1 Constructing childhood
Global–local policies and practices

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At the global level there has been an increasing discontent with how children have been named, reified, and measured. Prevailing Eurocentric and North-American notions of “childhood” and “development” hold sway in how “childhood” is constructed and how “development” is theorized. Benchmarks about progression are viewed as universal, and little has been done to disrupt the colonization of families who have children who do not fit the Eurocentric milestones and who are asked to change their family practices in order to be “ready for learning.” In this book, we explicitly provide a series of windows on the construction of childhood around the world, as a means for conceptualizing and more sharply defining the emerging field of “global–local childhood studies.” Providing research evidence of the nature and range of childhood contexts across countries provides a conceptual platform in which to draw comparisons and to build new understandings of the concept of childhood.

The agenda that is developed throughout this book is concerned with the specific dimensions of contemporary construction of “childhood,” specifically the way globalized discourses constitute instruments (e.g. practices of policy and marketization) which disrupt, re-shape or contest family practices that educate and care for children. In this way, the book seeks to actively explore childhood studies from a range of perspectives, including those derived from education, sociology, and psychology. We begin this critique by drawing upon cultural-historical and ecological theory in order to build a dialectical relationship between global and local contexts to provide a conceptually rich discussion of “childhood” and children’s development. This perspective lies in contrast to the globalized practices of policy and marketization that we criticize. In providing a perspective of “global–local” that is dialectically framed, we move beyond the binary concepts of “individual” and “universal” or “general” and “particular.” Through this, we seek to give insights into how different countries address contemporary global politics shaping local childhoods.

Initially, it might be helpful to consider two of the ways in which the word “global” has been conceptualized. At times it has been used to mean “universal,” in the sense that development is sometimes viewed as occurring in much the same way in any part of the world. From this point of view,
understanding how development takes place in any one group of human beings adequately explains how development does, or should, occur in any part of the world. In this perspective, a single measuring stick is adequate to determine who has developed optimally and who is deficient in one or more ways.

But the term “global” has also been used in the sense of globalization, or the spread of ideas from one part of the world (typically conceived as the United States or western Europe) to the rest of the world, in an apparent process of economic, ideological, or educational colonization (see Nsamenang, this volume). These two senses of the word are linked, to the extent that if development is thought of as universal and a certain way of thinking, or behaving, or believing is viewed as the best among one group of people in one part of the world it makes perfect sense to export conditions likely to allow more people in other parts of the world to attain the same ways of thinking, behaving, and believing.

In our view, and that of the authors of the following chapters, these two related senses of the term “global” are dangerous. Culture is so heavily implicated in developmental processes that one has to consider local considerations about what should be viewed as optimal in children’s development. In other words, many measuring sticks have to be employed, rather than just one, to assess development in different cultural groups. If this is the case, one clearly must be cautious about the spread of ideas, or economic or educational institutions, from one society to others (or from a dominant group within a society to others that have been marginalized), whether in a form of active processes of colonization or by creating the conditions under which local or marginalized groups come to value aspects of the “modern” world.

What does global–local mean across communities?

It is important to note, however, that we are not advocating a local versus global approach to study children’s development. The global–local distinction can lead to a dichotomization of the understanding of what is meant by “global–local studies of childhood and children’s development.” In psychology, education, and sociology dichotomies (such as mind–body, nature–nurture, society–subject, etc.) have flowered. In ecological and cultural-historical approaches these dichotomies are transcended and turned into dialectical and complementary relationships. As Branco (this volume) argues, to understand children’s development one must consider “the intertwined nature of both general (species specific) and local (socioculturally specific) aspects of human development.” Problems arise when “global” is only conceptualized as:

- universal, transcending specific times and places
- general laws, transcending unique cases and events
- theoretically abstract practices
and local as:

- specific places and times
- unique cases and events
- concrete practices.

The aim is to understand how a global approach to childhood and children’s development always has to include reference to specific times and places, and at the same time how general laws of children’s development have to encompass unique cases and events, and theoretical conceptions of children’s development have to relate to concrete practices. The particular events in a child’s development cannot be understood in themselves without using theoretical concepts and theoretical conceptions of childhood and children’s development. are worthless if they cannot be related to concrete practices in all their complexities.

In this book we present research that draws upon a theoretical wholeness approach in researching “global–local policies and practices”

- that provides insights into and critiques policy imperatives, pedagogical processes, and cultural contexts
- that provide insights into how different countries address contemporary global–local tensions
- that foregrounds the educational context, through research in institutions such as family, school, child care and preschool.

The chapters in this book examine research from birth to twelve years, across institutional contexts (families, schools, child care, informal learning centers, community spaces), and within both poor majority and rich countries from the industrialized (minority) world. Contributors to this book provide many different windows into the global–local study of childhood and children’s development from birth to 12, and through these presentations of research, provide new insights into how studies of children’s development can be framed. However, the periodization of childhood is not uncontested, and in drawing upon sociological theories, the next section seeks to explore the tensions found in the naming of “childhood.”

