Child-Centered Education: Criticisms

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Abstract
There have been quite a lot of concerns and arguments over the appropriateness of CCE for developing countries where the social and cultural values, educational traditions, and available resources are so different from the West. Most of the educationists argue for the teacher-centered formalistic approach, which is believed to be more suitable for contexts where resources are sufficient, and teacher professional capability is very high. Issues related to CCE in developing countries have been the focus of discussion from the 1980s and particularly the 1990s. The primary intention of the present study to explore the significant criticisms related to child-centered education. Eleven serious objections: danger of centeredness; absenting knowledge; learner centeredness: scientifically validated?; freedom versus discipline; practicality of learner-centered teaching; individual and society; the absence of authentic social relationships; teacher's roles; natural Sequence of development; the powerless female teacher and child; and the free and individual child: an illusionary and decontextualized construct have been discussed in the present article.
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Developing countries, as well as more developed countries in the Eastern world, have long been known to follow a teacher-centered didactic approach to education, emphasizing knowledge to be imparted, remembered, and then applied. However, from the 1980s and particularly 1990s, centered child education (CCE) as a notion originated from the West has been legitimized by government policies to be promoted in educational reforms in many developing countries (Black et al., 1993, O'Sullivan, 2004; Brodie et al., 2002). There have been quite a lot of concerns and arguments over the appropriateness of CCE for developing countries where the social and cultural values, educational traditions, and available resources are so different from the West. Darling-Hammond (1997, cf. Brodie et al., 2002) argues that CCE aiming for integrated curricula, active in-depth learning; appreciation for diversity, collaborative group learning, and individualized teaching, etc. require substantial school restructuring and management, more open space, precious resources and smaller classes. O'Donoghue (1994) does not think those of discovery learning, activity-based learning, and integrated curricula are appropriate for the developing world as they presuppose small classes, precious resources, capable teachers who do not exist. Similarly, Guthrie (1990) also challenges the appropriateness of those child-centered practices for the developing world and argues for the teacher-centered formalistic approach, which is believed to be more suitable for contexts where resources are limited, and teacher professional capability is low. Tabulawa (2003) notes that the current curricular reforms in many African countries (Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa), which try to make CCE their official pedagogy in schools, are a result of the ideological influence from the West, mainly from Britain over many years of colonialism. However, there are also studies from developing countries that show some degree of teaching effectiveness after adopting a more CCE (Brodie et al., 2002).

Although the notion of child-centered Education (CCE) has many advantages, the idea of CCE has been criticized from many fronts. The ideology of CCE had a substantial impact on American and British education during the late l9th and most of the 20th century, but there has recently been a breaking away from it by the two countries. This was because CCE was under severe attack by some scholars and philosophers. To Entwistle (1970), the term LCT has become 'a slogan with all the potential for promoting change and creating misunderstanding' (p. 11). He also noted that many theorists as well as practitioners rallied around different schools for or against CCE and some of the emphases upon the child have been subject to sustained criticisms, provoking a critical, even hostile, reception from many. Along similar lines, Olson and Bruner (1996) called CCE 'a not very meaningful term at best.' They say that it is `a politically useful codeword giving loosely affiliated groups a common identity' (p. 19). They also point out that the term, LCT, has complex and contradictory underlying assumptions about children and their learning. Tabulawa (2003) even critically sees the term as a disguise for Western aid agencies to sell their ideology of individualism and democracy to developing countries as he, like Holliday (1994b), believes that there does not exist a universal pedagogy which works with equal effectiveness irrespective of the context.

This indicates that one of the major concerns of the existing field education has been CCE. Learner-centered education in Asia, Africa, and other developing countries of the world has been supported by International Aid Organizations such as UN agencies, UNESCO, and UNICEF. Often this assistance is provided under the rationale of enhancing participation in schooling in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) (Mtika & Gates, 2010; Serbessa, 2006). Schweisfurth, 2011, p. 427) emphasizes that some aid agencies view learner-centered pedagogy as 'a policy panacea… to address a myriad of social problems in the developing world'. According to Tabulawa (2003), aid agencies justify their promotion of such pedagogy in 'benign and apolitical terms' (p. 9), emphasizing the efficacy of child-centered pedagogy in cognitive/educational

terms. In the same vein, child-centered ideas have been introduced in teacher-training programs and school reforms in many parts of Africa and Asia with the intention of creating more child-friendly, democratic learning environments (Sriprakash, 2010). As such, child-centered education has been described as a 'traveling policy, transferred from country to country in the developing world to hopefully solve such historically intractable issues as poverty and political authoritarianism, to increase levels of foreign investment or to extend democratization' (Schweisfurth, 2011, p. 427). However, Tabulawa (2003) presents an alternative view of the widespread implementation of student-centered pedagogy in developing countries. International aid agencies and institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, he claims, have prescribed the introduction of CCE through educational projects in developing countries, showing their preference and support for Western liberal democracy.

