and kin and perpetual child labour (*CTF/L262–70; FNGO/L8–15)* however, they put this down to social forces such as family poverty and teenage pregnancy *(FNGO/L23–26; FTW/L138–147)* which drives parents to neglect their children. From my observations in the field, young children (as young as 5 years) in the capital city, are frequently engaged in some income generating transactions before/ after (and sometimes during) school hours. This mainly involves guiding blind adults through traffic and begging on their behalf (on a commission basis), being engaged as a petty trader e.g. selling water and other commodities or running errands for adults. The data suggests that factors such as poverty and unemployment are impacting on the ability of families to provide adequate food, shelter and protection for children, let alone the fees and supplies they

need to attend preschool. School age children have their own challenges too as they are forced to create their own economic opportunities and social networks outside of parental networks to support themselves and their families.

Similar findings conducted by Leonard (2005) in economically disadvantaged communities in Northern Ireland, found that children in dire circumstances use their social networks to access some form of economic capital. Leonard examined 150 households that managed poverty and the strategies they used to alleviate or cope with their situations, linking these strategies to social and economic capital. Similar to my own data, Leonard (2005) found that despite parental circumstances, education was highly valued and seen as a *way out* of poverty however, due to parental unemployment, parents could not afford the cost of schooling (purchase of school bags, uniform, shoes etc.) and so children took it upon themselves to create their own employment opportunities through independent social ties with adults in the community. Leonard (2005) cited examples of child employment which included running errands, babysitting etc., as a source of minor income (p. 616). This suggests that children are capable of practicing agency outside their parental/family networks, if not for future economic growth, at least as a survival strategy which was corroborated in my own field notes (*FN28/7/2015).* Feeny and Boyden (2004) add that benefits found in cross cultural research demonstrate "the position of children within the household often improves after they start contributing to household income" (p. 41) thus increasing emotional capital, which contributes to a deeper sense a belonging.

It can be argued that the accumulation of social capital can facilitate small amounts of economic capital and this empowers children to develop a *feel for the game* (Webb et al., 2002) in terms of how society operates to advance or restrict their potential. However, in essence, no

matter how hard children try to accumulate economic capital, it is not an easy commodity to accrue especially in Sierra Leone where more than 60% of the population living on less than US$ 1.25 a day and unemployment and illiteracy levels remain high, particularly among youth (UNDP, 2015). In addition from a child's perspective, according to Leonard (2005) "children's weaker position vis-à-vis adults in society may provide additional constraints to their ability to manage exchangeability between different types of capital" (p. 606). For the children in this data, the possibility of being able to manage exchangeability on a macro scale would prove challenging. It would require the capacity or ability to break through the fields of power controlled by various adult agents in order to activate the right kind of group memberships and social networks that can advance their economic and cultural capital. As Bourdieu asserts the *volume* of social capital possessed by a given agent, depends on the size of the network of connections he/she can effectively mobilize but also "the volume of capital possessed in his own right by each of those whom he is connected" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 89). This *volume* of social capital requires sophisticated strategic manoeuvring and whilst the data suggests that children do have the capacity to mobilize social capital, it remains to be seen if they carry the 'right type' of capital and whether they can strategically increase the volume of social capital or exchange it for other forms of capital – such as school capital to derive long term educational or economic benefits.

We begin to see that despite all good intentions and the resourcefulness of children in Sierra Leone, there are barriers to capital and especially cultural capital in pre and primary schools which impose its own specific determinants upon all who enter the field (Wacquant, 2006). Preschool currently operates in a way that excludes the majority of poor children and their parents, especially if they do not carry economic and the 'right' type of cultural capital.

Bourdieu's (1986) argument that convertibility of social capital is not just dependent on the quantity of cultural and economic capital held but whether people are positioned as inferior to other social members, therefore restricting accessibility. In examining the field of education more broadly, capital does not come from just one field; its power comes from relationships between fields (Webb et al., 2002) which tend to overlap and compete (government, school administration, tribe, language, housing etc.). It is the relationships between the fields that enact volume and valued capital, fused by an embedded middle class habitus which facilitates a certain understanding of how the education system works (Tzanakis, 2011). Without the right volume and type of combined social, cultural and economic capital, structural barriers such as chronic poverty, economics, illiteracy and cultural knowledge of what Tzanakas (2011) defines as "high-brow culture" (p. 77) education becomes a barrier perpetuating educational gaps which according to Vandenbroek, Coussee and Bradt (2010) begin in early childhood and grow with the education system. The notion of powerlessness resonated in the data not only from the perspective of parents of poverty but from teachers and advocates such as Francis, whose voices were not perceived to carry enough influence and power to transform the status quo.

Influence and power

The data shows that whilst teachers may have developed symbolic capital as they are respected as both educators and care-givers and perceived by parents to know more than parents *(PPW/L201–203)* their power and influence is subjective. For Clara, she is unable to derive the right type of social and cultural capital from her position as class teacher, to compete in the field of educational advancement. Clara's comment during the interview that she needs to be *"special"* in order to be considered for a promotion, demonstrates her lack of approved social networks and cultural capital. In addition, comments expressed by Francis and Clara

demonstrated that they perceived they have no influence or power in the field of educational administration to move things along. Whilst Clara's situation does not relate specifically to ECDE, we can see how social positions relegated to some, serve to create patterns of disempowerment to others. Clara states:

> *Ten years (waiting) to be senior teacher. Nobody care or going to ask. The head teacher supposed to recommend you, I ask for some ideas but when I went, there was no "yes", so I forget about it – I will not have that promotion. Some have already got that paper, I need to be special. (CTF/L 408–409).*

According to Bourdieu, society is a plurality of social fields where agents and their social position are located (Siisiainen, 2000). Being *special* implies being strategically placed in a position of power to hoard capital whether it be symbolic, cultural or economic (Bourdieu 1998). Whilst positions held in the field are a result of habitus, for Clara, the structure of her relations and past/present experiences have determined the spaces she is able to occupy in the field of school. Clara saw herself as unable to transform her current position from class teacher to head teacher, perhaps due to her limited knowledge of the internal power relations acting upon her in the field as well as a lesser value placed on the forms of capital she possessed. As Leonard (2005) states:

> The importance of social capital lies in its ability to be converted into other forms but convertibility is dominated by the powerful who position working class capital as having limited exchange value (p. 612).

We begin to see that systemic barriers exist to keep people *in their place* because social movement requires structural support. If what is of value to me is not of value to society at large then my capital is automatically de-valued giving me little or no bargaining power for advancement. Bourdieu however, saw the ability for individual transformation more

optimistically by the1990's where he posited that "actors and actors' social movements, will through knowledge and subsequent action, change the world" (Siisiainen, 2000, p. 17). This idea of social action driven by knowledge is expanded upon by Hage (2011) whose notion of social gravity, will be discussed in answering question 3. In returning to Clara's position, we are once again reminded that the habitus is not a closed book but rather a structuring structure incorporating dispositions that are constantly subjected to different experiences and new knowledge bases (Jenkins, 2002). Despite the fact that Bourdieu remains adamant in his stance that life is a struggle for domination and power and fields are spaces within society where positions can be contested (Siisiainen, 2000), the individual (as is the case with Clara) must be willing to fight for those spaces.

The field of government

Another barrier to early childhood education is government, which in spite of educational reforms, has created road blocks to education by maintaining the status quo and failing to meet its own targets for early childhood education. Both the data and government literature (chapter 2) corroborate that the bureaucratic system in Sierra Leone has failed to advance ECDE. Contributing variables, such as corrupt practices, administrative delays and limited investment (both human and economic) evidenced in the interview data in chapter 3, show that current administrative constraints are holding back the advancement of preschool education in the country. At the same time we see the potentiality for transformation and the role that government can play as a facilitator to ECDE if they apply the same economic priorities for gender equity as they do for preschool education. For example, progress has been made in relation to gender equity and schooling. Whilst the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) goal 2, *Achieve gender parity by 2005 and gender equity by 2015*, has not met target, the country has advanced in this area and based on the data – field notes from radio programs and interviews

with Fatmata and Clara (Chapter 3) – girls are now perceived as major contributors to nation building and their right to education is a priority being advanced by the government and especially the President and his wife (FTW/L390–400). The local goal identified in *An Agenda for Change* (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2008) which set out "to encourage girl child education" (p. 9) remains an on-going priority into the future and is included in the Education Sector Plan 2014–18 (MEST, 2013) and *The Agenda for Prosperity* (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013) implying that the collaboration between government structure and agency is what leads to transformation in the country.

Post-war Ebola barriers

As outlined in the literature review (chapter 2) the international target to expand and improve early childhood care and education set by the MDG's has not been met (*MDG African* Report, 2014) by the government. Given that the MDG's are designed to measure progress across the period of 1990–2015, Sierra Leone has experienced many constraints that have legitimately held back progress, especially during the first half of this time frame.

The civil war that started in 1991 and ended in 2002 left a bloody and brutal trail of destruction, staining the country for over a decade. Despite the country's fragile post war state and brutal past, it was experiencing a healthy reconstruction phase, most recently facilitated by the government poverty reduction strategies, *An agenda for change* (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2008) followed by *The agenda for prosperity* (2013). An "epic journey" into the future was advocated, with a sustained development plan incorporating "a stable economy, an inclusive, green, middle income country by 2035" and a promise that 80% of the population would be living above the poverty line (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013, p. 12). Sierra Leone indeed was making some progress. Ranked as one of the fastest growing African economies compared with China, India, and Brazil (*MDG African Report*, 2014, p. 13) it was once again hit by a

different war in 2014. Commonly referred to as the *invisible war*, Ebola struck West Africa and especially Sierra Leone with a vengeance, leaving yet another trail of tragedy in an already fragile underdeveloped country. According to the World Health Organization situational report, 2016 there are 14,124 Ebola cases recorded and 3,956 deaths in Sierra Leone. Ebola disrupted the whole fabric of society resulting in major economic, social, and educational set-backs and the impacts have been felt in education, agriculture, health, income, business, and the economy as a whole. Schools and higher education institutions closed their doors mid-2014 for 9 months and at the time there was no resuming time frame for schools and colleges to open. Agriculture was also affected as the usual planting season (July–August) was abandoned due to quarantine and lock down measures. The economy was left exceptionally vulnerable, with fiscal deficits including growth estimates at – 0.2%, food inflation at 8.5% and rising daily and a loss of household income totalling 30% (*Update Economic impact of Ebola epidemic*, 2014).