Are globalized views of “childhood,” “children’s development,” and “learning” being constructed or politicized?

Traditional critiques have foregrounded the problems with uniformity and coherence in relation to the concept of childhood. Henricks (1997) argued that in the 1800s childhood had not been conceptualized as universal. It was the early 1900s that saw middle-class communities determine an identity for children constructing a “modern view of childhood.” “Childhood” became constructed and reconstructed into age periods and took on a
public identity. However, constructions of “childhood” evolved over time from Rousseauian Naturalism, Romanticism, and Evangelicalism. Similarly, wage-earning labour was transformed into a period of “childhood,” the term “juvenile delinquent” was created, a “child study” movement was founded, “children of the nation” was conceived as a public phrase, “psycho-medicine” emerged, and finally “children of the welfare state” was invented (see Henricks, 1997, pp. 35–36). Henricks determined that modern childhood was “legally, legislatively, socially, medically, psychologically, educationally and politically institutionalized” (p. 35). Kincheloe (2002) argued that along with the institutionalization of childhood came a way for describing children in universal terms. For example, young children were referred to as “non-social” or “pre-social,” and later came the notion of “normal” and “abnormal” phases of children’s development, which were taken up into the public psyche in relation to children’s growth and development in many Western countries. Kincheloe (2002) wrote:

By undermining an appreciation of the diversity and complexity of childhood, such viewpoints have often equated difference with deficiency and sociocultural construction with the natural. The complicated nature of childhood, child study, child psychology, social work for children, and childhood education demands rigorous forms of analysis. (p. 76)

Each of these disciplines has now embarked upon a serious critique of how children and therefore “childhood” has been positioned within their field.

We are now seeing an overwhelming number of critiques that have been undertaken within and across early childhood education, developmental psychology, history, and cultural studies that suggest that “childhood” is a cultural construction (Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002; Prout & James, 1997). Much of this literature states that the “child” as a construct is “reified as the ‘other’ and is seen as innocent (i.e., simple, ignorant, not yet adult), dependent (i.e., needy, unable to speak for themselves, vulnerable, victims), cute (i.e., objects, play-things, to be watched and discussed)” (Cannella, 2002, p. 3). In line with more recent, postmodern studies of childhood (Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002), this book takes an interdisciplinary, critical, and international view of “childhood.” Indeed, because of interdisciplinary research, how children are viewed has changed and, we argue, will continue to change, over time. In this book, children have been positioned as central agents within the studies reported in the chapters that follow. For example, in Section I, Fleer and Quiñones discuss the concept of “children as researchers” from both a sociological and cultural-historical perspective.

Some authors in international cultural studies have suggested that as researchers we must remember that any discourse can be dangerous and that it should continually require historical and political examination. Cultural-studies scholars suggest that the discourses can be used to “generate a childhood studies that critiques itself, attempts to decolonize, and struggles to construct partnerships with those who are younger in the generation of
human possibility” (Cannella, 2002, p. 8). Others (see Kasturi, 2002, p. 41) have argued that critical cultural studies seek to emphasise the “political dimensions of culture and society” and to examine the relations among culture, knowledge, and power in relation to children.

Postmodern critiques of “childhood,” in putting forward the notion of “postmodern childhood studies,” emphasize the need for the “disruption of the adult/child dualisms that predetermine people and generate power for one group over the other” (Cannella, 2002, p. 11). This line of critique moves beyond simply rejecting dualisms, but constructs the child as a political agent. In challenging universalism, postmodern childhood studies attempt to generate new possibilities for children. For instance, researchers have critiqued “children” and “childhood” in relation to policy development (Newburn, 1996; Oppenheim & Lister, 1996; Parton, 1996; Pilcher, 1996; Winter & Connolly 1996), the children’s rights movement (Franklin & Franklin, 1996), representations in art and popular print such as cards, magazines etc (Higonnet, 1998), education, entertainment and advertising (Kenway & Bullen, 2001).

