Protecting Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education: What Ethical Measures are in Place for School-based Social Research?

C. I. O. Okeke and M. L. Drake

University of Fort Hare, East London Campus, Eastern Cape, RSA

ABSTRACT This paper explores some of the documents on ethical requirements to lay the framework for further interrogation regarding ethical considerations with school-based social research involving children. The researchers argue that within the context of educational and social research, the current ethical framework policies provide insufficient understanding and protection for diverse categories of children in early childhood development (ECD). The researchers argue that as vast attention is shifting towards ECD research, it is imperative that appropriate policies addressing children's rights as participants are put in place. The researchers also argue that current ethical framework policies, which appear to originate from a purely medical and health perspective offer insufficient protection for children at various ECD centers visited during a research fieldwork. The paper proposes that formal national ethical framework policy for social and educational research involving children be formulated to guide researchers in this specific field of study. Further recommendations have also been made.

INTRODUCTION

In many disciplines, research has become an issue of ethics and responsibilities. However, unlike the medical and allied health professional and non-professional research where the ethical principles guiding research involving 'human subjects' are well established (Department of Health 2006; National Health Act 2013; World Medical Association 2013; Akpabio and Esikot 2014; Nortjé and Hoffmann 2015b), the situation appears very different for educational and social research. Given that school-based educational and social research differs significantly from say, a medical research, the researchers argue that current ethical framework policies, which appear to originate from a purely medical and health perspective offer insufficient protection for educational and social research involving children. This appears to inform why the World Medical Association (2013: 1) notes, "consistent with the mandate of the WMA, the Declaration is addressed primarily to physicians. The WMA encourages others who are involved in medical research involving human subjects to adopt these principles". The absence of ethical principles that specifically target educational and social researchers may mean that when children

are involved in such research, their rights would either be undermined or taken-for-granted.

Educational and social research with children proceeds in subtle ways quite clearly distinguishable from medical and other allied research processes (Flick 2006; Fossheim 2013; Nortjé and Hoffmann 2015b). At the moment, only the Minister of Health in the Republic of South Africa possesses the mandate to permit or authorize research that is classified non-therapeutic (National Health Act 2013: 98-99). Space does not permit discussion on whether educational and social research may be classified non-therapeutic in the clinical sense. However, it suffices to mention that the environment in which educational and social research involving children is carried out, the nature of the interaction from such research, the kind of data obtained and the analyses thereof are not susceptible to such classification. Given that the "Minister of Health may not give consent in circumstances…" (National Health Act 2013: 99), questions are raised over how specific aims and objectives that resonate through educational and social research with children may be interpreted from a medical and paramedic standpoint.

Educational researchers need to protect their research participants, develop a trust with them, promote the integrity of the research (Steneck and Mayer 2010; Nortje and Hoffmann 2015a), guard against misconduct and impropriety that

Address for correspondence:
C. I. O. Okeke
E-mail: cokeke@ufh.ac.za

may reflect on them and their institutions, and cope with challenging and surprising problems. Issues such as personal disclosure, authenticity, credibility, the role of the researcher in cross-cultural contexts and the issues of personal privacy (Broch 2013; Creswell 2014) create a mirage of complexities. These complexities are further deepened by the inclusion of children in the research process. Coady (2001: 64) cautions that researchers need to be especially heedful of young children's vulnerability as children are heavily represented among victims of research. Even well meaning researchers can cause harm to child participants in research (Mukherji and Albon 2010; Brostrom 2012).

Since the 1980s, the promotion and creation of children's protection through the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989) has created a new environment for researchers whose participants include children. This landmark policy outlines rights for children and expresses vision and hope for children all over the world. In four fundamental and universal rights statements, children have a right to survive, a right to develop to the fullest, a right to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation, and the right to participate fully in family, cultural and social life (Brostrom 2012: 258). It is through these rights and expressions that children have moved from the traditional view of being seen as 'objects' in the research process, to now being seen as active participants within a new type of childhood, characterized by ideas of individualism, self-formation and human beings responsible for their own learning (Brostrom 2012). The implications this has for educational researchers are that children should be given influence and should be seen as active participants in the research process.

SOME FRAMEWORK POLICIES RELATING TO THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA

The protection and special care granted for children stems from the very roots of South African policy. The Constitution of South Africa sets the foundation for the provisions and care that South Africa's children are entitled to (Kotzé 1996; Republic of South Africa 1996). After years of neglect and discrimination against specific groups of children in South Africa, the Constitution laid the basic principles and values for dealings with all children. The new government saw a 'Bill of Rights' as central to the new Constitution. According to Section 12c, subsection 2c of the Constitution, every child has the right "not to be subjected to medical or scientific experiments without their informed consent" (Republic of South Africa 1996: 5). The Bill of Rights is based on the notion of fundamental equality of all women, men and children, irrespective of age, gender, race or color. The Bill of Rights protects a range of civil, political, economic and social rights, which were denied to the majority of South Africans during apartheid years (Hatchard and Slinn 1995). Civil rights include the right to life (not defined), human dignity, privacy, freedom, security and the prohibition of torture of any kind, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Hatchard and Slinn 1995). Fundamentally, the provisions above have many implications on how children are seen, and how they are protected in South African society.