Such structural barriers have unavoidably created set-backs in the advancement of preschool education which will result in further post-Ebola recovery delays for the government. Other more systemic barriers in the form of bribery continue to perpetuate a culture of corruption which has remained constant throughout post-war and post-Ebola recovery stages.

Dishonest practices and delays

From the interview data, it would seem that corrupt practices operate top-down and bottom-up, involving teacher's administrators, and government authorities thus making bribery a structural and systemic epidemic in the country. Despite free primary education, administrators and teachers are still finding ways to collect money from parents, corroborated in my own field notes *(FN14/4/2013)* and the continued influx of ghost teachers (Guo, 2014) remains despite ministerial promises (Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone: Official Hansard Report, 2014) which have proven slow in changing such practices.

The Report on Basic Education (2006) in Sierra Leone highlighted some of the dishonest practices stating that:

> A huge quantum of monies destined to be paid as school subsidies were usually unaccounted for due to the corrupt practices of some school authorities and officials of Ministry of Education Science and Technology (p. 6).

Despite the eight year time lapse and the Global Education Monitoring report (2015) claiming that: "As of 2012, Sierra Leone had rooted out 1,000 ghost teachers with the aid of the Anti-Corruption Commission" (p. 254) parliamentary debates are still publicly condemning the epidemic of ghost teachers, with the Minister of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) stating:

> Today, we have ghost teachers, ghost schools, and ghost pupils. We have to fight these ghost elements and chase them to their respective tombs (Parliament of the Republic of Sierra Leone: Official Hansard Report 2014, p. 20).

Bureaucratic delays in processing recruitment applications is also forcing teachers to work without salary *(FNGO/L335; FNGO/L337–348)* and is most likely a contributing factor to petty corruption by teachers and administrators who create extra school charges not endorsed by government *(FTW/L74–77).* Educators such as Francis, remain hopefully optimistic that eventually teachers without salary will be paid *"no matter how long the day, how long the night will be, one day the run will raise … they (the government) will pay" (FNG/ L300).*

Bureaucratic delays

Another barrier to the advancement of ECDE is the delay in designing national standards and endorsing a national early childhood curriculum, According to Dr D, *"at the end of the day those who are experts in those areas who should be advising the ministry, we haven't been too*

successful in getting them" (DGOV/L 110–112). In discussing the lack of national standards for early childhood Dr D further states:

> We [the ministry] will not come out with the final stage just yet, because when you come out of that you have to be prepared to make sure there are resources to support that and the other things[experts] that should go along with that (DGOV/L 78–80).

A fear of advancing National Standards due to a lack of expertise is short sighted on the part of government as there exist several early childhood experts in the tertiary field of education (which I encountered through my own professional networks) who under the right conditions would assist in the process, indicating the issue may be more a lack of economic rather than human capital. The implications of such delays will continue to perpetuate overcrowded classes with open age entry points and continue to relegate ECDE to the back bench of policy and white paper trails in the anticipation that perhaps donor communities will invest where government is not prepared to.

Prioritized goals for ECDE in the Sierra Leone, *Education Sector* Plan, 2007–2015 (20070) were to increase public and private financial provision for early childhood. Two actions were identified for implementation. One was to increase the number of privately owned *childcare centres* (short term goal) and the other (long term goal) was for government to inject much needed funding to ECDE (p. 89). To date, the long term public goal has not been actioned and the push for Private Public Partnerships (PPP) to boost an injection of funds for ECE is currently deemed more of a government priority as expressed by Dr D: "*more of government resources should be focused to support of PPP's" (DGOV/L69).*

Such neoliberal priorities will continue to marginalize rural communities as there is no economic profit to be made from providing early childhood services to disadvantaged rural

communities as Dr D pointed out, *"it's not going to be too attractive however, for privates outside of the urban areas"* due to economic viability. This continues to place ECDE in rural areas in the hands of charitable/NGO agencies however, as Francis pointed out, even the Catholic mission charge fees for preschool (FNGO/L272–274). If the government continues to prioritize private public partnerships (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013), this will no doubt continue to perpetuate an in-balance of power and privilege and create accessibility only for those who have money to attend and those who have the money to start up ECDE services. As a result Sierra Leone could find itself in an intermediate space where the field of education in the same way as the field of business will favour those who already possess economic capital.

In concluding the answers to the question: what are the facilitators and barriers to ECDE, the data supports the literature that young children have the capacity to herd emotional, social, and cognitive capital (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Woodhead, 2006) through child agency. As evidenced, children are already facilitators of such capital through their social networks, competencies, and adaptable dispositions. Advocacy exists in the form of teachers and parents however, unless preschools become inclusive of all types of cultural capital found in all types of children and parents and teachers, the doors of access and equity will remain closed for those of less privilege and ECDE will become a field of social division acting to maintain the disadvantage of certain children (Webb et al., 2002). In poverty stricken Sierra Leone, the accumulation of economic and cultural capital is not easy to acquire, yet the paradox rests in the very nature of barriers such as poverty. As Nsamenang (2011) suggests "most African children are compelled by their impoverished circumstances to struggle to survive and make progress through their own agency" (p. 239). Ironically, it is this early stage in a child's life which is most neglected in Sierra Leone schooling structures (Nishimuko, 2007; OECD, 2012) and continues to be relegated to the backbench of nation building. Simply instituting early childhood

education (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013) is not enough in Sierra Leone and the role that children can play in the country's national development is discussed in this final question.

Question 3. What role do children play in the country's national development?

To some extent this question has been answered as discussed in response to the previous two questions on the nature of early childhood, the roles that children play in family and community and the facilitators and barriers to ECDE. In response to the questions related to what children currently contribute and how they can contribute to national development in the future, I address both questions as interrelational notions. Children's unique contributions to society are manifested socially, emotionally, physically, cognitively, and even at times, economically and their participation in society as active citizens, contributes to nation building in the here making citizenship an evolving process that begins in early childhood .

From the interview data we see that the government representative regards education as vital for the nation's development and investing in children's education is an investment in national development. Dr D claims that "*education looks at the children, not just from the individualistic point of view but how things can be made better for the nation as a whole"* (*DGOV/L13–16*). Children's development is intricately tied to national development and the way they think and learn, alone and alongside others implies they are contributing to their own developmental trajectories, thus advancing society. I argue that children's active participation in society and their contributions have yet to be valued on a macro scale and prioritized in Sierra Leone schooling systems. Results from this particular study have evidenced the way children are already contributing to national development in the here and now through active participation. Looking into the future, a closer appreciation of the *current role* that children play in national development and what they already bring to society (regardless of their circumstances) must be valued as part of a future strategic nation building plans.

The developing child

Child development is a fundamental element of national development and children are already advancing nations through their very existence, beginning with their contribution to a national science of child development. Neuroscientific research has evidenced that the first five years matter – for life (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Young & Mustard, 2008) and the long term economic and social benefits for investing in ECH programs are well documented and discussed in this thesis (Barnett & Nores, 2012; Heckman, 2006; Heckman et al., 2012). The interview data in this study does not point to traditional ideas of long term investment in young children's development and learning with a latter return on investment (for the nation). Rather children, through their own agency are already *at work* for the nation. For the Sierra Leonean child, development occurs as part of everyday life, whether it be on the back of a begging mother or the back of an akada (motor cycle) in the care of an older sibling or in the care of a kin, in the market selling or in the school setting. Learning and development occurs in all spaces and places but this is yet to be fully appreciated and validated as national development.

The long-established idea that child development is a phenomenon of natural biological progression has now been expanded to incorporate contextual and cultural development (Rogoff, 2003) and even economic factors (Soto, 2000). Western beliefs about the nature of childhood are not in-fact universal (Ebrahim, 2012; Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011) and Sierra Leone has its own unique context and cultural experiences, its own values, beliefs and social structures that impact on children's growth and development. How African parents think about their children and how they enact them in their parenting also impacts on a child's development (Super et al, 2011) as discussed earlier in this chapter and evidenced in the field notes below.

Child development theory in Africa has been dominated by concepts provided by western psychology and this has permeated teacher training institutions and courses

(Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011). My own experiences as a lecturer in Sierra Leone, teaching the child development course (HTC) also validates such practices.

> Field notes (31 July 2014)
> *During a lecture on child development to ECE students who are completing the HTC course, I was explaining the concept of a cot and a nursery room as a common, white middle class parenting practice in Australia. The students interrupted me with great concern. They told me an infant should be at all times with its mother/aunty/kin, and this practice where an infant sleeps in separate room is child abuse and neglect of infants.*

The science of child development continues to remain linked to biological factors and immaturity (Nsamenang, 2011) and has been mostly driven by the work of Piaget, which is based on a series of pre-determined stages leading the child to logical competence (James & Prout, 1997). This homogenous slant has dominated early childhood developmental discourses globally (Pence & Nsamenang, 2008) and has left little space for African voices and even less room for notions of other forms of cognition, social autonomy and the type of active participation found in the home and community. According to James and Prout (2015), "children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives and the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live" (p. 4) and it is such active involvement via child agency that has been evidenced in this study which demonstrates children's contributions to nation building.

Children's contributions

Whilst children's development appears to move at its own pace, it is measured by the level of autonomy and responsibility handed down by adults as well as children's own freedom to determine readiness and maturity. This freedom to choose appears to be highly respected as supported in the field notes, where the children at church (some as young as five years) were

given the freedom to establish their own social networks driven not by chronological readiness but their own assessment of social maturity. Ebrahim's data (2012) in South Africa concurs that children's participation in social life is not determined by age but by specific roles actively encouraged by mothers and grandmothers from as young as three years of age. From this perspective, we begin to see the concept of social autonomy, as a trajectory in motion (Hage, 2011) where social agents (children) determine the speed. This kind of trajectory is both social and developmental, as children regard themselves as capable of acting strategically within any given situation providing they are given social autonomy. Thus further suggesting that children are active social agents and a propelling force already in motion at a young age. Whilst young children do not have the mental schemas to strategize the same way adults can, they bring their own unique intelligences to situations and problems. This has yet to be harvested in formal early childhood settings that are very teacher directed and content driven; however, under the right conditions, preschool can encapsulate the powerful mental and creative contributions children have to offer. African concepts of intelligence, including social cognition and social responsibility intelligence (Super et al., 2011) have been evidenced through the interviews and field observations noted in the way children learn through observation, hands-on experience, by taking care of themselves and others, by participating and accepting responsibilities and by playing and designing games, all of which have served to make them co-contributors in their own development and learning. As Nsamenang (2011) states: "I see the [African] child as both a 'manager' and instigator of her or his own development" (p. 236). This kind of understanding of child development must be transmitted into the schooling context because we cannot separate the social context in which children live and learn (Soto, 2000) for this is what shapes a child's performance and success into the future.