As scholars have critiqued and debated the cultural construction of “children” and “childhood,” the corporate world has actively used the construct of “childhood” to “create, sustain, and legitimate a type of consumer ethic that has come to dominate the landscape of childhood imagination” (Kincheloe, 2002, p. 42). Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997) and Kincheloe (2002) have argued that few scholars have noticed what they call the “corporate construction of childhood.” In recognition of the immediacy and depth of information made available to children through new technologies, and through the broadening worldview of children as a result of easy exposure to information, corporations have actively targeted and redefined “childhood.” Kincheloe (2002) stated:

Corporate producers, marketers, and advertisers, recognizing the dynamics before other social agents, have reduced prior market segmentations based on chronological age to only: (a) very young children and (b) all other youth. Abandoning divisions suggested by developmental psychology, such business operatives realize how blurred age categorization has become. (p. 79)

The corporate world has redefined childhood in relation to marketing criteria. Market research by the corporate world has shown that in Western (Jipson & Paley, 2002; Kasturi, 2002; Scott, 2002) and also some Asian communities (Shon, 2002; Viruru, 2002) children are enjoying a “kidworld” (Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002) or “Kinder-culture” (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998) that runs covertly in parallel with the “adult world” (Kasturi, 2002; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Scott, 2002). Kincheloe (2002, p. 103) argued that when children are “[d]rawing on this technology-enhanced isolation, children turn it into a form of power. They know things that mom and dad don’t. How may parents understand the relationship between Mayor
McCheese and the French Fry Guys in McDonaldland? Children are enjoying the power of generating their own discourse (Scott, 2002), worldly input, and technological knowledge expertise (as a result of being able to operate technologies more easily than adults) (Provenzo, 1998), and through this children have problematized the traditional beliefs of “childhood” as “innocent,” “cute,” and in “need of protection” (Cannella, 2002; Hendrick, 1997; Higonnet, 1998). Kincheloe (2002, p. 83) stated that “traditional notions of childhood as a time of innocence and adult-dependency have been challenged by children’s access to corporate-produced popular culture.”

Alongside arguments that center on children’s agency has been a growing number of studies that also have shown the impact of the corporatization of childhood. For example, Petterson (2005), in researching consumption and identity in Arabic cultures through an analysis of Arabic children’s magazines, noted that Egyptian communities are concerned for how their children can simultaneously be modern and Egyptian. He argued that a form of hybridity of cultures prevails—that is, rather than dualities of “galabiyya vs. jeans and button down shirts,” “veil vs. the salon hair style,” and “sermon vs. TV” what is observed is “the sheikh with a cell phone, the televised sermon, the veil, selected for color and pattern, as style accessory” (p. 196). For some groups in the corporate world, the hybridization has become a form of colonization. For instance, “Disney’s geographies appropriate and commodifies space, while the histories restructure time for corporate convenience. Disney is viewed as constructing and presenting specific, ideologically loaded stories and lessons for consumers to learn” (Kasturi, 2002, p. 44). Through this process, cultural groups become invisible or stereotyped. Kasturi (2002) suggested that “the unproblematized representations of race, class, and gender in Disney ‘stories’ (e.g., movies, comics, parks)” and on their websites (p. 45) scale up the U.S. set of highly questionable values to a global form of colonization. She argued that “Disney’s power lies in this subconscious form of colonization” (p. 43). However, the tensions between local and global forms of colonization are well known to the corporate world, as argued by Kincheloe (2002):

So concerned is McDonalds about implanting this perception of localization/personalization in the mind of the public that the company actually employs a vice-president for individuality. The stated function of this office is to make “the company feel small” despite the reality of globalization. In Beijing, McDonalds markets itself to the Chinese people not as an American but as a Chinese company. (p. 87)

Similarly, in the course of researching popular children’s culture, through an analysis of the Beanie Babies, Scott (2002) argued that along with many other artefacts are products “that have lubricated the wheels of materialist globalization, a complex site of both agency and control. Beanies join with many other Euro-American artefacts in the construction of a global capitalist hegemony…” (p. 72).
The authors of various chapters in this volume make similar points about the impact of these colonizing tendencies. Citing their previously published work (Artar, Onur & Çelen, 2002; Göncü et al., 1999), Göncü, Özer and Ahioğlu (this volume) state that children’s games are influenced by their economic and cultural context, and that decreasing frequency of games and children’s reliance on ready-made toys revealed that the local meaning of childhood is being replaced by that which is introduced to Turkey through the free market economy and globalization.

Nsamenang (this volume) also mentions these problems in relation to the global impact of poor country worldviews of childhood, particularly “child development,” suggesting that there needs to be a recognition of the cultural conceptualizations of “childhood,” “child development theory,” and the practices that flow from these views. He states:

Are rights activities and the development community really aware that many Majority World children “hide” their true identity because contemporary ECCE [early childhood care and education] services instil shame in them for being different from the normative Western child?

Nsamenang (this volume) suggests that what should be foregrounded is a view that global childhood should be characterized by diversity. He states that the image of the “global child” is Western-derived and “that pathologizes all ‘other’ images of childhood.” He notes that what is actively being promoted by the “development community in [the] Majority World is a product of European and North American culture, which represents only a minority of the world’s early childhoods in a multicultural universe.” Further, he claims that those who do go beyond the industrialized world only locate themselves in the majority world cities, thus missing 70 percent of the world’s population who live in rural communities. The dynamics between the global and the local are taken up in quite different ways in the literature, and quite different critiques of “children” and “childhood” are offered by scholars working within particular theoretical perspectives, particularly those adopting a postmodern perspective.