Nykiel-Herbert (2004) notes that child-centered pedagogy has spread in developing countries, making a transition to democracy, perhaps because it promises intellectual liberation and emancipates from traditional approaches that are considered oppressive. Learner-centered pedagogy might also be regarded as democratic in that it calls for an equal relationship between teachers and students. Nykiel-Herbert (2004) critiques the role that aid agencies play in promoting CCE as a one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach, which works effectively in any setting. Similarly, Tabulawa (2003, cited in Altinyelken, 2011) argues that 'if pedagogical practices are converging around the world (at least in the official curriculum), it is because a certain pedagogical approach is in the interests of powerful states or international organizations' (p. 140). Guthrie (1990, cited in Tabulawa, 2003) similarly suggests that student-centered pedagogy represents a process of westernization with its political and economic meanings. Such discussions emphasize the interconnected nature of pedagogy, politics, and ideology. Whatever the reasons for the implementation of such approaches in developing country contexts, 'the history of the implementation of CCE in different backgrounds is riddled with

stories of failures grand and small Schweisfurth (2011, p. 425).

This discussion indicates that child-centered education has been criticized on several grounds. It has been criticized by the many educationists, educational administrators and educational planners, policymakers, curriculum developers, child psychologists, and the others. The major criticisms of child-centered education have been discussed in the following sections.

Danger of Centeredness

The first criticism focuses on risks of centeredness. In their literature review of the contemporary usage of the term child-centered Education (CCE), Chung & Walsh (2000) found 40 meanings of the term, thus suggesting that consensus of a common meaning may be illusionary. Nevertheless, they argued that 'despite a range of meanings, there appears to be a common ideological understanding across most early childhood educators' (Chung & Walsh 2000, p. 216). In their historical analysis of the period from the late 1930s to the 1980s, Chung & Walsh (2000, p. 229) did uncover three primary meanings: Frobel's notion of the child at the centre of his world; the developmental idea that the child is the center of schooling; and the progression notion that children should direct their activities. Chung & Walsh maintained that underlying the ideological surface of these central meanings were different notions about children, learning, and development.

Child-centered education is a protest philosophy; it protests against the over-emphasis placed on the content or curriculum at the detriment of the child. So, the fear is that too much attention on the child and on methods of teaching him may lead to the neglect of content or may suffer the same fate as curriculum centered education (Schofield, 1981, p. 58). The problem with too much concentration of anything, especially in the educational method, is that it quickly leads to rigidity or orthodoxy, which may not give allowance for new ideas and changes. Stiffness at a particular time will undoubtedly result in educational irrationality, bigotry, and lack of balance.

Criticisms of the Reconceptualists and Poststructuralists

The second criticism centers on criticism of reconceptualized and poststructuralists. The construct of child centeredness has dominated education for the past few decades, especially in the form of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). Ryan (2005) regarded developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) as a full expression of, and interchangeable with, centered child education. Grieshaber & Cannella (2001) described DAP as the dominant pedagogical discourse in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and inextricably tied to definitions of high quality. Before DAP, child-centered pedagogy, as an ideology, was difficult to dispute and to challenge because it drew upon progressive values, such as democracy and individual freedom (Cannella, 1997). It was not until child-centered education was codified into and 'in the guise' of DAP in a 1996 position paper by the National Association for the Education of Young Children that it received its sharpest criticism (Brooker, 2005, p. 118).

In this context, reconceptualized and poststructuralists emphasize diversity. In particular, they have expressed concern that developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) is biased in its focus on Western theories of child development and have limited application concerning education's social and cultural dimensions (Burman, 1996; Cannella, 2000; Lubeck, 1998; Grieshaber, 2008). For the reason that education takes place within society's ever-changing, increasingly global contexts, it is important to view education from a holistic perspective (Popkewitz, 2003, 2007). Reconceptualists and poststructuralists criticize child-centered pedagogy as being overly reliant on outmoded notions of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). Reconceptualists believe that developmental theories should be critically examined cross-culturally, whereas poststructuralists work from a social perspective to reconstruct views of a child based on his or her multiple meaning-making and discourse.