For now, it appears that *under the tree* learning environments are the spaces in which children are most active and engaged in their own learning, where development stresses the creative production (agency) rather than the pre-determined social behavioural norms governed by teacher rules and discipline (which appear to be more highly valued by the teachers in this data). Quality preschools must validate cognitive differences and multiple ways of knowing based upon children's daily realities in order to understand how the *politics of cognition* (Soto, 2000) works as this "can help democratize intelligence in ways that transform children's lives" (p. 81). This however, would require teachers to be trained and qualified in early childhood pedagogy and practice and understand the politics of social justice principles in their classrooms. Teachers who are able to create culturally appropriate learning environments that connect children to their past present and future (Kanu, 2007) and fuse the formal with the informal (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011) by scaffolding the dispositions learned in the home and community, such as social autonomy, resilience, intellectual and practical every day knowledge bases. Currently, it appears that school settings value children's conformity not autonomy and this could result in restricting children's holistic development and creative potential once they enter educational institutions.

Government contribution

Government policy and priorities has influenced the way ECDE has been prioritized which in turn influences the role that children can play in national development. It would seem that the rights of the child treaty which has now been incorporated into the country's Child Rights Act (2007) has not contributed greatly to children's role in national development and has raised awareness on the right to education for all children. In addition, despite competing priorities, government policies such as *An Agenda for Change* (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2008) did position '*Education*' as an important priority, ranked fourth in order of strategic priorities,

with *Power Supply, Productivity* and *Transportation*, the first three respectively. This gave some attention to the value of early childhood education however, less than five years after this strategic plan was materialized in *The Agenda for Prosperity* (2013) which is Sierra Leone‘s Third Generation Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2013–2018) was introduced and political priorities moved from human capital and infrastructure to neoliberal priorities. A new vision aimed at middle income status by 2035 with an emphasis on increasing private partnerships, placed Education under the prosperity umbrella of Pillar 3 *Human Capital* and ECDE has now faded under the micro-pillar of *‘Education’* (primary, secondary and tertiary). This 216 page policy document now allocates only four pages to education, with no mention of early childhood education.

My field notes suggest there have been questions about why President Ernest Bai Koroma decided to abandon a manifesto pledge – the *Agenda for Change*, which by his own admission remains incomplete, to introduce a new set of policy-making objectives encompassing prosperity *pillars*. The rebuttal was that this second agenda has built on the successes to date of the first and as such the focus now is on empowering the Sierra Leonean economy through the support of private sector. However, as the American economist Joseph Stiglitz points out, “development is about transforming the lives of people, not just transforming economies” (Stiglitz, 2006, p. 50). Such government priorities in essence, have repositioned country policy from a peace building post war recovery agenda (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2008) to a neo liberal business model incorporating eight prosperity pillars related to economic growth and international competitiveness (Government of Sierra Leone, 2013). Both could be argued to be national building policies but the latter relegates educational transformation to the private sector. If preschool is also relegated to the private sector (as the data and literature review alludes

to) then national development will rest in the hands of those with privilege and power regardless of children's competencies and their current as well as future contributions.

Into the future

In Sierra Leone the current status of children is fragile and despite this fragility, children's experiences and industrious contributions are already making them active members of society, described by James (2011) as a *living citizenship through child agency*. If provision of preschool was more readily available, it would not only provide an educational foundation to advance the child but contribute to advancing good citizenship from a young age which both teachers in this study deemed necessary (*FTW/L377–381; CTF/L213).* Into the future, culture and education must be regarded as more than simply minor influences in nation building, they are equally important as economics in determining differences in groups (Webb et al., 2002) which in turn creates hierarchies and elitism.

The data has evidenced how children contribute to their own development, how they are resilient, resourceful, and socially autonomous. Their competencies rest in child agency manifested in social autonomy and mobilized by their ability to acquire social capital of their own. However, in the cultural fields of capital there exist hierarchies where exchanges of capital limit what children are able to contribute to national development into the future. Whilst capital in any form does not in itself alleviate children's circumstances according to Bourdieu (1986) when one form of capital is reinforced with other forms of capital, it can become highly effective. However, such competences are influenced by objective structures and the subjectivity of individuals and groups, as the determination of competence is subject to those who have the power to decide which forms of capital are deemed worthy.

Bourdieu uses the notion of competence, to distinguish between the 'haves' and 'have not's in society and it is competence that is used to justify the privileges of dominant groups

(Leonard, 2005, p. 619). According to Bourdieu elites develop a reputation for competence which enables them to convert social capital into other forms. They do this by developing a *feel for the game* (Bourdieu, 1990). In other words, knowing how the game works and the rules of the game, mobilizes people to move between positions in space with a sense of *embodied entitlement* (Bourdieu, 1986).

Leonard (2005) adds that:

> Children may experience specific difficulties in converting social capital into other forms because conceptions of children as 'naturally incompetent' may prevent them from accumulating stocks of social capital that the wider society recognizes as having 'exchange value' (p. 619)

The problem therefore, lays in the subjectivity of competence and how certain competencies (found in certain types of cultural capital) are recognized as belonging just to the elite. In the field of education for example, schools control and determine what knowledge is considered legitimate and ensure that it is reproduced and reinforced. Agents who are privileged enough to occupy spaces within the field from an early age are able to position themselves to expect more and adjust their expectations accordingly (Webb et al., 2002). If all children are to have a chance to contribute to national development in the future, they too must be given the same opportunities to contribute.

Poverty in Sierra Leone is a reality but not a life-trap for children and whilst class trajectory exists (Bourdieu, 1984) it does not have to lock children into a self-fulfilling prophecy. All young children are on the move from a very young age in Sierra Leone and child agency is a powerful developmental trajectory making the notion of social gravity (Hage, 2011) a potential nation building tool. However, for the transformational power of social gravity to be operationalised it must pull all social agents into the same entitlement pool regardless of class,

economic and circumstance. In addition, it would depend on whether the *exchange value* of a poor child's cultural capital is regarded as equally valued by the education system, the government and society. Herein lays the challenge for schooling and early education. Into the future, advocates such as Fatmata saw the vital role that government has to play in developing ECE and nurturing their greatest national resource the country has – young children.

> *Well the government do have more role to play, to put things in order, especially for this early childhood we have already started.*
> *Government need to train teachers and send them all over the country, because it is very important. It very important when the child start going to school, at the age of three years in fact he will learn MORE things when he grows up, he will not depart from that particular thing. They will learn, how to take care of themselves, how to obey at home, how to do things that will not harm them, it will not lead them to street.*
> *So I think it is good, early childhood education, it is good for us. (FTW/L373–379)*

For this to happen, it would require a reconceptualization of early childhood education and wider provision for preschool that would be affordable for all families.

Conclusion

This chapter brought together the research questions, addressing them individually yet indirectly weaving dominant ideas that resonated from the theory and data. The theoretical underpinnings of Bourdieu's habitus, capital and field, were used to discuss notions of power, influence, social action and explain the phenomenon of ECDE in Sierra Leone. Bourdieu's assertion that the social world is "accumulated history" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 83) resonates even though that social world, is embedded in fields of inequality.

This study revealed that the nature of ECDE in Sierra Leone incorporates the past present and the future. Representing many childhoods, different priorities, and positions, children are

valuable and active social agents who contribute to family community and the nation at large. The process of accumulated capital was discussed to examine the barriers and facilitators to ECDE. The need to acknowledge the capabilities and competencies of all children and value the forms of cultural capital they bring to the preschool and school environment requires systemic social action in the form of advocacy. It remains to be seen if the accumulation of social capital can be transferred into highly desired economic capital and for schooling purposes – cultural capital. For now, it is evident that cultural capital is unequally distributed in society and there is a risk this will be further exasperated by the continued privatization of preschools. This will result the capital transmitted in the homes of the poor, seldom matching the forms of capital regarded as worthy in preschools.

The barriers facing early education are to be found in structural constraints such as poverty, post recovery realities, bureaucracy and a low priority placed on advancing preschool education. Despite such constraints, children as social agents have emerged as active facilitators who become co-contributors to the growth and development of self and of their nation. There is a need for government to begin prioritizing the provision of preschool and an increased perception of its value as a nation building tool for the future. The field of schooling as a nation building structure must recognize all children as powerful social agents of change in their own right. If Serpell claims, “African schools are perceived as agents of progressive social change sometimes called national development, or modernization” (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011, p. 198), then the provision of preschools is a timely addition to modern discourses surrounding children as current and future transformational agents of change. Without structural changes to access and equity preschool will simply become a field where the reproduction of the current status quo continues to create homogenous spaces for children whose parents have the right amount and type of capital.

CHAPTER 7 Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

This final chapter summarizes the research findings and presents conclusions in order to show the contribution to new knowledge through theory policy and practice. Included in this chapter are the summary of the purpose, theoretical framework, and methodology and a summary of the key findings. Recommendations for developing an effective early childhood education system that responds to the cultural and developmental needs of Sierra Leone and an explanation of the limitations in this study conclude this chapter.

Summary of the Research

The purpose of this research study was to explore the current state of early education in Sierra Leone in terms of its post-war nature and development. A key focus was to use the conceptual tools of capital, habitus, and field from Pierre Bourdieu's critical sociological theory to identify the constraints and possibilities for early childhood education and development. In view of this purpose, the following research questions were formulated to lead the exploration.

1. What is the current nature of early childhood education in Sierra Leone?
2. What are the barriers and facilitators of early childhood education?
3. What role do children play in the country's national development?

In order to collect relevant data for analysis to answer the above research questions, I adopted a transformative research paradigm to the methodology given the socio-historical context of Sierra Leone and I used critical theory as a lens to illuminate the complicated problems and social issues pertaining to early childhood development, in order to inform what needs to change (Reeves et al., 2008). In using a qualitative critical ethnographic case study, my intent was to capture more up-close and personal insights, beliefs and values surrounding early

education of children to shed light on the current nature of ECDE thus providing a platform for the *silent voices* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) of participants to be heard. It is argued that concepts of social justice and emancipatory reform (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Mertens, 2010) are the make-up of critical research and the evaluation of current educational and policy reforms (see chapter 2) which identified gaps in policy and implementation served to challenge the *status quo* (Mertens, 2010) in this thesis. I applied critical reflexivity (Bourdieu 1990a) to both the methods and the research steps taken during the research process (see Chapter 4). The methods adopted in this study allowed for the gathering of multiple data from sources that helped facilitate the answering of the research questions. The sources included data from the semistructured and unstructured interviews, field notes from informal and formal meetings in schools, communities and institutions, socio-cultural events and observations derived from the broader field of daily life. In addition, a journal to record my experiences, thoughts, reactions, and ideas enabled me to move forward and backwards with critical reflexivity as a researcher in the field.