Writing from related perspectives, Elliott, Tudge and Odero-Wanga, Freitas, Shelton, and Sperb, and Branco (all in this volume) draw attention to the ways in which views of “appropriate” ways of thinking about and dealing with children and adolescents have been spread by North American and West European scholars to other parts of the world. Elliott, for example, shows how Western educators have attempted to export their ideas to the Russian context, despite the fact that there was a great deal to admire in the Soviet educational system and much that is lacking in its North American equivalent. Similarly, Freitas and her colleagues (Freitas et al., this volume; Freitas, Shelton, & Tudge, 2008) note the ways in which North American
approaches to early childhood education have been applied in Brazil, including a two-tiered system (education of the “whole child” for the children of the rich, “care” or a deficit-inspired model to “improve” the children of the poor). Branco’s chapter, written from a cultural-historical perspective, raises the additional issue of the impact on Brazilian early childhood education of competition among children, which she sees as having been influenced by market forces to the detriment of more collaborative and interdependent ways of being. One additional issue, however, is the fact that Western and North American ideas do not always have to be imposed on parts of the majority poor world, but are sometimes accepted along with McDonalds and Starbuck as emblematic of becoming “modern.”

Childhood labor is another contested area, as many scholars from Western cultural contexts have actively sought to question such practices. However, other scholars have suggested that views of “childhood” and therefore “childhood labor” are framed from within communities, and that Eurocentric or middle-class views of what constitutes work should be culturally located and not globalized. These scholars suggest that locally relevant models should be constructed and named, and globalized definitions should be questioned (see Stephens, 1995). Assumptions about how “childhood” is being conceptualized in these discussion about “childhood labor” should be critiqued. Göncü, Özer and Ahioğlu (this volume) suggest that “the economic interdependence common in low-income households influences values about family, and children’s and women’s places in specific terms.” Further, Tudge and Odero-Wanga (this volume) demonstrate nicely how the views expressed in the 1980s in relation to Kenyan communities must now be understood as a particular period in time, as most Kenyans lived in rural communities. With the rapid movement of families into cities, Kenyan children, particularly those from middle-class backgrounds, spend much less time involved in labor. Although the urban working-class children from Kenya in their comparative study worked more, Tudge and Odero-Wanga (this volume) show that Kenyan middle-class children spent no more time at work than did children in many cities from the industrialized world. These findings draw our attention not only to the need to move beyond literature published some time ago, but also the significance of how views of some groups of children become treated as reflecting universal aspects of development, and reified, despite the diversity of circumstances and chances that occur across and within particular communities either in a specific country or across the world.

In this section we have examined the literature that has critiqued “childhood” and “children” with a view to better understanding the “global construction of childhood” and to introduce some of the key ideas inherent in the chapters within this book. In the next section we examine a new view of “children” and “childhood studies.”
A wholeness approach to researching “childhood” and “child development”

In noting the tensions inherent in discussing “childhood studies” this book seeks to move beyond the problematization of terms and concepts and offer new insights. In this book “childhood and children’s development” is framed from a wholeness perspective. A wholeness approach includes a global–local dialectic in which childhood and children are seen in interdependent relation to their activities, institutional practices, and societal conditions. This approach can both be used to conceptualize childhood in general and to follow single children in their different everyday institutional settings. It could also be used in relation to specific problems such as researching children’s use of “other persons as role models in educational practices.” Wholeness is not one thing but is a relational concept beginning with the aims held by people. For us, it is important to understand children’s development as anchored in local practices, such as the aim of teachers to have children “being compliant in the classroom” (see Elliott, this volume) or exhibiting cooperative behavior (see Branco, this volume), and this practice needs to be seen as related to theoretical concepts about children’s development. For example, in some societies interdependence is a highly valued developmental outcome, as observed in the former Soviet Union (as reported by Elliott, this volume). However, the wholeness approach also includes the influences on development that shape and change local practices which come from other groups. For example Elliott (this volume) speaks of how education was so highly valued by youth in schools, but in recent times social conditions have generated disillusionment and diminished respect for education due to its inability to improve the economic situation of people within Russia. A wholeness approach to understanding “global–local childhoods” is only possible when all of these cultural-historical conditions are brought together.