Reconceptualists believe that a standard child development approach to child centeredness is limited, partly because the theory underlying this approach developed only in the West and primarily

before the '80s. In their view, knowledge should continually be reconstructed across a variety of individuals, cultures, and contexts. Graue (2005) has remarked that the hegemony of the developmental perspective has discouraged adequate sensitivity and attention to socio-cultural differences among children. Reconceptualists urge a holistic view of children's developmental needs that encompasses sociocultural as well as biological factors (Burman, 1996). In a conceptualist approach, the teacher interacts with each student to discover that a child's unique needs rather than simply employ standardized practices (Burman, 1996; Cannella, 2002; Grieshaber, 2008; MacNaughton, 2001). MacNaughton (2001) has argued that the DAP approach can create inequity by neglecting social relationships within the classroom, failing to value knowledge derived from actual classroom practices, and relying on outdated theories of child development. Reconceptualists see teachers as scholars who continually revise their theories of education as well as their pedagogy based on what they discover in the classroom (Ayers, 2002; Cochran- Smith and Lytle, 1990; Bayley, 1999; Rasberry, 1996; Zeichner and Liston, 1996).

Poststructuralism emphasizes, through discourses across time and place, the more precious thinking and knowing by which a child's development and learning occur. Through conversations, poststructuralism is sensitive to the equity of diverse ethnic/racial, cultural, and social contexts (MacNaughton, 2001). It emphasizes education as spanning different times and places (González et al., 2005). In particular, poststructuralism calls for attention to and voicing of underrepresented perspectives (Genishi and Goodwin, 2008; Grieshaber and Ryan, 2005). Teachers who employ a poststructuralist approach often engage in autobiography and use other forms of self-examination to gain a deeper understanding of their teaching (Genishi and Goodwin, 2008). In the classroom, they use children's real-life experiences to foster literacy (González et al., 2005). Poststructuralist teachers also heavily rely on children's artistic creations. The Reggio Emilia approach encourages children to give creative expression to their unique perspectives (Edwards et al., 1998). In creating art, children create multiple discourses that result in each child's meaning-making being valued (Wright,

2005). Poststructuralists challenge the view that knowledge is obtained strictly by scientific methods or imparted by those in power. They see wisdom as constructed by all participants, whose perspectives have equal value and who contribute their different discourses, which change in response to factors such as culture, time, and place.

Historically, pedagogical theory and practice have progressed from a didactic, teacher-centered approach to a child-centered approach in which the child creates meaning with the surging critical movement, conceptualizes believe that child-centered education should not be limited to DAP based on traditional Western theories of child development but should continually be reassessed and reconstructed. As part of this continual revision, teachers frequently examine their doctrines and practices. Recent efforts to rebuild an equitable outlook, poststructuralists advocate that this frequent reconceptualizing be based on diverse perspectives and that it entail particular attention to underrepresented voices. Ultimately, the goal is to facilitate the adoption of these multiple discourses across schools, communities, and societies to broaden our scope of understanding and add depth to the possible ways in which we can view children.

Learner Centeredness: Scientifically Validated?

The third criticism focuses on the validation of the child-centered approach. Validation is an essential aspect of any theory. Theories are proved based on the validation process. Child-centered education (CCE) received apparent scientific validation from Piaget, and Vygotsky (Matthews, 2003, p. 54; Stone, 1996, pp. 11-12). These psychologists researched the process of learning, and their findings indicated that learning is an active process of knowledge construction (Geary, 1994, p. 263). Piaget believed that such construction was purely individual, while Vygotsky maintained that knowledge is socially and culturally constructed (Boudourides, 1998, p. 2). Another of their findings was that children's cognitive abilities become progressively more advanced, and such advancement occurs in age-related stages, which, as Matthews (2003, p. 54) points out, is what one would expect. Developmentalist educationists take the previous finding as establishing the superiority

of natural learning over teacher instruction. The latter result is considered as creating the truth of the natural development of cognitive abilities. But these deductions are not necessitated by the findings.

With regard to the former finding, learning as an active knowledge construction process points only to the fact of mental activity, and not to the superiority of natural learning. In fact, the actions of good teachers-if students have understood, correcting misunderstandings and errors immediately, providing opportunities for independent application-show that it has always been implicitly recognised that learning is knowledge construction and that the principal agent of learning is the activity of the learner's own mind. With regard to the latter finding, it only showed a progression in cognitive abilities; the deduction that such progression is natural is based not on the findings but on the a priori developmentalist premise. The fact of progressive advancement in children's cognitive abilities does not invalidate instruction as the necessary condition for the optimal development of secondary cognitive abilities. Empirical evidence of progressive advancement in children's cognitive abilities has therefore no decisive consequences for traditional education theory. It still leaves romantic developmentalism, which is the backbone of learner centredness, in the realm of speculation. In fact, the non-universality of the three Rs and the increase in learning disabilities appear to validate instruction, and not natural learning, as the necessary condition for their development and all the intellectual learning based thereon.