I began with an exploratory pilot study which provided some valuable lessons for me as a novice ethnographer (see Chapter 4) helping to formulate the research questions and the methodological approach for this research. The exploratory study gave voices to teachers on issues of advocacy and highlighted power relations between agents and government and this influenced the choices I made in methods of gathering data for this study. On the ethical advice of the academic board, I began this doctorate study by identifying local key informants who helped me source interview participants, rather than choosing them myself. Qualitative in nature, my ethnographic case study represented a cross section of participants from government and non-government agencies, parents, and teachers. Six semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted and transcribed as necessary.

It occurred to me early in this research project that Sierra Leone finds itself in a constant state of *post* realities and recoveries. For example, post-colonialism, followed by post-war and more recently post-Ebola recoveries, all of which have impacted on the lives of people both structurally and individually and as a result impact on the constraints and possibilities for early childhood education. Such past and present realities have not only been imposed upon the people but have served to shape the educational, social, political, cultural and economic landscape, and in particular the educational and developmental lives of children. It was therefore, impossible to look at the nature of ECDE without casting the net further afield. With

Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus, capital and field, I was able to view the three concepts collectively but also examine them side by side in order to critique the roadblocks which have slowed down progress and shed light on possibilities in the advancement of early childhood education. Bourdieu's early work in Algeria (Bourdieu, 2012) helped me understand and dig deeper into the relevance of his ideas surrounding structure and agency and how one impacts on the other and examine the roles they play in reproduction and transformation for impoverished people. The key findings from this research study are presented below.

Summary of Key Findings

In answering the three broader research questions, I present five key points of reference with a brief explanation for each. Whilst the key findings tended to answer more than one of the research questions, for the purpose of organizational structure I have identified the question that most represents each finding, bearing in mind there is overlap and relevance between the three questions.

1. What is the current nature of early childhood education and development in Sierra Leone?

The results identified that: ECDE is *embedded in past experiences, exists as a constant reminder of present realities, and can serve as a catalyst for transformational change under the right conditions.* The findings show: (1) relationships are embedded in family and community, (2) biographies related to hardships, traditional practices, non-parental care arrangements and daily life experiences yield different childhood outcomes, (3) the need to care for and protect children is regarded as a communal responsibility belonging to parents, kin and teachers, (4) children are valued as *beings* in terms of what they contribute in the here and now and valued as *becomings* in their potential through education, (5) industry driven childhoods provide skills and competencies that mobilize child agency (6) the voices of children are not yet heard in the larger arena of education.

Caught in-between time and space, the findings demonstrate that childhood exists as a pendulum, swinging backwards and forwards between post war realities, the current hardships of poverty and a neoliberal and technocratic future. Bourdieu (1977) describes this in relation to the habitus as "the past which survives in the present" (p. 83) and the past with its historical traditions, rituals and parenting practices are important sources of cultural reproduction. The present for most people in Sierra Leone exists as a constant reminder that children are rarely protected from the external realities of hardship and whist the care and protection of children is regarded as a communal responsibility, it is not always a possibility. Changing economic and societal patterns influenced by globalization, appear to constantly position and reposition children, as do parenting decisions around child labour and non-parental care arrangements. It is within this past–present context that the interview and field data explains how children are valued as contributing members of society and where they develop their sense of being and

belonging. It is here that agency (linked to an early childhood habitus) has the potential to transform educational opportunities.

2. What are the barriers to and facilitators of early childhood education?

Barriers

1. Limited access and provision leading to the current exclusivity of preschool (reproduction of status quo)
2. Government priorities are constraining the advancement of preschool education targets not met and ECE is currently relegated to the back bench
3. Mismatch in the learning landscape of ECE between informal learning and formal learning in preschool and early primary schooling (social autonomy vs. social conformity)

There is no legislation that regulates the number of private preschools and no boundaries or enforced standards to adhere to. The interview data indicates the elite nature of preschool, contributed by government privatization priorities. The lack of supervised provision has created a plethora of *"mushroom preschools"* in the capital city designed for the purpose of profit. This physically excludes the majority of poor children (especially in rural areas) who cannot afford or are unable to access preschool (unless provided by donor/charitable organizations). This in effect creates a division in society, based on economic and cultural privilege. In addition, bureaucratic delays in advancing a national preschool curriculum and the push for more private partnerships indicate more road blocks ahead in terms of country-wide affordable preschool provision across the country.

The data reveals a mismatch between content learning in pre-primary and process learning in the home and community. Outside of schooling children are highly practical, creative, and involved in their own learning, making daily decisions, managing routines, taking

responsibility and problem solving. An academic push is favoured in most preschool settings and with no distinct curricula based on current early childhood educational theory, content is influenced by western developmental domains and specific content driven subjects drawn from primary school syllabus (Carpenter et al., 2011) or from the Sierra Leone, (*National draft ECE curriculum (*n.d.). Formal preschool in Sierra Leone is not play-based and provides limited physical spaces with few or no hands-on free choice materials and young children sit behind desks waiting for teacher direction. Catholic operated preschool programs are defined as nonacademic and *purely African*, offering specific industry based life skills. The interests, biographies, and geographies of children appear not to be considered in this curriculum model and the same content is delivered across the country in the same way. The global landscape in which ECDE pedagogical knowledge is derived (including indigenous knowledge bases and technology) has yet to be woven into preschool pedagogy and practice.

Facilitators

1. Advocates exists as individual change agents (parents, teachers child rights activist) in spite of a lack of organized social action in advancing ECDE
2. International and national educational reforms become facilitators in advancing ECE (on paper)
3. Child agency is mobilized through domestic and industry driven skills and competencies that contributes to wellbeing of family and society.

All the participants interviewed saw the value of preschool education and advocated for the advancement of formal early learning programs and parents supported academic skills in the home and community. The data revealed that teachers perceive themselves as advocates and carry social, emotional, and cultural capital in their role as educators, caregivers, and protectors of children.

Despite the gaps between policy and practice which exist as a structural barrier, rhetorically (on paper) policies and educational reforms act as facilitators for the advancement of ECE. International initiatives such as The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); World Conference on Education for All, 1990; MDG African Report, 2014; and the Sustainability Development Goals, 2015 have helped raise awareness of the importance of ECDE. In addition, educational reforms in Sierra Leone, such as The Gbanamja white paper (2010) recommendations for compulsory pre-primary school in 2010, the Child Rights Act (2007), the National Education policy (2010), and the Education Sector Plans (2007 & 2013) have all contributed in raising the profile, if not the advancement, of preschool provision.

Child agency as a facilitator shows the way children act independently and are able to make choices, learn from each other and strategize, in spite of (or perhaps because of) their circumstances. Child agency in relation to active citizenship is further explained in key findings, in response to question 3 below.

3. What role do children play in the country's national development?

The findings identify that children are active citizens contributing to national development with two elements of children's place and role in society. The first is: *Children are regarded as valuable members of society adding to the wellbeing of family and through their own agency are contributing to community, society thus national development, from a young age.* The second is: Preschool education *under the right circumstances can be a nation building platform for active and responsible citizenship, provided that all children have the opportunity to acquire the cultural capital necessary for optimum educational advancement.* Observations in the field showed that: 1) child agency is mobilized through domestic and industry driven skills, family responsibilities and informal learning, 2) child agency enables some children to hoard their own social capital and at times, quite independent of family networks, 3) children

contribute to their own developmental trajectories, as well as to the wellbeing of their families through certain competencies, 4) self-care as well as the care of others contribute to family community and society at large.

Child agency is relational and children exist alongside and within collective structures therefore cannot be understood in isolation (Webb et al., 2002) neither can children's competencies be relegated to a future potentiality. Observations from this study indicate how children are not only socially embedded in the lives of their parents and extended family but in society (even as infants). As preschoolers' playfulness is intermingled with industry tasks and social responsibilities and involves both freedom and obligation to self and others (the make-up of democratic citizenship). Their autonomous social mobility as they move in and out of social, economic, and cultural circles embodies a community of practice in the family/community compound, in the market place and in cultural and religious institutions. As such, active citizenship through participation (James, 2011) has already laid its foundation in early childhood, positioning young children not as citizens of tomorrow but as citizens of today.

In addition, whilst the literature identifies a new sociology of childhood which has encapsulated children's agency globally (James & Prout, 2015; Leonard, 2005; Morrow, 2011; Rogoff, 2003) this is not a new phenomenon in Africa (Nsamenang, 2011; Super et al., 2011). In Sierra Leone, it is evident that children are already social actors in their own right, regarded as both *being* and *belonging* rather than, *beings in the process of becoming* (James & Prout, 2015). From the data, it appears that child agency is enacted through social capital (at times independent of adults) and on occasions is exchanged for economic capital. However, certain constraints such as poverty, status, power positions and even schooling itself, make it harder for children to exchange the capital from home/community for the school capital desired by teachers and government thus restricting educational opportunities. Whilst children's acquisition of some

forms of capital (especially social capital) is evident from this data, it is not clear if children are able to exchange and retain the capital they accrue into other forms of capital (economic or cultural). In order for this to happen, the exchange value of one type of capital for another must be perceived valuable by the dominant society for it to be worthy of exchange. It appears that the cultural and social capital accrued by impoverished children in this study is deemed to be a less valued commodity.

Contribution to New Knowledge: Theory, Policy, and Practice

In view of the key findings, the following section discusses the contribution of this study to theory, policy and practice in relation to early childhood development and education.

Theoretical contribution

This study adds to the science of child development theory through the contribution of Bourdieu's conceptual tool of habitus. Understanding how habitus operates individually and collectively on the ground in Sierra Leone, contributes to historical and sociocultural understandings of child development.