Children develop through participating in everyday practices in societal institutions, but neither society nor its institutions (i.e. families, kindergarten, school, youth clubs, etc.) are static but change over time in a dynamic interaction between person’s activities, institutional traditions and practices, societal discourse, and material conditions. Several types of institutional practices in children’s social situations influence children’s life and development. At the same time, children themselves influence the institutions in which they are situated: they change their families by their arrival, their particular temperamental qualities, the ways in which they interact with their parents and siblings, and so on; they change their kindergartens and schools by arriving there with unique past experiences, different motivations and interests, the relationships they establish with their peers and their teachers, and so on. Children’s development can be seen as diverse possibilities for socio-cultural tracks through different institutions. The chapters in this book provide a range of rich examples of diverse possibilities. Stetsenko (this volume) shows how these socio-cultural tracks have in the past been informed by an incremental view of development, where the universal perspective prevailed.
Her theoretical work shows an expansive view of development “where people come to know themselves and their world… [and] ultimately come to be human in and through (not in addition to) the processes of collaboratively transforming their world in view of their goals and purposes.” Similarly, Tudge and Odero-Wanga (this volume) draw on cultural-ecological theory (see Tudge, 2008), to show the ways in which young urban Kenyan children, from both middle-class and working-class backgrounds, develop in the course of initiating and engaging in their everyday activities.

In developmental psychology much research has focused on children’s cognitive and emotional development without considering the traditions in the settings of children’s everyday life. So for us the question is: How can studies of children’s activities in everyday institutional settings (such as family and school) across different nation states contribute to an understanding of children’s development that transcends these setting? And how can a wholeness approach be formulated that both can be used to understand children in their everyday activities in local communities and as sharing global aspects of childhood? To approach these questions one has to focus upon what is understood as a wholeness approach, and also to formulate a research approach that conceptualizes children in their everyday activities across nation states, institutional borders and local settings. We conceptualize institutional practices as part of an elaborated account of a wholeness approach where the different instances/aspects create conditions for each other. That is, when we think about children we look at the children within the institution of their family, their local community practices within institutions such as clubs, sporting groups, and the formal learning institutions that they attend, such as school or child care. This is foregrounded by van Oers (this volume) when he discusses the pedagogy of developmental teaching. In his research he notes the importance of organizing learning to reflect the wholeness of community within the classroom through the generation of everyday home and community practices within the children’s learning environment. Van Oers states “The aim of Developmental Education can also be described as the enhancement of persons’ abilities to participate independently and critically in sociocultural practices of their community.”

Given that this book focuses on researching childhood and children’s development, the concept of institutional practice has to be seen in connection with the upbringing and education of children, and how children’s active participation in their everyday practices influences the practices themselves and thereby becomes part of their learning and development conditions. That is, we consider both the child-rearing practices and experiences of children in families at the same time as we note the way these children participate in the practices of schooling. When children step into an institution, such as a school, they bring with them their everyday life from home as part of “who they are.” We believe that the child’s everyday life at home, as embedded within the child, has to be included in the institutional practice of the school, and through this influences the conceptualization of his or her learning and development.
Theoretical approaches that have focused on the same problem to develop a wholeness approach can be found in both the cultural-historical activity research with Lev Vygotsky (1998) and A. N. Leontiev (1978), which has evolved into a Scandinavian research tradition (Hedegaard, 2002, 2008; Hundeide, 2003), and the ecological approach best represented by Urie Bronfenbrenner (2005) and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), and adapted by Tudge (2008). Both cultural-historical and ecological theories share the position that understanding development requires taking simultaneous consideration of activities and interactions, characteristics of the individuals involved in those activities and interactions, and the cultural setting, as developed over historical time, that gives meaning to those activities and interactions. Trying to understand development by focusing only on the level of the individual and his or her activity or only on practice or context are seen as insufficient in both theories; instead, they require a wholeness approach.

Critiques have also arisen from other approaches such as the “deconstruction of psychology” formulated by Erica Burman or the “interpretive reproduction” approach as formulated by William Corsaro (2005). All these approaches see diversity in societal practices and traditions as central as well as point to the importance of values in research about children’s development and childhood. They all oppose the prevailing Eurocentric and North-American notions of “childhood” and development as presented above.

An educational approach needs to formulate what is conceptualized as good development; such conceptions have to be anchored in the relation between societal practices and the values that connect with these so that development cannot be viewed as universal progression. Scholars who have not considered a group’s values about what constitutes good development or a good childhood have judged these things as though they can be measured on a single Eurocentric or North American scale. Families whose children do not “measure up” on this scale are viewed as having deficits whose practices need to change to ensure “good” development. Globalizing pressures that try to ensure that all children around the world are raised in similar ways clearly stem from the idea that local practices are counter-productive if they do not fit well with a supposedly universal set of markers for good development.