Since then, the South African Children's Act (Department of Justice 2006) provides detailed aims and objectives regarding the protection and care of children. The objectives of this policy among others are to:

…Develop and strengthen community structures, *which can assist in providing care and protection of children*, *protect children from discrimination, exploitation and any other physical, emotional or moral harm*, *provide care and protection to those children who are in need of care and protection*, *recognize the special needs that children with disabilities may have*, *and promote the protection, development and well-being of children* (Department of Justice 2006: 18).

These provisions have implications for both educational researchers and others who engage with children in the research environment. For instance, Kjorholt (2013: 23) suggests, "a child perspective in research presents particular challenges". This is because children are described as vulnerable participants (Neaum 2013) and therefore, require educational researchers to take extra care when considering ethical decisions and principles on which interactions with them are based. The Act also expresses that if it is in the best interests of the child, the child's family must be given the opportunity to express their views in any matter concerning the child. This principle can be seen reflected in the current ethical considerations that are taken when work-

ing with children in the research environment, through the necessary consent and permission needed from children's guardians or parents (Coady 2001). However, if children are to be "taken seriously as participants in the research process and seen as competent 'subjects' with valuable knowledge, views and ability to communicate" (Kjorholt 2012: 25), serious ethical implications may result in a situation when adult family member takes the role of the child in a research situation. In the context of educational and social research, the credibility of findings emanating from such process may be questionable on many grounds.

Other framework policy guidelines relating to research involving children are the guidelines for good clinical practice (Department of Health 2006) and the National Health Act (2013). Although the two documents emanate to guide therapeutic and non-therapeutic research from a medical perspective, however, various sections of both documents are found to relate to the conduct of educational and social research. Generally, drawing from the Helsinki Declaration (WHO 2001), the Department of Health (2006) established 13 ethical principles for good clinical practice (GCP) that all clinical and other research must be based on. Within these principles resonate the responsibilities of the researcher for all research participants including minors. On the other hand, Sections 71 to 73 of the National Health Act (2013: 96-101) fully explain in detail the responsibilities of the researcher for various types of research involving minors. While Section 71 (2a-d) stipulates how minors should be treated in a therapeutic research, and subsection 3a (i-v) discusses how minors should be handled in a non-therapeutic research (National Health Act 2013:98-99). Although some Faculties of Education in South Africa's Universities have adapted most (if not all) of the ethical principles from both the Department of Health (2006) and the National Health Act (2013) in establishing their own research ethics, however, research may be required in order to understand various implications of such adaptation in the conduct of school-based research with children.

Notwithstanding, it has already been suggested elsewhere in the paper that school-based social research differs significantly from health or medical research. From the psychosocial standpoint, it is well obvious that children perceive and verbalize ideas differently from adults

(Boddy 2013) in social interactions. Again, Kjorholt (2013) argues that instead of making adult members of a particular family answer for the children, it becomes imperative for social researchers to create meaningful environments that would enable children to be able to answer for themselves. One way social researchers can achieve this during a research process is by being able to reflect on the kind of questions they ask and the methods with which they do so. Otherwise, it will be very questionable how consent and permission, particularly pertinent to research in ECD that focuses specifically on children and educational practice, would be achieved through a third party.

While this may be necessary and possible in a medical or health research where perhaps the efficacy of a new product to be tested on children requires certain level of precautionary intervention, such practice may be meaningless in a social research. Traditionally, there appears to be a tendency to objectify children, teachers and school stakeholders by creating a perceived 'gap' between research participants and the researcher. Unfortunately, in many instances, children are still seen as objects in the research process. However, more and more social researchers are finding usefulness and sincerity in allowing participants who are children to have a voice and to be seen as active participants in the research process (Brostrom 2012). This paper will detail ethical principles and values that allow for effective and reciprocal relations between the researcher and children participants. But before the researchers analyze these relationships, the uniqueness of children as research participants has been explored.

UNIQUENESS OF CHILDREN AS PARTICIPANTS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Social research that involves children is a relatively new dimension to research and research that involves preschoolers is novel to South Africans. Related to this is the "lack of debate about ethical dilemmas involving preschool children in relation to how researchers' decisions and behaviors in the field can affect children, and the communication between the researcher and children" (Skanfors 2009:8). Researching children raises particular concerns regarding ethics, due to the vulnerability status

that children are afforded. Children can be vulnerable in two ways (O'Reilly et al. 2013). There are children who are vulnerable because of their more limited knowledge and physical weakness that render them dependent on adults, although this changes as they grow and develop. Children can also be seen as structurally vulnerable because of a lack of economic and political power (Lansdown 1994). Notwithstanding, social research with children can come with numerous benefits. Mwaipopo (2006: 1) notes that such research is necessary because it enables researchers "to reach out to a section of society disadvantaged by age in terms of their representation in societal issues".