The findings in this study, has evidenced the way children develop within a past–present context (Bourdieu, 1977) and the development of habitus was observed as both an individual and collective process, driving social action (praxis). An understanding of the way habitus predisposes and at the same time pulls children into a certain developmental, cultural, and social trajectory (Hage, 2011) means that the habitus is as Bourdieu (1990a) describes: "society written into the body, into the biological individual" (p. 63). In other words, the way that culture in society embodies (internalizes) in the individual, is formed through the habitus and it is this

combination of both individual and collective habitus which provides the basis for the way children perceive, act, see and make sense of their world. As such, habitus operates internally (unconsciously) but is enacted externally as seen in the examples of child agency in this study. Because child agency involves actions, thoughts, and situations and because the child is as much an independent as a collective being, possessing desires and goals the habitus is therefore a shaped and shaping conduit to development. But the child is also objective in that he/she is embedded in social relationships, institutions, and hierarchies and so, has structural restrictions. In a country such as Sierra Leone, children develop through cultural trajectories, embedded in rules, rituals and traditions which are largely regulated by where and who they are (or by positions society relegates to them). Understanding how habitus operates individually and collectively contributes to understanding more about how children develop within a sociocultural context. It is such understandings that can be integrated into Afro-centric knowledge base, thus contributing to a less dominant Anglo-centric model of child development which currently permeates preschool pedagogical knowledge bases and dominates tertiary HTC syllabus in early childhood studies at teacher training colleges in the country.

Policy contributions

The literature review (chapter 2) contributes to policy by providing a current status review of ECDE policy priorities and reforms in Sierra Leone. It provides model country policy initiatives for comparison and highlights gaps between policy and implementation, suggesting that structure and agency (policy and praxis) is what is needed to mobilize the advancement of early childhood education.

Preschool in Sierra Leone under the right policy direction can become a great sociocultural and educational equalizer, providing that all children have the opportunity to access quality preschool education which lay foundations into future learning pathways. This

study has provided an evidenced based and empirical review of international policy initiatives including African model policy directions that can be used for reference and comparison purposes. Educational blueprints from Sierra Leone provide a current status review of ECDE policy reforms and directions which have served to highlight the gaps and the fragmented approach to policy and implementation in the country. This thesis has evidenced the interplay between structure and agency (government and human capital) which can both compliment and contribute to strategic policy directions, if spaces and places for dialogue between advocates of ECDE (who have demonstrated how much early education is valued) and policy makers come together. Government policy is a driving force to advance ECDE and from a critical social theory perspective, structure and agency are powerful determinants that act to transform – but only when collectively fused. Bourdieu's sociological picture of educational policy is a contested and dynamic field yet to be fully explored in relation to educational policy (Lingard, Taylor, & Rowelle, 2005). Government policy makers especially those establishing ECDE policies must be cognicent of the tensions within the field of policy making and Bourdieu's capital and field lenses provides a thinking tool to examine the way bureaucratic policy fields operate and vie for space, resources and status. This enables policy makers to better recognize power struggles over capital thus leading to more democratic and transformative ECDE policies.

Practical contributions

As observed and discussed throughout this study, not all children share the same educational or life opportunities. For children to access and then succeed in school they must be provided with *instruments of appropriation* (Bourdieu, 1973) from the dominant culture and support in unlocking the subjective and arbitrary nature of cultural and symbolic capital that remains hidden until entry into school. This study contributes practical implications of

Bourdieu's theoretical ideas for the purpose of critical reflexivity. Teachers whether consciously or unconsciously perpetuate the reproduction of social inequality in their classes by failing to convey explicitly (to parents and children) what educational values are most desired to succeed in schooling. Certain teacher beliefs categorize children unable to meet the expectations of obedience and social conformity as *stubborn African children* which could ostracize those who bring different types of social competencies and cultural capital to school settings. It is crucial that teachers understand principles of ECDE (presented in chapter 2) in order to better facilitate young children's sense of belonging to school (regardless who and where they live) and draw upon their home and community life for a more culturally inspired curriculum. Recognition of the unique competencies learned informally which have made children resourceful, social, playful, resilient and process driven in their learning habits can be easily eroded for many poorer children upon entry to formal schooling especially if they experience a different reality not practiced by their own family and community. This thesis provides educators with an opportunity to reflect upon their own pedagogical practices, to develop an understanding that "inculcation operates in and through a relationship of communication and pedagogic action" (Bourdieu, 1973, p. 58) thus becoming more critical about what cultural norms of society should be transmitted in preschools and avoid colonial pedagogical hangovers which currently exist in western style preschools in the country that assume all parents are literate and facilitate preliteracy/numeracy skills prior to preschool entry.

The life worlds of teachers and students should be fused with elements of *sankofa* (Kanu, 2007) representing a closer alignment to present realities, where content learning and process learning serve as complimentary not conflicting preschool priorities (Nsamenang, 2011). Teachers have the power to reduce the feeling of segregation that comes from those less able to

assimilate into preschool and this can lead to transformational outcomes in other educational settings later in life.

Recommendations

This study provides insights into the nature of early childhood education in Sierra Leone and the barriers as well as the facilitators that exist in accessing preschool education and reveals that even the most impoverished agents (parents) are advocates of early childhood education. The current private/government structures exist as objective/subjective dichotomies separating the public and private domains mobilizing but also constraining agency. The field of education is a multidimensional social space leading towards a certain trajectory (Harker et al., 1990), and if preschool provision and policy reforms are not given serious attention in the early stages of establishment, preschool education will become a field driven by privatization resulting in a certain class trajectory. Currently, entry points into preschool are generally determined by the amount and type of capital one holds, whether it is economic, cultural, or symbolic. In the following recommendations, I put forward a call to action by government and local authorities to re-prioritize ECDE and begin this process by drawing upon the capital of teachers, parents, children and advocates who given the voice, the support and the structure they need, can apply their current and developing agency knowledge toward social action by supporting government in facilitating the advancement of ECDE in the country. In order to transform the current constraints surrounding ECDE into possibilities, this study proposes knowledge, policy, and practical transformational reforms.

Knowledge-based recommendations

Shifting paradigms beyond a universal '*one model fits all'* for childhood development and learning, suggests diverse views of how children think and learn has been evidenced in this

study, where the everyday cognitive development of children (Rogoff, 2003) and the power of socially responsible intelligence (Super et al., 2011) characterizes what one teacher described as *"under the tree learning"* meaning all learning outside of school settings. The global voice of childhood has yet to give priority to such African paradigms despite empirical evidence from the African continent (Nsamenang & Tchombe; 2011; Pence & Nsamenang, 2008; Rogoff, 2003). Whilst there is a tendency to borrow starting points from western theories of child development, it is time to derive starting points from within the continent of Africa and more closer to home. The work of embedding African perspectives into a nationally recognized early childhood education curriculum has already begun in Africa (Nsamenang & Tchombe, 2011). Opportunities for including such information in training modules and workshops would provide practitioners with starting points to evaluate their pedagogy and practice and give student teachers firm theoretical foundations to build practice upon. It is imperative that a global model of ECDE in Sierra Leone reflects local knowledge as well as universal perspectives on child development and early learning.

I suggest that a national stake holder's forum be organized to collect qualitative data, empirical reviews, and exemplars from countries that have advanced ECDE policies in Africa. Such findings could be presented at a national early childhood conference in Sierra Leone. Such a recommendation will not only contribute to the global science of early childhood development it will act as a beacon for other sub-Saharan countries to emulate.

Drawing from the data, literature review and my own experiences as a lecturer in the field of early childhood training in Sierra Leone, I further propose an amended early childhood development subject to be included in the TC and HTC syllabus based on new knowledge and understandings surrounding the way African children think and learn. Such ideas have yet to

permeate ECDE syllabus in tertiary institutions or form part of ongoing professional development training or knowledge sharing in the country.

Policy-based recommendations

In reviewing the educational blueprints for Sierra Leone and the corroborating data from the interviews and field notes, it appears that early childhood policy documents as well as the national draft ECE curriculum are currently fragmented and remain stagnant and/or hidden under bureaucratic paper trails. Yet the evidence is compelling (as presented in the literature review chapter 2) that preschool matters intellectually, socially and economically and produces long-term benefits for the child, the family and the nation (Bartik, 2011; Fisher, 2012; Heckman, 2006; Young & Mustard, 2008). Whilst new legislation was created by the government in order to reform the education system (*The New Education Act 2004*) which states that its purpose was to assist in raising the standards of pre-primary institutions and provide assistance in the development of curricula, neither initiative has become a reality. It is timely that local authorities and government (especially the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MEST) now takes the lead rather than simply *assisting* in such goals.

Many early childhood targets have not been met in the country hence the changing goal posts and time lines to accommodate such realities. This has resulted in little progress made to advance ECDE, and with many other government priorities overshadowing early childhood education agendas, it has been easily relegated to the back bench. However, with new aims derived from the new Sustainability Development Goals (2015) that include targets such as *inclusive pre-primary education by 2030* and expectations that *all children will have access to quality early childhood education in readiness for primary school*, there is much to be done. Unfortunately, Sierra Leone is already at risk of once again failing to meet its targets. The Measuring National Priorities for Post-2015 in Sierra Leone Report (Braima et al., 2015) has

already found gaps between policy and practice and predict that targets, from which development is measured against, currently do not appear to be achievable for Sierra Leone.

It is recommended that a new steering committee be established to drive an empirical and more up-to-date knowledge and evidence based national early childhood education policy. The steering committee should include experts in the field of early childhood development and education (locally sourced and funded) and the process is facilitated and overseen by MEST. The policy should be framed within a model of *affordability, equity, and accessibility* with realistic time lines and action plans that call public and private responsibilities to accountability and action. It is also recommended that the steering committee have fiducial responsibilities and appoint a project manager who together can devise a costing model for Pre-primary school so that the government can proportion a percentage from the annual education budget towards the advancement of public preschools into the future. In the short term, this recommendation would require an injection of government funds in order to support the various stages of policy design and implementation. Into the future, private operator licensing fees could inject future funding for systemic oversight of the policy and its accompanying national standards. Finally, it is recommended that the methodology in policy formation must involve a process of looking backwards in order to look forward as described in the concept of *Sankofa* (discussed in chapter 6) and be framed within a socio cultural context, reflecting learning and development in the local and wider context of a child's world.