By contrast, this book explicitly seeks to provide a series of windows on the construction of childhood in relation to different societal demands and value systems around the world, as a means of conceptualizing and more sharply defining the emerging field of global–local childhood studies. For instance, Nsamenang (this volume) has shown the relations between global views of what constitutes “good early childhood education and care practice,” and local constructions of “childhood” and “childhood development.” In his analysis he has problematized the disjunction between minority (usually Western) views of early learning and care and majority worldviews, showing how the dynamics between majority and minority worldviews are resulting in a form of colonization. Bottcher (this volume), in undertaking a case study of two children with cerebral palsy in a primary school context, has shown the dialectical interactions between the social and biological, accentuated through
the physical constraints imposed. Her work nicely illustrates the relations between neurobiological constraints, child motives, and child thinking and acting. She shows how children “with lesions to their brains change and develop actively in and with changing demands and possibilities in the social settings similar to the way normal children do, even though their conditions for doing so are different.” Her work provides another window into how “childhood” and “childhood development” can be conceptualized, and also illustrates that no single measuring stick is sufficient to assess development, even within a single society. Göncü, Özer & Ahioglu (this volume) show in their analysis of the Turkish context that “children’s activities are determined by the economical and value contexts of their communities.” That is, when family time and energy are devoted to the collective enterprise of income generation and collective domestic chores, then how children play and how they spend their time is significantly influenced. These local and within-community variations in children’s activities are not always well understood or considered. They provide valuable insights, not only in terms of the data generated, but also though their locally framed methodologies. In this section we have examined the global–local tensions inherent in contemporary thinking about childhood studies with a view to realizing a new perspective on the global–local study of childhood—a wholeness approach. In the next section we seek to explicate this approach specifically in relation to education.

Foregrounding the educational context through research in institutions such as family, school, child-care and preschool contexts

Education in the context of this book on childhood studies can be found as a critical interface between theoretical concepts of children’s development and local family practices—that is, seeing “education” in broad terms as the instruments and practices of learning which are located both within and outside families.

In this connection, it is important not to use the time and space distinctions for family studies naively so they become physical concepts but instead to use them to specify the relations of institutions within a societal frame. A society gives conditions for its institutions, and institutions reflect generational changes that both are dependent on and influence societal change (James, Jenks & Prout, 1997). Hedegaard and Fleer (this volume) provide insights into how the family institution creates possibilities for development in relation to societal conditions. It is through the everyday practices of the family that family-specific values, motives, and beliefs are encountered and transformed by the participants. The transitions between everyday activities, the demands and conflicts within the activities, as well as the modelling by siblings and parents are detailed for two children—one in Australia and one in Denmark. At this everyday level it is possible to see how constraints and demands at the societal level, as well as the general conception of family life impact upon the day-to-day activities of children in their family. For example, living in Australia
where community resources are geographically distant means families need a car. Being poor in Australia means that you don’t have a car and this sets up different opportunities for development.

In Bang’s chapter environmental affordance perspective is introduced and presented as an important factor in the study of development. She argues that “environment should be studied from an integrated historical/cultural and a functional perspective” environment is not a neutral term; instead the environment of a child becomes that which the child perceives as available to action”. This availability is related to social others and the self experience. Bang demonstrates her understanding in interpretation of a student’s learning in a mathematics class where both artefacts, teachers, students, and the child’s self experience have affordance in learning activity, and space” dimensions.

The relational concept of “time and space” can also be considered from the perspective of how a society depicts differences in childhood across nation states, where regional diversity and changes in practice are evident. Elliott (this volume) provides a good example of this when discussing the changes emerging both within Russian society and within the former Soviet schooling system as a result of both economic change and an opening up of values from outside the country. Similarly, Tudge and Odero-Wanga (this volume) call attention both to the passage of historical time in Kenya and to the different impact historical changes have had on middle-class and working-class Kenyan families. A practice perspective in relation to “time and space” provides the possibility to transcend the rational conceptions of this dimension and opens up space for tradition and values as part of change. Fleer, Tonyan, Mantilla and Rivalland (this volume) in their analyses of how Western play theory is used in local play practices, draw attention to how both local and societal tensions in relation to values are shaped and constituted through “time.”

At another level, how institutions shape or are shaped by different views of “children” and “childhood” (both institutional and societal) become evident in the studies reported in this book. Bottcher (this volume), drawing upon cultural-historical theory, has foregrounded the dialectical relations between the social context (school), and the activities of two children with cerebral palsy that she was studying. Rather than viewing “childhood” in isolation from the institutional context in which children participate, Bottcher (this volume) focuses on the dialectical relations between them, and through this shows how “normal children” and “children with cerebral palsy” can be reconceptualized. Her work reframes thinking in education. It repositions “biological constraints,” in this case cerebral palsy, like all other biological constraints, such as being small or being large, so that the focus of attention is in relation to the activity and how this generates (or not) motives for learning for the participants in her study.

Freitas, Shelton and Sperb (this volume) in foregrounding the historical component of Vygotsky’s cultural-historical theory, have undertaken an analysis of Brazilian views and policies of early childhood care and education in relation to the views and policies espoused in the United States. Their work shows local institutional agency, despite global domination. In examining
the dominant minority (Western) worldview, often positioned as universal, on what matters for early childhood care and education, they note that the “general principles about the care and education of young children take on local nuances.” Policies and practices are enacted or imagined with local understandings. They suggest that

in order to understand the global–local tension involved in implementing early childhood care and education policies in any society it is essential to know the history of that society, given that the changes that take place are always a transformation of what had been and not a simple substitution of the old by the new.