Traditionally, researchers have seen children who engage in the research process, in one of four groups (Munford and Sanders 2004; Stellenberg and Dorse 2014; Nortjé and Hoffmann 2015b). Different conceptualizations and opinions have been used by scholars to identify these groups or categories. Christensen (2004) describes four categories of the child in a research process to include: child as an object, subject, social actor, and participant or co-researcher. The first two categories represent the traditional research paradigm, while the last two represent the more contemporary research paradigm. The most traditional of these approaches is 'the child as object', which tends to relate to research which is conducted on or about the child. Like a real object, a child in this category would have no say or active role other than to be submissive to the will of the researcher(s). This category of children as research objects stems traditionally from a more scientific research paradigm, when children were subjected to experiments without consideration of any trauma that the experience could result in. Such model according to Backe-Hansen (2012: 100) "presupposes a stable and asymmetrical power relationship between researchers and the researched". This kind of situation results in an exploitative relationship in which the child comes second best. This argument is also supported by an earlier finding by Mwaipopo (2006: 1) who had argued, "theories about children and childhood evolved from the traditional assumptions that viewed children as naturally passive, otherwise immature and hence, incompetent persons who required training as they developed into adults".

In the second category, 'the child as subject', the image of the child is an improvement

from the first. In this category the child is no longer seen as an object but as a person with some form of subjectivity (Christensen and Prout 2002). The problem with this view is that although the researcher's perception of the child has improved considerably, the child in practical research is still an object—with subjectivity (Johansson 2012). It is therefore understood that within both of these groups of children's participation in research, the child is seen as an object in the research process. The child as a social actor denotes the view that children are the subjects of research, and they are seen even more deeply as social actors with their own understandings and their own experiences. One of the vital movements that resulted from this understanding of children in research is that children were given the freedom to make their own decisions in the research process, particularly, with regards to whether they wanted to participate in the research or not (Christensen and Prout 2002).

The fourth perspective, 'the child as a participant or co-researcher' has been largely influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), discussed earlier. In this perspective, children are viewed as citizens with an active participatory role in society. This outlook emphasizes the agency of the child. These categories and movements in ethical considerations regarding children participants describe how the status of children in research has been changing over the years in response to socio-political changes in specific countries as well as globally. Children's participation in social research has evolved from being objectified, as was common in traditional research processes until recently, to participants or co-researchers in the research process. Active participation of children in social research has led to the notion of children as researchers in their own right, hence the perspective of 'the child as a co-researcher.' More so, Backe-Hansen (2012: 98) notes that the notion of children as co-participants derives from the fact that "bringing children's citizenship centrally into adult thinking and practice, then will foster a climate of mutual respect and support across the generations that will benefit all".

Furthermore, it can be argued that with these dramatic movements in how researchers understand children's participation in research, comes a revelation from the researchers side; the application of ethics (Munford and Sanders 2004).

How ethics are or can be applied to children participants remains a contested and debated terrain. It can also be argued that the four groups or categories coexist, and that there is no definite progression, but rather that these understandings continue to exist alongside each other in contemporary, modern research (Christensen 2004). The main challenge for contemporary research with children is not how to progress from perceiving 'the child as object' but how to lessen the co-existence of the different perspectives of the child in contemporary research. Different perspectives cause inconsistent treatments of children in research, depending on what the researcher's perspective of children is. A shift towards the perspective of children as social actors and co-researchers uplifts the status of children in society (Johansson 2012). Promoting the perspective of children as social actors facilitates a more positive engagement of children in research and prevents the violation of children's rights that is often associated with research on or about children. Following these debates and realizations, this paper will present ethical principles and their challenges when engaging with children in the research process.

Despite some of the downsides of research with children, Mwaipopo (2006), Ball (2012), and Urban (2012) suggest that doing research with children as co-participants comes with numerous gains. Research activity in which children are treated as active social actors would positively impact the quality and relevance of the findings of such research. When children are engaged in research as active participants, decisions about intervention to matters concerning them are informed by less speculative assumptions.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND ISSUES IN RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

Research ethics is particularly interested in the investigation of ethical issues that are raised when people are involved as participants in research, and with children such issues can be very sensitive. According to Mwaipopo (2006:2), ethical principles entail that researchers consider "how child participants could be enabled to participate in and not be exploited by the research as well as ensuring that their rights are protected". Now, the researchers describe some specific and relevant principles that should guide all interactions with children when engaging in research. It also opens a platform for further discussion and thoughts regarding a national framework for South African research involving children participants. The key ethical principles include the following.

Assent of the Child Participant

The issue of assent becomes necessary with the understanding that the child is a person who has not attained the legal age that allows him or her to consent to research. Child assent stipules obtaining an agreement from the child to partake in a research process. The importance herein is that the child him/herself must personally offer to be a part of the research after the researchers have successfully communicated all aspects of the research to the child. There has been a growing interest about the ways in which children themselves assent to participate in research. Issues of assent relating to children have been the focus of extensive deliberation (France 2004; Alderson and Morrow 2004; Skanfors 2009). This interest was initiated as a result of dissatisfaction about traditional approaches to ethical considerations and the accepted view that adults can decide on behalf of children, by way of informed consent to participate in research (Munford and Sanders 2004).