This policy would become the framework to steer a more current revised and harmonized national early childhood education curriculum replacing the current *National draft ECE curriculum* (n.d) and reflective of Afrocentric knowledge bases

Practice-based recommendations

Preschool has practical (teachers) and symbolic (privatization) gate keepers that decide how society imitates and reproduces itself. Structure and agency currently dictate who has access to preschool and what type of cultural capital and competencies are best suited to school readiness. Because culture is arbitrary (Alanen et al., 2015) cultural capital can easily lose it value from one field to another (home and school) and impoverished children who may be fortunate enough to gain a place in preschool still have to navigate the kind of formal trajectories most valued by teachers and society. Teachers hold power through their own agency to decide and evaluate their own teaching styles and decide how to respond to the cultural capital derived informally by children who enter their classes. For children, there is a danger that gate keeping the desired cultural capital serves to limit trajectories not just to education but to other related fields of power and influence in the future. Such understandings fuelled by Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of capital and habitus (Bourdieu, 1986) contribute to deeper insights into how power relations work in the field of preschool. Children bring to preschool what is available to them – their own individual and collective habitus and their own social and cultural capital and it must be harvested and integrated and on occasions, exchanged for the kind of capital desired for reproduction by schools. All the good intentions of the habitus to rise above circumstances cannot transform the lives of children without government and schooling structures making explicit what kind of capital is valued and how to obtain it.

The pedagogical practices and current early childhood knowledge bases of teachers in Sierra Leone are not in line with global understandings of contemporary teaching or the way content and process learning work together in early learning environments to complement each other. I therefore, recommend a systemic synergy between policy, pedagogy, and practice framed with clear and transparent guidelines for preschool teachers and a curriculum framework

that is inclusive of all children's realities, where all children can belong regardless of who they are, what language they speak, where they live and their economic and social status.

There is urgent need for opportunities to engage teachers in metacognitive thinking strategies that reflect critical reflexivity. This could take the form of practical classroom training and regular network meetings or more organized workshops in conjunction with local government. The primary aim would be to examine and reflect upon the way teacher practices and current school readiness definitions which determine certain types of capital deemed more worthy of reproduction. If teachers can gain a better understanding of how the objective structures of society come from values and ideas deriving from government and educational institutions and how that impacts on producing their personal world view and as a result their reality (Webb et al., 2002) they will be able to develop better strategies in facilitating smoother transitions for children who also come from different reality points thus gaining insights into the way all cultural capital can be a powerful source of learning and motivation for young children.

Limitations

This project had its own limitations. Participants were only drawn from two regions western urban and western rural and therefore reflect the findings from only two regions. There were challenges in finding willing government representatives to participate in interviews, therefore ministerial representation was limited to only one government consultant. Despite his statement *"Let me say first of all, we also (the government) realize ECH education is a priority (DGOV/L60)* his responses during the interview may well have been his own opinion and not representative of the Ministry. Having the opportunity to interview those actively involved in policy making from MEST would have not only given a stronger government voice to the data

but provided me with additional insights into the constraints and possibilities for ECDE from a government perspective.

An ongoing challenge was access to government white paper documents which are not readily available in the public arena or available to purchase in print form. At the time of this thesis writing, there was also no empirical research specifically related to early childhood education in the country and so empirical research findings and literature has been drawn from further afield to inform and contextualize this research project. Finally, limitations on a practical level whilst living in Sierra Leone – such as time management, transportation, limited power and internet supply – created their own drawbacks in logistically travelling to meet people especially in the rainy season, communicating electronically, and accessing and validating government information.

This research study has not given me all the answers I expected; in fact for me, it has created more questions than I started with. I am acutely aware that this research project will neither *neutralize* nor *resolve* the structural and family constraints that prevent the majority of children from impoverished backgrounds from accessing a quality preschool program. In addition, the voices I captured in the interviews reflect the voices of only a few. I anticipate that other researchers will follow suite and continue to conduct qualitative research involving educators, teacher's government representatives and include the voices of young children, which have yet to be heard in Sierra Leone.

Recommendations for Future Research

In view of the limitations explained above, future research needs to focus on capturing the voices of both national and local government bodies that are responsible for policy formation and implementation and the advancement of the SDG's in relation to ECDE. Other research could involve class action research projects which will add further insights into the way African

children think and learn formally and how child agency is further enacted across the country. Both research recommendations will bring holistic understanding of development, theory, and practice in relation to early childhood education in Sierra Leone leading to transformation in early childhood education and development.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Introductory Letter

MONASH University
Education

[redacted]

Dear _____

Thank you for your interest in my research project.

My name is Eleni McDermott and I am conducting a PhD research project under the supervision of Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education: Monash University Australia. Tel +613 99044200.

My research is focused on early childhood education in Sierra Leone and involves both field work and the submission of a thesis. The title of my research project is: "Early Childhood Development and Practices in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities". All measures will be taken to conduct the research at a time and place suitable to you.

Name
_____

I am available on the following date and
time: _____

To confirm the day and time: My mobile number is:_____

Attached is the project explanatory statement which provides information on the project and my obligations. I look forward to our next meeting where I can answer any of your questions and once again, thank you for your interest in participating.

Yours sincerely,

Eleni McDermott

Appendix B: Explanatory Statement for Teachers

Date This information sheet is for you to keep.

Research Title:
Early Childhood Development and Practices in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

Student Research Project
My name is Eleni McDermott and I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr Joseph Seyram Agebenyega, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education: Monash University, Australia. My research is focused on early childhood education in Sierra Leone and involves both field work and the submission of a thesis.

Why did you choose this particular person as a participant?
You are invited to participate in this research because you are a teacher (or have been a teacher) of young children, in a school or early childhood setting in either Freetown city or Waterloo district in Sierra Leone.

The aim/purpose of the research
The purpose of my research study is to explore the nature of early childhood development and education and investigate the current status of formal early childhood education in Sierra Leone. In so doing, it is anticipated that I will identify current constraints and future possibilities for improvement. I will be examining the systems that support and limit child development and learning in Sierra Leone. Through one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, NGO's, government representatives and community leaders as well as extensive field work, The aim is to capture the voices of those working with and for young children in Sierra Leone.

Possible benefits
It is anticipated that in exploring the development of early childhood education in Sierra Leone, emerging constraints and recommendations will be helpful in advancing systems, government policies and pedagogical practices for the country. With this aim in mind, I anticipate that my findings will also inform current practice for teaching and early learning and contribute to the early but growing research on post-colonial, post war early education in West Africa.

What does the research involve?

The study involves your participation in a semi-structured interview and will be facilitated by the researcher (and an interpreter if necessary). The interview will discuss the nature of early education in Sierra Leone and seek your perceptions and views. The aim is to seek your opinion and through this, gain multiple views, experiences and perspectives on early childhood development and education in Sierra Leone.

How much time will the research take?
The interview will last no more than one hour. A follow up visit may be necessary in order to clarify any points or seek further explanation/elaboration. This ensures I have understood your views and captured them in writing and also adds validity to the research project.

Inconvenience/discomfort
All measures will be taken to conduct the research at a time suitable to you. Any observations related to field work will only be for the purpose of seeing what takes place in the context e.g. class or community and will not involve any judgement of performance or ability. Your willingness to participate or not participate in the research will in no way be related to any assessments or affect any child/student or your career.

Can I withdraw from the research?
Agreeing to participate in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you may withdraw prior to your approval of the interview transcript or prior to the publication of a report of the project.

Confidentiality
The names of schools and all participant details will be kept confidential and not mentioned in any publications.

Storage of data
Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and be kept on university premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Use of data for other purposes
Data may be used to write journal papers and a thesis but will not include the name of any school or teachers or materials that could identify an individual. But please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality/anonymity.

Results
If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact emcd9@student.monash.edu. The findings will be accessible for six months.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	**If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research: Project Number: CF12/4041–2012001951 is being conducted, please contact:**
Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega Monash University Lecturer/ (Med) Course Pathway Advisor Early Childhood Education/Inclusion Building A, Peninsula, Frankston, Vic 3199 Tel: +61 3 9904 4200 Mobile: 0437959009 Email: joseph.agbenyega@education.monash.edua.au	Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Fax: +61 3 9905 3831 Email: muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au

Thank you.

Ms. Eleni McDermott

PhD Candidature Student **Appendix C: Explanatory Statement for Parents**

MONASH University
Education

Date This information sheet is for you to keep.

Research Title:
Early Childhood Development and Practices in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

Student Research Project
My name is Eleni McDermott and I am conducting a research project under the supervision of

Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education: Monash University, Australia. My research is focused on early childhood education in Sierra Leone and involves both field work and the submission of a thesis.

Why did you choose this particular person as a participant?
You are invited to participate in this research because you are a teacher (or have been a teacher) of young children, in a school or early childhood setting in either Freetown city or Waterloo district in Sierra Leone.

The aim/purpose of the research
The purpose of my research study is to explore the nature of early childhood development and education and investigate the current status of formal early childhood education in Sierra Leone. In so doing, it is anticipated that I will identify current constraints and future possibilities for improvement. I will be examining the systems that support and limit child development and learning in Sierra Leone. Through one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, NGO's, government representatives and community leaders as well as extensive field work, The aim is to capture the voices of those working with and for young children in Sierra Leone.

Possible benefits
It is anticipated that in exploring the development of early childhood education in Sierra Leone, emerging constraints and recommendations will be helpful in advancing systems, government policies and pedagogical practices for the country. With this aim in mind, I anticipate that my findings will also inform current practice for teaching and early learning and contribute to the early but growing research on post-colonial, post war early education in West Africa.

What does the research involve?
The study involves your participation in a semi-structured interview and will be facilitated by the researcher (and an interpreter if necessary). The interview will discuss the nature of early education in Sierra Leone and seek your perceptions and views. The aim is to seek your opinion and through this, gain multiple views, experiences and perspectives on early childhood development and education in Sierra Leone.

How much time will the research take?
The interview will last no more than one hour. A follow up visit may be necessary in order to clarify any points or seek further explanation/elaboration. This ensures I have understood your views and captured them in writing and also adds validity to the research project.

Inconvenience/discomfort
All measures will be taken to conduct the research at a time suitable to you. Any observations related to field work will only be for the purpose of seeing what takes place in the context e.g. class or community and will not involve any judgement of performance or ability. Your

willingness to participate or not participate in the research will in no way be related to any assessments or affect any child/student or your career.

Can I withdraw from the research?
Agreeing to participate in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you may withdraw prior to your approval of the interview transcript or prior to the publication of a report of the project.

Confidentiality
The names of schools and all participant details will be kept confidential and not mentioned in any publications.

Storage of data
Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and be kept on university premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Use of data for other purposes
Data may be used to write journal papers and a thesis but will not include the name of any school or teachers or materials that could identify an individual. But please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality/anonymity.

Results
If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact emcd9@student.monash.edu. The findings will be accessible for six months.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	**If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research: Project Number: CF12/4041–2012001951 is being conducted, please contact:**

Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega Monash University Lecturer/ (Med) Course Pathway Advisor Early Childhood Education/Inclusion Building A, Peninsula, Frankston, Vic 3199 Tel: +61 3 9904 4200 Mobile: 0437959009 Email: joseph.agbenyega@education.monash.edua.au	Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Fax: +61 3 9905 3831 Email: muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au

Thank you.