Their work points to the institutional agency found within early childhood education and care in Brazil, and provides a platform for thinking about the global–local construct in relation to institutions within and across countries. Institutional agency has also been noted in a study by Fleer, Tonyan, Mantill, and Rivalland (this volume) on the theories of play that were being drawn upon to inform early childhood professionals’ practice in a child-care centre in Australia. The staff (particularly the unqualified staff) used the language of Western theories of play, but constructed their own labels in order to explain their observations of children at play. As has been argued by Göncü, Özer and Ahioğlu (this volume), “none of schooling, play, or labor takes place as uniformly as was expected by Western theorists and policy makers.” Whilst the theories of play had colonized their professional practice, they were identifying problems and were working towards new understandings in relation to theorizing their practices. As with Freitas, Shelton and Sperb (this volume), the global or universal terms used in early childhood, in this case the theories of play, are also being nuanced at the local level. In contrast, Göncü, Özer and Ahioğlu, in their study of Turkish children, families and education system, argue that most Turkish scholars publish in Turkish, and as such, the theories and practices of child development and education are unavailable to the rest of the world. They state that in relation to Turkish preschool play “we do not know of studies that examine the middle-class caregivers’ values about or participation in the play of children.” Through locally relevant research, scholars in Turkey have not needed to draw upon research or theories from outside of their own society for framing up locally relevant practices.

The traditional practice in society by many countries is to separate care and education (see Freitas et al., this volume), and this has also been mirrored in the separation of family and schooling. In contrast, Kravtsov and Kravtsova (this volume) have brought together the institution of the “family” with the institution of the “school” through the creation of the Golden Key Schools in Russia. They argue that “life is organized on the principle of the family, where all adults, without exception, participate in the upbringing of the children… and [the schools are] a continuation and extension of the child’s own family.” The multi-age settings, combined with an easy flow of practice between the
school and the home, generate a learning context where separation between institutions is less evident. With an orientation towards space in the first year, followed by the foregrounding of time in the second year (e.g., time periods through history as well as “minutes,” “seconds,” and “hours”), and finally in the third year the focus is on materials (e.g., folk art and other cultures), learning is generated through teamwork across settings. The Golden Key Schools support both horizontal and vertical learning across contexts and over time.

Another aspect of education that has been noted in this book is the tension between education and development. Chaiklin and Hedegaard (this volume) suggest that “education is a societal practice, children’s development is a consequence of their participation in societal practices, and therefore education has a significant role in children’s development.” In their chapter their analyses have occurred in relation to education and development on a general analytical level, on a general practice level, and on a concrete societal level. Here they introduce the concept of radical–local teaching and learning. The concept radical–local combines the cultural-historical theory of education with local practice. “The designation ‘radical–local’ is meant to emphasise the integration of general intellectual concepts (‘radical’ in the sense of ‘root’) with the local content and conditions for children’s lives.”

Van Oers (this volume) also makes reference to the dialectical relations between education and development through detailing how developmental teaching has been theorized and enacted in practice in the Netherlands. He suggests that 10 percent of schools have adopted this approach to their teaching because of a dissatisfaction with the prevailing reductionist view of pedagogy and learning and a growing interest in cultural-historical activity theory. He states

From our Developmental Education perspective we believe that meaningful learning that can stimulate critical identity development can only blossom in activities that have adopted a format that is based on clear rules, that stimulates involvement in the actors, and that allows (at least) some degrees of freedom. This format is characteristic for play activities (see van Oers, 2005), but we extrapolated the format to all meaningful activities in the Developmental Education curriculum. That is why we characterise the whole Developmental Education curriculum as a play-based curriculum. This includes both playful learning activities in the primary grades, and the inquiry-based learning activities in the upper grades of primary school. This format of the activities in school creates the basic conditions for emancipation, identity formation and meaningful learning.

Developmental teaching positions children as not just consumers of society, learning the required curriculum, but rather as critical participants who are not only shaped by their learning community but who also contribute towards and shape curriculum possibilities.
In this section we have foregrounded some of the arguments put forward by authors of chapters in this book. We have noted the relations between society at large and the institutions found within that society, we have also considered more broadly how Western minority worldviews pass into institutional practices and are resisted or taken up, and we have considered within-nation institutions and the borders (or not) between the institution of the family and the institution of schooling. Finally, we have examined how education and development are dialectically related, and how a local–radical view can be transformative of traditional educational practices. We now move towards examining the framing of research for studying global–local childhoods.