Factors to be considered in ensuring that the child is duly informed of research processes and principles include age, general cognitive ability, emotional status and knowledge (Lindsay 2000; Urban 2012). Coady (2001) cautions that according to legal definitions, children cannot consent, but the child's legal guardian can give consent on behalf of the child. Yet, contemporary approaches to research ethics in which children are allowed to assent to participate, can be justified on the basis that parents' consent does not guarantee the child's willingness to participate. Within the human rights framework, seeking the parents' consent alone in order for a child to participate is insufficient and in violation of the child's right not to participate in research. If children are treated as participants in a social research it is necessary to seek their assent. In keeping with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the researcher should ask the child to assent to be involved in the research (Coady 2001; Kellet 2005; Murray and Urban 2012; Urban 2012).

The 'Complete' Well-being of Children Participants

The well-being of participants is arguably the most important principle in research with children. This principle is meant to protect research participants from physical, emotional and psychological harm. Non-maleficence, according to O'Reilly et al. (2013), refers to avoiding harm and how researchers should aim to produce net benefit and reduce all risk of harm when planning and conducting their research. Therefore, while the researcher has to fulfill the rigorous methodological requirements of a study, there is also an obligation to apply rigorous means to ensure protection of participants (Johansson 2012). Hence, the researcher must be sensitive to the unique needs of all individuals, participants and their own activities in the research process (Nairn and Clarke 2012). While ensuring the physical well-being of children in research seems rather simple, many researchers are often puzzled when children tell them in interviews that they are victims of physical abuse (Nairn and Clarke 2011). This means researchers must plan in advance the means to convey sensitive messages of abuse that are reported by children during interviews.

Perhaps one question to ask here could border on what ethical issues may arise from this sort of dilemma. On the one hand, the researcher has been signatory to confidentiality and privacy principles that warrant that he or she protects the child participant to the extent that disclosure might be injurious to the participant. So should the researchers remain mute just because he/she has signed the privacy and confidentiality documents to protect the child while allowing the abuse to continue? From the perspective of conscience, disclosure may necessarily be the option "if the anticipated benefits justify the risk" (Department of Health 2006:67). This is one way of making children benefit from the research particularly since there had been speculation over the years that most research with children tends to benefit researchers only (Lynch et al. 1999).

Ensuring children's emotional and psychological well-being in research is probably the most complex and challenging ethical consideration to adhere to. Not only is it difficult because researchers cannot be sure about what is harmful to different children, particularly in a multicultural context like South Africa, but also because emotional and psychological suffering could be experienced long after the interview had been done or the research completed. Along these lines, it is vitally important that the researcher strive for best ethical practice and responsibility for any upset during the recruitment phase of the research, during the fieldwork, and once the research is deemed complete (Kjorholt 2012; Nairn and Clarke 2012). It takes additional consideration as researchers and educationalists to completely undertake such challenges when planning the research design.

Privacy and Confidentiality when Working with Children Participants

Most professionals working in the early childhood field are aware of the need to maintain confidentiality about children and their families (Coady 2001). Ensuring the confidentiality of research data or evidence and anonymity of children participants in the research process is a vital component of conducting ethical research with children. Children should be informed about the limitations of confidentiality before participating in research. This will allow them to give a fully informed consent (Fargas-Malet et al. 2010). The important element in this consideration is that children themselves must decide which information remains between the child and researcher and which information could be shared with other people. However, there is debate among researchers and academics about whether sensitive information that results from interviews regarding, for example, child abuse or victimization (Coady 2001) should be disclosed against the child's will. As the researchers have already argued above, if the benefit of disclosing such abuse will outweigh the risk for the child, then such abuse must be disclosed accordingly.

Having said that, Lynch et al. (1999) suggest that sensitive information such as sexual abuse, derived from an interview with a child, should be reported to relevant stakeholders even if this means breaching the confidentiality code agreed upon prior to the interview. On the other hand, Fargas-Malet et al. (2010) maintain that sensitive information or any information given by a child should only be disclosed or shared when the child assents to that, after having discussed it with the child. In practical situations it would

seem unethical for a researcher to allow himself or herself to be oblivious to the suffering experienced by a child participating in a study. In child abuse cases the breaching of the confidentiality code agreed upon by the researcher and the child at the beginning appears inevitable. Although this kind of scenario may put the researcher into a very complex situation, in a very serious crime as child abuse, the researcher will hold no legal obligation to uphold the confidentiality agreement other than to disclose crime.

Power Relations between Researcher and Children Participants

The age difference between the researcher and the participants alone shifts the power to the researcher. Power relations determine how the participants will respond to the researcher and how they conduct themselves throughout the research process (Christensen 2004). It is on this assumption that ethnographic studies are said to be inappropriate for research with children. Ethnographic studies "suggest that childhood is an exotic foreign land that adults visit, just as colonial ethnographers…ventured to 'other' cultures" (Randall 2012:40). While ethnographers visit the research setting with good intentions, participants have a predisposition to perceive the researcher as someone who 'knows better' or in other words, is more powerful. Even worse, an ethnographer could be perceived as someone who uses covert means to obtain information from the participants. Under these circumstances, children might withdraw or act in ways that do not display their true characters. This means the researcher has to find ways to relinquish some of his or her perceived power.