Ms. Eleni McDermott

PhD Candidature Student **Appendix D: Explanatory Statement for Non-Government Organization Representative**

Date This information sheet is for you to keep.

Research Title:
Early Childhood Development and Practices in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

Student Research Project
My name is Eleni McDermott and I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education: Monash University, Australia. My research is focused on early childhood education in Sierra Leone and involves both field work and the submission of a thesis.

Why did you choose this particular person as a participant?

You are invited to participate in this research because you are a teacher (or have been a teacher) of young children, in a school or early childhood setting in either Freetown city or Waterloo district in Sierra Leone.

The aim/purpose of the research

The purpose of my research study is to explore the nature of early childhood development and education and investigate the current status of formal early childhood education in Sierra Leone. In so doing, it is anticipated that I will identify current constraints and future possibilities for improvement. I will be examining the systems that support and limit child development and learning in Sierra Leone. Through one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, NGO's, government representatives and community leaders as well as extensive field work, The aim is to capture the voices of those working with and for young children in Sierra Leone.

Possible benefits

It is anticipated that in exploring the development of early childhood education in Sierra Leone, emerging constraints and recommendations will be helpful in advancing systems, government policies and pedagogical practices for the country. With this aim in mind, I anticipate that my findings will also inform current practice for teaching and early learning and contribute to the early but growing research on post-colonial, post war early education in West Africa.

What does the research involve?

The study involves your participation in a semi-structured interview and will be facilitated by the researcher (and an interpreter if necessary). The interview will discuss the nature of early education in Sierra Leone and seek your perceptions and views. The aim is to seek your opinion and through this, gain multiple views, experiences and perspectives on early childhood development and education in Sierra Leone.

How much time will the research take?

The interview will last no more than one hour. A follow up visit may be necessary in order to clarify any points or seek further explanation/elaboration. This ensures I have understood your views and captured them in writing and also adds validity to the research project.

Inconvenience/discomfort

All measures will be taken to conduct the research at a time suitable to you. Any observations related to field work will only be for the purpose of seeing what takes place in the context e.g. class or community and will not involve any judgement of performance or ability. Your willingness to participate or not participate in the research will in no way be related to any assessments or affect any child/student or your career.

Can I withdraw from the research?

Agreeing to participate in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you may withdraw prior to your approval of the interview transcript or prior to the publication of a report of the project.

Confidentiality

The names of schools and all participant details will be kept confidential and not mentioned in any publications.

Storage of data

Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and be kept on university premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Use of data for other purposes

Data may be used to write journal papers and a thesis but will not include the name of any school or teachers or materials that could identify an individual. But please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality/anonymity.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact emcd9@student.monash.edu. The findings will be accessible for six months.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	**If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research: Project Number: CF12/4041–2012001951 is being conducted, please contact:**
Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega Monash University Lecturer/ (Med) Course Pathway Advisor Early Childhood Education/Inclusion Building A, Peninsula, Frankston, Vic 3199 Tel: +61 3 9904 4200 Mobile: 0437959009 Email: joseph.agbenyega@education.monash.edua.au	Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Fax: +61 3 9905 3831 Email: muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au

Thank you.

Ms. Eleni McDermott

PhD Candidature Student **Appendix E: Explanatory Statement for Government Representative**

Date This information sheet is for you to keep.

Research Title:
Early Childhood Development and Practices in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

Student Research Project
My name is Eleni McDermott and I am conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Education: Monash University, Australia. My research is focused on early childhood education in Sierra Leone and involves both field work and the submission of a thesis.

Why did you choose this particular person as a participant?
You are invited to participate in this research because you are a teacher (or have been a teacher) of young children, in a school or early childhood setting in either Freetown city or Waterloo district in Sierra Leone.

The aim/purpose of the research
The purpose of my research study is to explore the nature of early childhood development and education and investigate the current status of formal early childhood education in Sierra Leone. In so doing, it is anticipated that I will identify current constraints and future possibilities for improvement. I will be examining the systems that support and limit child development and learning in Sierra Leone. Through one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, NGO's, government representatives and community leaders as well as extensive field work, The aim is to capture the voices of those working with and for young children in Sierra Leone.

Possible benefits
It is anticipated that in exploring the development of early childhood education in Sierra Leone, emerging constraints and recommendations will be helpful in advancing systems,

government policies and pedagogical practices for the country. With this aim in mind, I anticipate that my findings will also inform current practice for teaching and early learning and contribute to the early but growing research on post-colonial, post war early education in West Africa.

What does the research involve?
The study involves your participation in a semi-structured interview and will be facilitated by the researcher (and an interpreter if necessary). The interview will discuss the nature of early education in Sierra Leone and seek your perceptions and views. The aim is to seek your opinion and through this, gain multiple views, experiences and perspectives on early childhood development and education in Sierra Leone.

How much time will the research take?
The interview will last no more than one hour. A follow up visit may be necessary in order to clarify any points or seek further explanation/elaboration. This ensures I have understood your views and captured them in writing and also adds validity to the research project.

Inconvenience/discomfort
All measures will be taken to conduct the research at a time suitable to you. Any observations related to field work will only be for the purpose of seeing what takes place in the context e.g. class or community and will not involve any judgement of performance or ability. Your willingness to participate or not participate in the research will in no way be related to any assessments or affect any child/student or your career.

Can I withdraw from the research?
Agreeing to participate in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. However, if you do consent to participate, you may withdraw prior to your approval of the interview transcript or prior to the publication of a report of the project.

Confidentiality
The names of schools and all participant details will be kept confidential and not mentioned in any publications.

Storage of data
Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and be kept on university premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

Use of data for other purposes
Data may be used to write journal papers and a thesis but will not include the name of any school or teachers or materials that could identify an individual. But please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality/anonymity.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding, please contact emcd9@student.monash.edu. The findings will be accessible for six months.

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:	**If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research: Project Number: CF12/4041–2012001951 is being conducted, please contact:**
Dr Joseph Seyram Agbenyega Monash University Lecturer/ (Med) Course Pathway Advisor Early Childhood Education/Inclusion Building A, Peninsula, Frankston, Vic 3199 Tel: +61 3 9904 4200 Mobile: 0437959009 Email: joseph.agbenyega@education.monash.edua.au	Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Fax: +61 3 9905 3831 Email: muhrec@adm.monash.edu.au

Thank you.

Ms. Eleni McDermott

PhD Candidature Student

Appendix

F: Consent Form for Teachers

MONASH University
Education

Title: Early Childhood Development and Practices in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

I agree to allow the researcher to observe and take notes	Yes	☐	No	☐
I agree to take part in the interview	Yes	No ☐		☐
I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped	Yes	No ☐		☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw prior to my approval of the interview transcript or prior to the publication of a report of the project.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview and observation data for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

Participant's name

Appendix

Signature Date

G: Consent Form for Parents

MONASH University
Education

Title: Early Childhood Development and Practices in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

I agree to allow the researcher to observe and take notes	☐ Yes ☐ No
I agree to take part in the interview	☐ Yes ☐ No
I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped	☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw prior to my approval of the interview transcript or prior to the publication of a report of the project.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview and observation data for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

Appendix
Participant's name

Signature Date

H: Consent Form for Non-Government (NGO) Representative

MONASH University
Education

Title: Early Childhood Development and Practices in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

I agree to allow the researcher to observe and take notes	☐ Yes ☐ No
I agree to take part in the interview	☐ Yes ☐ No
I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped	☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that my participation is voluntary, I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and I can withdraw prior to my approval of the interview transcript or prior to the publication of a report of the project.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview and observation data for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

Appendix

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

Participant's name

Signature Date

I: Consent Form for Government Representative

Title: Early Childhood Development and Practices in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

NOTE: This consent form will remain with the Monash University researcher for their records

I agree to take part in the Monash University research project specified above. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

I agree to allow the researcher to observe and take notes	☐ Yes ☐ No
I agree to take part in the interview	☐ Yes ☐ No
I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped	☐ Yes ☐ No

I understand that my participation is voluntary, I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and I can withdraw prior to my approval of the interview transcript or prior to the publication of a report of the project.

I understand that any data that the researcher extracts from the interview and observation data for use in reports or published findings will not, under any circumstances, contain names or identifying characteristics.

Appendix

I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

Participant's name

Signature Date

J: NGO/Government Representative Participant Details

Name (include title) _____

Mobile _____

Email _____

Tribe/Region _____

Languages Spoken _____

Organization details

Address _____

Position _____

Your role/duties _____

Years in Current Position _____

Appendix

Please describe any specific ECH programs/policies/initiatives you have been involved in specifically in Sierra Leone.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

K: Parent Participant Details

Name (include title)_____

Mobile_____
_

Email_____
_

Tribe_____

Region_____

Languages Spoken_____

Children

1. Name_____

   Gender_____Age_____

   Kindergarten/School_____
   _

2. Name_____

   Gender_____Age_____

Appendix

Kindergarten/School_____

3. Name_____

Gender_____Age_____

Kindergarten/School_____

L: Teacher Participant Details

Name (include title)_____

Mobile_____

Email_____

Tribe_____

Region_____

Languages Spoken_____

Kindergarten/School currently teaching

_____
_

Position_____

Grade/Class level currently teaching _____

Years in current position_____

Years in total of early childhood/early primary teaching experience_____

Appendix

M: Parent 1–1 Interview

Welcome: Introductions and roles of helpers (audio technician, note taker, facilitator etc.)

The Topic: Early Childhood Education in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

Aim: To explore the development of early childhood education in Sierra Leone and identify constraints and possibilities for improvement.

Paperwork: Go through Explanatory Statement and ensure Consent Form is signed by participant.

Guidelines for Interviews

- Semi structured 1–1 interview with researcher
- Explain reason you have been selected to participate
- No right or wrong answers, only seeking his/her point of view
- Confidentiality
- Tape Recording
- Question/Answer format: Open ended questions (may change as interview progresses).
- Role of Researcher
- Questions/Clarifications before we begin

Over-arching Research Questions:
What is the nature of early childhood education in Sierra Leone? What are the constraints and the possibilities?