**Researching and critiquing policy imperatives, pedagogical processes and cultural context**

One of the main themes in this book is that research with children should not be detached from children’s everyday practices. Psychological and educational research activity has generally been shown to run parallel with educational and everyday practice (see Chaiklin & Hedegaard, this volume). This points to the alternative of researching children in practice, where researchers entering this practice can be conceptualized as part of the research practice. But to do this we also have to conceptualize research as located within children’s social situations. For example, Fleer and Quiñones (this volume) discuss how traditional approaches to childhood studies have positioned the child center stage, and have marginalized the researcher. In listening to the voice of the child, the researchers have been made invisible. Yet a wholeness perspective acknowledges that the researcher is a part of the research context, not simply seen as a static being influencing the research (as it is often reported), but rather someone who engages with the children, offering possibilities for interaction and discussion. The researcher is not a play partner, but has a specific “research role,” and his or her role must be taken into account when examining the data that are generated. Similarly, children are not researched as though they were on their own. Fleer and Quiñones argue that a “children’s consultation culture… is premised upon an ideology that simply listening to children equates with generating robust research data.” They argue that foregrounding the child is not enough. The researcher in their interactions with the child, and how they enter the field, how they are positioned or position themselves (what role they take), must be made visible and understood. This is understood as a “relational ontology of human development and learning that places relations between individuals and their world at the core of this development” (Stetsenko, this volume). The psychological, educational and sociological sciences researchers have to see themselves as part of the practice, paying tribute to societal demands. When we see childhood research as practices that are related to societal demands, the researcher’s own value base unfolds.
Constructing childhood

Traditional Western psychological, educational, and sociological research, like other institutional practices, have been located within modern societies that have the “universal” goal of progress. We do not free ourselves from these societal values when we undertake research within other countries, unless we see the research context as related to “studying localized societal demands reflected in concrete practices” (Kravtsova & Kravtsov; this volume). For instance, these authors illustrate four easily observable values in the daily life of any person of any age as concrete practices:

The ability to act in the space surrounding the child. The skill to organise one’s personal space according to the goals of the activity; Orientation to time, the skill to develop, construct a sequence of actions and to plan them; The ability to work with various materials, to use their properties and peculiarities in one’s own activity; The development of the ability to analyse one’s own actions, to reflect, to understand oneself as the subject of these activities.

Here progress as value statements for the institution are assumed, and research within this institutional context seeks to determine these developments.

When going into a young nation state to look for a new kind of research into children’s development, we must ourselves question or acknowledge the extent to which our research assumes some type of universal goal in relation to the demands and societal practices which children have to meet. Otherwise we risk finding or framing research based on Eurocentric and North-American notions of childhood and children’s development. We do not conquer new knowledge by going to young nation states unless the focus of the research is related to societal demands when researching childhood practices. What we seek to avoid is reproducing the dominating science traditions. Göncü, Özer & Ahioğlu (this volume) actively positioned themselves as researchers of global–local childhood, transcending the dominating traditions in research. They were interested in how children played in rural communities in Turkey. To do this, they designed a study which not only captured the occurrence and frequency of play, but also examined the meaning of play within the particular cultural communities. They argue: “This meant that both the examination and the interpretation of children’s play need to take place according to the cultural priorities of children’s communities.” To achieve this Göncü and his colleagues observed in naturalistic settings, and they interviewed the adults who were in the environment at the time (e.g., grandparents). Interviews and observations were videotaped.

We need to conceptualize the diversity of family values as seen from different institutional and societal perspectives in our research in order to better understand the diversity of views on what constitutes “childhood” and “childhood development.” Generating a diversity of research in order to capture broader and better understandings of children and childhood is essential for increasing scholarly knowledge in global–local childhood studies.
Through this, we begin to better understand the interdependence between worldviews, methodologies and methods. For example, Bang (this volume) draws our attention to the child–environment reciprocity in an activity setting, seeking out small and great novelty. Here novelty refers to the “presence of things and people in specific context, but also to the presence of an absence (temporality/historicity) of societal processes” as the child interacts with the environment. In the study of global–local childhoods, Bang (this volume) argues that in studying “potentials for small and great novelty within an activity setting means studying what kind of activities are going on in which particular environment, how does a child participate in ongoing activities, and how does he or she experience/feel about this.” The dialectical relations between the local research context and the worldview and methodology of the researchers come into play.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have explored how a wholeness approach to the global–local study of children can provide new insights into how we think about childhood studies and how we may go about researching child development and learning within and across institutions and countries. Throughout this book we have positioned the global–local study of children, childhood, and development through a wholeness lens. The chapters that follow further problematize the cultural construction of childhood (Section I), elaborate more on the theoretical ideas introduced in this chapter (Section II) and finally, they expand on the educational implications of contemporary global–local thinking (Section III).

**References**


Marilyn Fleer, Mariane Heregaard and Jonathan Tudge