Mandell (1988) proposed three principles for shedding some of the perceived power that a researcher enters the research setting with. Mandell's principles have been summarized by Randall (2012:40) to include minimizing "the social difference between adults and children, value the children's social worlds as being as important as those of adults, and find shared meaning with children through social activities such as play". Minimizing the social differences entails "suspending the notion of children and view them simply as social members" (Mandell 1988:436). Minimizing social differences means researchers should not stand on the outside,

observing or looking in on children and their childhood. Rather, they should attempt to understand how children experience being children and living their childhoods (Randall 2012). These assertions show that the researcher's mindset has a great influence on how power relations are negotiated between the researcher and the child. A researcher's preconceived ideas about children's incompetency and intellectual immaturity will act as barriers to positive engagements with children.

The second principle of Mandell relates to the need to minimize the perceived power by valuing the children's social world. This depends on the researcher's ability to "gain knowledge of children's views and of the ways in which children accept and challenge adult perspectives" (Mandell 1988:436). Similarly, Randall (2012:42) asserts that in order for researchers to minimize their adult power, they should believe that a child's social world is as real, valid and vital as those of adults. This viewpoint is significant as it emancipates children from the state of vulnerability and makes their voices heard. This is an important move from the traditional view of children as research participants and encompasses the modern take on ethical considerations with children in research. This view is also important because it favors the notion of conducting research with children rather than about children.

The last principle proposed by Mandell is that the researcher should attempt to have genuine or 'real' interactions with children to find shared meaning, through social activities such as play or arts-based participatory methods (Randall 2012). The contemporary perspective on children is necessary to achieve this objective. It is also clear that only a researcher who views children as competent human beings, who deserve to be listened to, will be able to conduct research with children in a humanistic and ethical manner. To evaluate research with children, research reports the need to include discussions of how the researchers addressed Mandell's principles. Researching children requires practitioners to be aware of the relevant ethical codes and guidelines, but furthermore, to be able to judge the relative importance of conflicting ethical principles that arise from working with this special group of research participants (Lindsay 2000). Evidence shared by children is influenced by how social differences are minimized, the per-

ceived value the researcher places on the children's social worlds and how children are engaged in the research process (Randall 2012).

DISCUSSION

Ethical Framework Policy for Social Research in ECD in South Africa

As social research differs significantly from health and medical research, the researchers argue that existing ethical framework policies do not fully capture the nature of interactions contingent upon social research. Kjorholt (2012) argued that although national ethical guidelines are important, they are not sufficient when doing research with children in cross-cultural contexts. According to Herczog (2012), the United Nations Convention on Child's Rights is the first legally binding human rights treaty. Within the Convention (UNICEF 2011) are four specific articles namely: Articles 3, 4, 12 and 18 that together point towards "the full recognition of the rights of all children to early childhood education and care" (Herczog 2012:549) as well as towards the respect of the views of the child. However, it is important to point out that although the Convention accords full recognition to the right of every child to early childhood education and care, it did not specifically address how children should be involved in the type of educational and or social research currently taking place within the domains of ECD.

Martin (2012) documents the progression of a policy framework on early childhood development in South Africa from 1994 to 2011. However, as important and unique as these developments may appear, a major weakness of such policy development was that each failed to specifically address the negative impact the socio-economic developments have had on African children in the country. Moreover, while some of the policies have had some focus on ECD, many others have only contributed minimally. The present researchers argue that ethical policy frameworks on research that uniformly target every South African child without recognition given to the apparent diversity and the differential socio-economic circumstances under which most South Africa's children currently live, would tantamount to inequality of access. Ethical concerns when conducting social research with children from low-income or disadvantaged backgrounds may differ significantly from ethical concerns when dealing with children from more affluent backgrounds. There is no evidence to suggest that current policy has dealt with these issues adequately. When working with children in disadvantaged schools, fieldworkers are often exposed to and have to confront harsh realities and environments in which these children live. It is obvious that researchers from the domain of humanities and social sciences would require dealing with different ethical issues that may require different ethical principles.

South Africa's progression towards a comprehensive early childhood development policy framework began in 1994 with the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) of 1994. Although the RDP was not specifically targeting ECD, a key provision that addressed an ECD matter was that of free healthcare for children under the age of 6 (Martin 2012). The RDP also failed to define what ECD entails. The White Paper on Education and Training (DoE 1995; Martin 2012; Saloojee and Slemming 2012) clearly spelt out what ECD means for South Africa, but was specifically silent on how educational and social researchers working with children either as participants or as 'subjects' should relate to them. The gap persists. The Interim Department of Education Policy for Early Childhood Development (DoE 1996) defined ECD following the White Paper on Education but also established a pilot project for a universal reception year (Martin 2012). However, as with the previous interim policy, there are no provisions for specific research issues involving children in the domain of humanities and or social sciences. The National Program of Action for Children in South Africa, which developed following the ratification of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, simply acknowledged the interim policy.