Introduction:
As a researcher, I will be examining the systems that support and limit early childhood education in Sierra Leone. Through observations, one on one interview and small focus groups, I intend to capture the voices and perceptions of teachers, parents, government and NGO's (who are currently operating early childhood programs/initiatives). Viewing the development and constraints from multiple lenses will enable me to analyse different perspectives and initiatives currently operating and identify constraints that have held back the development of formal early education. From this analysis some recommendations for the future will be suggested.

Appendix

Parent – Outline of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

A) GENERAL OPINION QUESTIONS

- In what ways do you think young children are valued is Sierra Leone?
- Has this changed post war? Can you give me an example?
- What is your understanding of formal and informal early education in Sierra Leone?
- What role do you believe African cultures play in early childhood development ?
- How can African culture, specifically that of Sierra Leone be used to develop early childhood curriculum and teaching?

B) PARENT SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- Can you share some examples of what and how you teach your little children?
- What are some of the important things you think young children should learn from home? And from school?
- What hopes do you have for the future of your young children?
- Have you been able to access early education for your child?
- What made this possible?

C) CONCLUSION

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about or add?

Appendix N: Teacher 1–1 Interview

Welcome: Introductions and roles of helpers (audio technician, note taker, facilitator etc.)

The Topic: Early Childhood Education in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

Aim: To explore the development of early childhood education in Sierra Leone and identify constraints and possibilities for improvement.

Paperwork: Go through Explanatory Statement and ensure Consent Form is signed by participant.

Guidelines for Interviews

- Semi structured 1–1 interview with researcher
- Explain reason you have been selected to participate
- No right or wrong answers, only seeking his/her point of view
- Confidentiality
- Tape Recording
- Question/Answer format: Open ended questions (may change as interview progresses).
- Role of Researcher
- Questions/Clarifications before we begin

Over-arching Research Questions:
What is the nature of early childhood education in Sierra Leone? What are the constraints and the possibilities?

Introduction:
As a researcher, I will be examining the systems that support and limit early childhood education in Sierra Leone. Through observations, one on one interview and small focus groups, I intend to capture the voices and perceptions of teachers, parents, government and NGO's (who are currently operating early childhood programs/initiatives). Viewing the development and constraints from multiple lenses will enable me to analyse different perspectives and initiatives currently operating and identify constraints that have held back the development of formal early education. From this analysis some recommendations for the future will be suggested.

Teacher – Outline of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

A) GENERAL OPINION QUESTIONS

- In what ways do you think young children are valued is Sierra Leone?
- Has this changed post war? Can you give me an example?
- What is your understanding of formal and informal early education in Sierra Leone?
- What role do you believe African cultures play in early childhood development ?

- How can African culture, specifically that of Sierra Leone be used to develop early childhood curriculum and teaching?

B) TEACHER SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- What is it like being an ECE teacher in Sierra Leone?
- What skills do you think young children already bring to the school environment?
- Why do you think formal ECE is important?
- What role do you believe that you play in the learning process?
- How do you see that ECE can contribute to National Development in Sierra Leone?
- What are your hopes for the future of young children?
- How can African culture, specifically that of Sierra Leone be used to develop early childhood curriculum and teaching

C) CONCLUSION

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about or add?

Appendix O: NGO 1–1 Interview

Welcome: Introductions and roles of helpers (audio technician, note taker, facilitator etc.)

The Topic: Early Childhood Education in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

Aim: To explore the development of early childhood education in Sierra Leone and identify constraints and possibilities for improvement.

Paperwork: Go through Explanatory Statement and ensure Consent Form is signed by participant.

Guidelines for Interviews

- Semi structured 1–1 interview with researcher
- Explain reason you have been selected to participate
- No right or wrong answers, only seeking his/her point of view

- Confidentiality
- Tape Recording
- Question/Answer format: Open ended questions (may change as interview progresses).
- Role of Researcher
- Questions/Clarifications before we begin

Over-arching Research Questions:
What is the nature of early childhood education in Sierra Leone? What are the constraints and the possibilities?

Introduction:
As a researcher, I will be examining the systems that support and limit early childhood education in Sierra Leone. Through observations, one on one interview and small focus groups, I intend to capture the voices and perceptions of teachers, parents, government and NGO's (who are currently operating early childhood programs/initiatives). Viewing the development and constraints from multiple lenses will enable me to analyse different perspectives and initiatives currently operating and identify constraints that have held back the development of formal early education. From this analysis some recommendations for the future will be suggested.

NGO – Outline of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

A) GENERAL OPINION QUESTIONS

- In what ways do you think young children are valued is Sierra Leone?
- Has this changed post war? Can you give me an example?
- What is your understanding of formal and informal early education in Sierra Leone?
- What role do you believe African cultures play in early childhood development ?
- How can African culture, specifically that of Sierra Leone be used to develop early childhood curriculum and teaching?

B) NGO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- What role has your organization played in the advancement of early childhood development and education in Sierra Leone?
- What do you believe has held back the progress of free preschool education in Sierra Leone?
- How do you see the future of formal early childhood education in Sierra Leone progressing?

C) CONCLUSION

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about or add?

Appendix P: Government Representative 1–1 Interview

Welcome: Introductions and roles of helpers (audio technician, note taker, facilitator etc.)

The Topic: Early Childhood Education in Sierra Leone: Constraints and Possibilities

Aim: To explore the development of early childhood education in Sierra Leone and identify constraints and possibilities for improvement.

Paperwork: Go through Explanatory Statement and ensure Consent Form is signed by participant.

Guidelines for Interviews

- Semi structured 1–1 interview with researcher
- Explain reason you have been selected to participate
- No right or wrong answers, only seeking his/her point of view
- Confidentiality
- Tape Recording
- Question/Answer format: Open ended questions (may change as interview progresses).
- Role of Researcher
- Questions/Clarifications before we begin

Over-arching Research Questions:

What is the nature of early childhood education in Sierra Leone? What are the constraints and the possibilities?

Introduction:
As a researcher, I will be examining the systems that support and limit early childhood education in Sierra Leone. Through observations, one on one interview and small focus groups, I intend to capture the voices and perceptions of teachers, parents, government and NGO's (who are currently operating early childhood programs/initiatives). Viewing the development and constraints from multiple lenses will enable me to analyse different perspectives and initiatives currently operating and identify constraints that have held back the development of formal early education. From this analysis some recommendations for the future will be suggested.

Government Representative – Outline of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

A) GENERAL OPINION QUESTIONS

- In what ways do you think young children are valued is Sierra Leone?
- Has this changed post war? Can you give me an example?
- What is your understanding of formal and informal early education in Sierra Leone?
- What role do you believe African cultures play in early childhood development ?
- How can African culture, specifically that of Sierra Leone be used to develop early childhood curriculum and teaching?

B) GOVERNMENT QUESTIONS:

- What progress do you believe has been made by the government in advancing ECE since the war ended?
- What new initiatives are in place or planned?
- What constraints have prevented the development and adoption of a National Preschool Curriculum?
- Do you see the formalization of compulsory preschool being implemented by the government in the future?

- How do you think local ECH research support the government?

C) CONCLUSION

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about or add?

Appendix Q: Notes from Meeting with Mr Jalloh, 23 July 2014

(Not a formal interview; however, this meeting contributed to data)

FOCUS 1000 emphasis on the first 1000 days of life prenatal and postnatal. 270 plus 730 are the critical periods of care.

Notion of KOMBRA isn't just about the mother and child but about anyone who takes care of the child. This is the original meaning … but the emphasis has been of that of the mother to do this. Men and husbands are often left out. FOCUS 1000 is emphasizing male participation in maternal and newborn health issues, and highlighting the need for the "Man Kombra" and "Woman Kombra" to work together to improve the quality of life of children. The emphasis is on antenatal care to higher the risk of survival.

The organization NGO accepts formal education but the emphasis is more on non-formal education e.g. in the community … Mr Jalloh sees this as more possible at the present time than formal preschool education.

Mr Jalloh has a clear definition of education and it must be combined with care for example EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT. Start with the parents – they are the first educators for kids. Country needs ECE but more important is ECCare.
What has changed post war? Before the war, children were nurtured after the war introduced a lot of negative perceptions e.g. "children became hardened. Perceived as stubborn". What has held back progress of ECE? Perceptions and Cost. There are unnecessary costs and expenses such as graduation ceremonies for young children, thanksgiving ceremonies, and these "social norms must go"

The Government's policies aimed at increasing pre-primary education are yet to be translated into successful early childhood education programs and interventions.
Early Childhood education programs that are evidence-based, low-cost, and sustainable

Why are children dying?
1. Malnutrition

2. Health – childhood diseases
3. Lack of care – protection

FINAL POINTS

- Importance of not just education but CARE.
- ECE Care and Education = involves family and children
- Start Early
- Formal and Informal should be an emphasis on informal care.

Appendix R: Change of Name Certificate

Queensland

CHANGE OF NAME CERTIFICATE

REGISTRATION NUMBER
2015/ 783

NAME REGISTERED IN CHANGE OF NAME REGISTER	
Name and surname	*Eleni Athinodorou*
FORMER NAME/s REGISTERED	
Name and surname	*(no names registered)*
Name and surname	
Name and surname	
Name and surname	
BIRTH PARTICULARS (AS PROVIDED TO REGISTRAR)	
Name registered at birth or adoption	*Eleni Michailides*
Date of Birth	*13 June 1956*
Place of Birth	*Islington, London, England*
REGISTRAR	
Name	*D. John*
Date of registration	*29 April 2015*
Place of registration	*Brisbane*

NOTES (if any) *Sighted a Queensland Driver Licence issued 26 November 2014 to Eleni McDermott, born 13 June 1956. D. John, Registrar-General, 29 April 2015.*

Sighted a 'Certificate of Australian Citizenship' issued 03 June 1992 to Helen Demitriou, born on 13 June 1956. D. John, Registrar-General, 27 June 2016.

CAUTION: Whosoever shall unlawfully alter any Certified Copy of an entry in any Register of Births, Marriages, Deaths or Change of Name, whether by erasure, obliteration, removal, addition or otherwise is guilty of a CRIME, and liable to the punishment by law provided in that behalf. (See Sections 486 and 488 of the "Criminal Code".)

This certificate confirms the registration of a change of a persons name only. It does not confirm birth details. If verification of birth details is required, it should be obtained from other documents.

I, David John, Registrar-General, certify that the above is a true copy of particulars recorded in a Register kept in the General Registry at Brisbane

[redacted]

REGISTRAR-GENERAL Brisbane QUEENSLAND

Dated: 27 June 2016

N.B. Not Valid Unless Bearing the Authorised Seal and Signature of the Registrar-General