Other policy frameworks that target the rights of the child in South Africa include the White Paper for Social Welfare (Department of Welfare 1997), the White Paper for the Transformation of the Health System in South Africa (Department of Health 1997; 2006), the Child Support Grant (Department of Social Development 1998), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which South Africa ratified in 2000 (Martin 2012), the UNESCO Education for All 2000 (Martin 2012; Saloojee and Slemming 2012), the Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood

Development (Department of Education 2001), the White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education (Department of Education 2001), the the National Integrated Plan for ECD in South Africa 2005 – 2010 (UNICEF 2005), and the National Health Act (2013). It must be noted that this plan was the first national action plan for the ECD sector in the Republic since 1994. According to the plan, ECD refers to a comprehensive approach to policies and programs for children from birth to nine years with the active participation of their parents and caregivers (Martin 2012:13). A mention must be made of the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (Department of Social Development 2006) and the National Early Learning and Development Standards for Children Birth to Four Years (Department of Basic Education 2009), which focuses on the development of quality learning for children between 0 to 4 years.

Although these policies have made tremendous progress in the area of children's rights to education in particular and early childhood development in South Africa generally, it remains doubtful whether ethical issues relating to school-based social research were addressed in any of these policy frameworks. Moreover, without a unified and binding national policy on early childhood development and education for South Africa, the important issues relating to the ethical principles involved in social research involving children may never be effectively addressed. An important aspect of ethics in children's research in a culturally diverse society such as South Africa is the question of how to address ethical issues when conducting research among children with a history of vulnerability including violence, abuse, neglect, poverty, disease-stricken, family instability, illiteracy, and rural dwelling. It is obvious that researchers in the domain of humanities and social sciences entering the spaces of such children will have a different ethical mandate from those who may be entering the spaces of children from affluent communities. For instance, if transformative radical research is meant to challenge the assumptions made about such vulnerable children, their families and communities (Barnett 2010; Ball 2012; Urban 2012; Stellenberg and Dorse 2014; Strode et al. 2014) then the researcher(s) would require different sets of ethical frameworks that enable them to navigate more sensitive territories as they progress with the research. By doing so, the gain of such research could possibly be the emancipation of such children and their communities.

Experience from a just concluded field research would support the notion that rural research with children requires a new ethical consciousness. At the moment, no rural-specific ethical requirements are known to exist anywhere either in the Province or in the Republic for researchers in the domain of humanities and social sciences. It is therefore necessary to begin to interrogate such a possibility. Herczog (2012: 542) suggests that "a rights-based approach consists in a set of values and standards and a comprehensive and inclusive manner that apply to all children and their best interests, and the development of their capacities". Given this fact, only framework policies on ethical requirements that specifically target educational and social research with rural children can best protect and serve the interests of those children as well as those of the researchers themselves.

In considering an inclusive ethical policy framework for educational and social research with children with a history of vulnerability, it is plausible to suggest that a different set of ethical considerations is a necessary step to guarantee the trust that has been hitherto denied to most children involved in social research. Such an ethical framework policy must take the nature of the researched children into account. Even if the research process is explained and understood by the child participants as suggested by Kjorholt (2012), such research may still not have considered the nature of the child. Social research process in which the nature of the child is properly considered would first attempt to understand how the entire research might impact the psychosocial well-being of the children involved. Most often, educational and social researchers are so preoccupied with obtaining rich and thick data from the researched children that they fail to cater for the impact of such research on the psyche of the child participants. That is why Broch (2012:64) notes, "children involved in research must be given an adequate, informative orientation about the proposed research project, its methods and intended outcomes". A functional ethical framework must clearly stipulate responsibilities for the researchers to demonstrate understandable evidence of how the child participants are supported even after the study has been terminated, noting that the out-

come of the study may have negative effects on the child participants.

An inclusive framework policy on ethical principles for school-based research with children will reflect the context of the child. More so, because the post-1994 experiences of the South African child are contextualized in terms of rural versus urban, poor versus affluent, parental affect, family stability and instability, violated and abused, language deficient, low socio-economic status, disease-stricken, and child-parent. A functional framework policy on the ethics of social research must reflect these realities and researchers entering the social spaces of the affected must be made by policy, accountable and responsible. Without much digression, it appears reasonable to think that most current ethical requirements are transported from across the Atlantic with undeniable Eurocentric undertone. For example, interpretations of individual rights in current ethical principles appear to be Western orientated. Backe-Hansen (2012:122) argues that "a predominantly Western focus on individual rights may actually be detrimental to the interests of young people in public care unless an ethic of care is developed alongside the rights perspectives".

The age and competency differential amongst children, and between children and adults, children's potential vulnerability to exploitation, and power relations between children and adult researchers are various elements that necessitate proper and carefully structured framework policy on the ethics of educational and social for research with children and for early childhood development research. Although the researchers are not against the giving of gratifications to the child participants or their communities for that matter, ethical considerations would call for the rationalization of such practice especially within the domain of humanities and social sciences. For instance, what do such gratifications mean to the vulnerable and rural dwelling child participants against the urban dwelling and affluent child participants? What are the likely impacts of such gratifications on both the research process and on the researched child participants? These issues raise very serious ethical questions for consideration if social research may achieve its objectives without leaving behind negative and permanent influences on the child participants. There are many more issues, however, space is limited for a full discourse in this very important subject.

CONCLUSION

From the domain of humanities and social sciences, it is obvious that research involving child participants raises many ethical questions, problems and challenges. It therefore, becomes imperative to address the issue of research ethics specifically targeting researching the empirical social world of early childhood development. Addressing such an important area would facilitate the establishment of a genuine and meaningful research culture that allows for the full acknowledgement of the rights and interest of the child participants in ECD research. It is therefore essential for all stakeholders to engage in debates aimed at devising a more transparent framework policy on the ethics of social research that effectively accentuates the responsibilities of the social researchers in South African early childhood development research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions above, the researchers would recommend a conceptualization of ethics that refer to conducting social (not medical) research in ECD contexts. There is the need for multi-sectorial debates on what ethics mean for social research and researchers in early childhood development. Research institutions and universities must engage with the concept of ethics in social research with children in order to come up with a child-specific framework policy document suitable for the conduct of educational and social research in early childhood contexts.

Researchers entering the spaces of children should be made to commit and demonstrate from the onset, how the outcomes of such research with children would benefit those children and their communities. A good example here is the case with teenage pregnancy. As it is known, many academics have been involved in this kind of research for years, and many have also risen from the ranks to become full professors, yet teenagers are still getting pregnant.

Gratifications in research involving children remain under scrutiny. Experience has shown that gifts may impact the credibility of the findings of particular studies. The researchers rec-

ommend that gratifications to children and/or their community for their participation in a research be avoided. While this may work for some types of research, it is obvious that when it comes to social research and the kind of data sought, gratifications may pose serious credibility issues. Participants in research must be free to contribute to particular research based on their understanding of how such research may benefit them and their communities and not only because of the evidence of gratifications.

REFERENCES

Akpabio EM, Esikot IF 2014. Social sciences and research ethics in developing countries: The perspective from Nigeria. *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development,* 6(4): 231-241.

Alderson P, Morrow V 2004. *Ethics, Social Research and Consulting with Children and Young People.* Ilford: Barnado.

Backe-Hansen E 2012. Between participation and protection: Involving children in children in child protection research. In: H Fossheim (Ed.): *Cross-cultural Child Research: Ethical Issues.* Norway: The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, pp. 97-127.

Ball SJ 2012. *Global Education Inc: New Policy Networks and the Neo-liberal Imaginary.* London: Routledge.

Barnett SW 2010. *Benefits and Cost of Quality Preschool education: Evidence-based Policy to Improve Returns.* Brussels: OECD.

Boddy J 2012. Ethics tensions in research with children across cultures, within countries: A UK perspective. In: H Fossheim (Ed.): *Cross-cultural Child Research: Ethical Issues.* Norway: The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, pp. 71-96.

Broch HB 2012. Anthropological field experiences from work with children in natural settings on three continents. In: H Fossheim (Ed.): *Cross-cultural Child Research: Ethical Issues.* Norway: The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, pp. 45-70.

Brostrom S 2012. Children's participation in research. *International Journal of Early Years Education,* 20(3): 257-269.

Christensen P, Prout A 2002. Working with ethical symmetry in social research with children. *Childhood,* 9(4): 477-497.

Christensen PH 2004. Children's participation in ethnographic research: Issues of power and representation. *Children and Society,* 18(2): 165-176.

Coady M 2001. Ethics in early childhood research. In: G Naughton, S Rolfe, I Siraj-Blatchford (Eds.): *Doing Early Childhood Research: International Perspectives on Theory and Practice.* Berkshire: Open University Press.

Creswell JW 2014. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Department of Basic Education 2009. National Early Learning and Development Standards for Children Birth to Four Years. Pretoria: Government Printers. From <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/curricula/southafrica/sa_ece_po_2009_eng.pdf.> (Retrieved on 5 August 2014).

Department of Education 1995. *White Paper on Education and Training.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Education 1996. *Interim Department of Education Policy for Early Childhood Development.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Education 2001. *Education White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development: Meeting the Challenge of Early Childhood Development in South Africa.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Health 1997. *White Paper for the Transformation of the Health System in South Africa.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Health 2006. *Guidelines for Good Practice in the Conduct of Clinical Trials with Human Participants in South Africa.* Pretoria: Department of Health.

Department of Justice 2006. *South African Children's Act 38 of 2005.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Social Development 1998. *Welfare Laws Amendment Act: Child Support Grant.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Social Development 2006. *Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Department of Welfare 1997. *White Paper for Social Welfare.* Pretoria: Government Printers.

Fargas-Malet M, McSherry D, Larkin E, Robinson C 2010. Research with children: methodological issues and innovative techniques. *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 8(2): 175-192.

Flick U 2006. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research.* London: SAGE Publications.

Folayan MO, Haire B, Harrison A, Fatusi O, Brown B 2014. Beyond informed consent: Ethical considerations in the design and implementation of sexual and reproductive health research among adolescents. *African Journal of Reproductive Health,* 18(3): 118-126.

Fossheim H 2012. Introduction. In: H Fossheim (Ed.): *Cross-cultural Child Research: Ethical Issues.* Norway: The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, pp. 9-16.

France A 2004. Young people. In: S Fraser, V Lewis, S Ding, M Kellett, C Robinson (Eds.): *Doing Research with Children and Young People.* London: Sage, pp. 175-190.

Hatchard J, Slinn P 1995. The path towards a new order in South Africa. *International Relations* 12(4): 1-26.

Herczog M 2012. Rights of the child and early childhood education and care in Europe. *Journal of Education,* 47(4): 542-555.

Johansson B 2012. Doing adulthood in childhood research. *Childhood* 19(1): 101-114.

Kellet M 2005. *Children as Active Researchers: A New Research Paradigm for the 21st Century?* United Kingdom: Economic and Social Research Council.

Kjorholt AN 2012. Childhood studies and the ethics of an encounter: reflections on research with children in different cultural contexts. In: H Fossheim (Ed.):

Cross-cultural Child Research: Ethical Issues. Norway: The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, pp. 17-44.

Kotzé D 1996. The New (Final) South African Constitution. *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 8(2): 133-157.

Lansdown G 1994. Children's rights. In: B Mayall (Ed.): *Children's Childhoods: Observed and Experienced.* London: Falmer-Press, pp. 33-44.

Lawhon M, Herrick C, Daya S 2014. Researching sensitive topics in African cities: Reflections on alcohol research in Cape Town. *South African Geographical Journal*, 96(1): 15-30.

Lindsay G 2000. Researching children's perspectives: Ethical issues. In: A Lewis, G Lindsay (Eds.): *Researching Children's Perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 3-20.

Lynch MA, Glaser D, Prior V, Inwood V 1999. Following up children who have been abused: Ethical considerations for research design. *Child Psychology and Psychiatry Review* 4(02): 68-75.

Mandell N 1988. The least-adult role in studying children. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 16(4): 433-467.

Martin P 2012. The role of the State: Legal obligations to provide comprehensive early childhood development services. In: L Richter, C Desmond, V Hosegood, S Madhavan, M Makiwane, T Makusha, R Morrell, S Swartz (Eds.): *Diagnostic Review of Early Childhood Development.* Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, pp. 86-156.

Mukherji P, Albon D 2010. *Research Methods in Early Childhood: An Introductory Guide*. London: SAGE.

Munford R, Sanders J 2004. Recruiting diverse groups of young people to research: Agency and empowerment in the consent process. *Qualitative Social Work* 3(4): 469-482.

Murray C, Urban M 2012. *Diversity and Equality in Early Childhood Education: An Irish Perspective.* Dublin: Macmillan.

Mwaipopo R 2006. Children Participating in Research. REPOA BRIEF, 5: 1-5. From <http://www.repoa.or.tz.> (Retrieved on 30 July 2014).

Nairn A, Clarke B 2012. Researching children: Are we getting it right? A discussion of ethics. *International Journal of Market Research* 54(2): 177-198.

National Health Act 2013. *The National Health Act: A Guide.* Cape Town: Siber INK, pp. 96-101.

Neaum S 2013. *Child Development for Early Year's Students and Practitioners.* 2nd Edition. London: SAGE.

Nortje N, Hoffmann WA 2015a. Ethical misconduct by registered psychologists in South Africa during the period 2007–2013. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 45(2): 260-270.

Nortjé N, Hoffmann, WA 2015b. Ethics misconduct among dietetic practitioners in South Africa (2007-2013). *S Afr J Clin Nutr*, 28(2): 77-80.

O' Reilly M, Ronzoni P, Dogra N 2013. *Research with Children: Theory and Practice*. London: SAGE.

Randall D 2012. Revisiting Mandell's 'least adult' role and engaging with children's voices in research. *Nurse Researcher,* 19(3): 39-43.

Republic of South Africa 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No 108 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Department.

Saloojee H, Slemming W 2012. Maternal and child health and nutrition. In: L Richter, C Desmond, V Hosegood, S Madhavan, M Makiwane, T Makusha, R Morrell, S Swartz (Eds.): *Diagnostic Review of Early Childhood Development.* Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, pp. 176-242.

Skanfors L 2009. Ethics in child research: Children's agency and researchers' 'ethical radar'. *Childhoods Today* 3(1): 1-22.

Stellenberg EL, Dorse AJ 2014. Ethical issues that confront nurses in private hospitals in the Western Cape Metropolitan Area. *Curationis,* 37(1): Art. #38, 9 pages.

Steneck N, Mayer T 2010. Singapore Statement on Research Integrity. *Paper presented at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity,* 21-24 July, Singapore.

Strode A 2015. A critical review of the regulation of research involving children in South Africa: From self-regulation to hyper-regulation. *TSAR*, 2: 334-346.

Strode A, Richter M, Wallace M, Toohey J, Technau K 2014. Failing the vulnerable: Three new consent norms that will undermine health research with children. *SAJHIVMED*, 15(2): 46-49.

UNICEF 2005. National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa. Pretoria: UNICEF. From <http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAF_resources_nip.pdf.> (Retrieved on 4 August 2014).

UNICEF 2011. *South Africa's Children: A Review of Equity and Child Rights*. Pretoria: UNICEF.

United Nations 1989. Convention on the Rights of the Child. From <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx.> (Retrieved on 5 July 2014).

Urban M 2012. Researching early childhood policy and practice: A critical ecology. *European Journal of Education* 47(4): 494-507.

World Health Organisation 2001. World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki. *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation,* 79(4): 373-374.

World Medical Association 2013. Ethical principles for medical research involving human subjects. *Clinical Review and Education*, 1-4.