Freedom versus Discipline

The fourth criticism centers on freedom versus discipline and self-directed interest versus authoritative knowledge. The opponents criticize child-centered Education (CCE) for giving too much freedom to children, making them unwilling to accept reasonable authority and letting their impulses lead their actions resulting in discipline problems. It is also criticized that with an exclusive emphasis on the child and his freedom, the curriculum may be ignored, and also the mastery of human knowledge and skills which require hard work as well as disciplined applications may be forgotten. Darling (1986) argues that it is not enough to just recognize

what children's interests are. We must also know what kind of interests we would like them to have and how such interests can be developed through education. Similarly, Oelkers (2002) criticizes Rousseau for taking for granted that the self-development of the child is driven by immediate interests, not by instruction.

The Practicality of Learner-Centered Teaching

The fifth criticism has focused on the practicality of child-centered Education (CCE) as it was treated much as an inspiration, and the reality failed to provide much evidence in its implementation. As a result, a general belief is formed; that is, learner-centered teaching is fine in theory but not so fine in practice (Perkinson, 1980, p. 198). Most of the educators have raised the question about the implementation of learner-centered teaching. Alexander (2000, p. 141) noted that `while the language of primary education may have changed out of all recognition, the practice changed rather less.' One problem is that the theory does not entail specific practices, and therefore, learner centeredness has to take on many different forms in training ranging from extremely learner-centered to not at all child-centered as Bennett's (1976) study showed. The other problem is that with child-centered ideologies, teaching is expected to be organized by principles other than standards of attainment, but teachers and education are often judged by examination passes, thus making actual implementation difficult (The Open University, 1984a, p. 24). Moreover, teachers do not have `the time, energy, imagination, intelligence, or patience; even if they do, they lack the freedom, the opportunity, the resources, and the support necessary to conduct such experiments' (Perkinson, 1980, p. 198). Moreover, some people argue that learner-centered teaching is ordinarily not practical in real classrooms, for it is more expensive as it requires more resources to enable learners to take responsibilities for much of their learning and it requires a low pupil-teacher ratio to meet individual needs (The Open University, 1984a). Many teachers complain that Dewey had an unrealistic conception of the real situation in an ongoing educational system' and his proposals for education demand highly imaginative, intelligent, sophisticated teachers-super teachers; and highly

imaginative, intelligent, sophisticated students-super students. They also demand ideal schools with administrators and parents who are understanding, supportive, and enabling' (Perkinson, 1980, p. 198). However, despite widespread use of the term, Lea et al. (2003) maintain that one of the issues with CCE is the fact that many institutions or educators claim to be putting CCE into practice, but in reality, they are not (2003, p. 322). Simon (1981) concludes with his review of several studies that it was the rhetoric, not the reality that had impressed the public as if a revolution had swept away the traditional practice while, in reality, limited changes had taken place. Thus the trendy ideology existed more in the rhetoric than in any fact (Alexander, 1984, 2000; Yandell 2003). What is more, the same rhetoric espoused by many often ends up with a variety of practices, some of which are `inconsistent with the rhetoric' (Alexander, 1984, p. 14). However, despite widespread use of the term, Lea et al. (2003) maintain that one of the issues with CCE is the fact that many institutions or educators claim to be putting CCE into practice, but in reality, they are not (2003, p. 322).

Individual and Society

The sixth criticism falls on the paradox between the individual and society. Entwistle (1970) points out that in both political and educational theories there is a well-established assumption that organization stands opposed to the individual; that social education is a threat to the individual integrity and for this very fact child centeredness is the focus of much criticism (p. 32), because with `an appreciation of children as individuals' the focus is less on `what each might become and more on what each already is', contradicting children's natural growth and development with social needs and development (Darling, 1994, p. 2). Similarly, Edwards and Mercer (1987, p. 170) criticize child-centered ideology for overemphasizing the individual at the expense of the social. Hutchinson and Waters (1984, p. 108) argued that education should be geared not only to the learners themselves but to `all the parties concerned.' To Graddol (2006), all these parties, such as learners' families, textbook publishers, and examination providers, are becoming more complex nowadays as they may all have very different views

and expectations about how education should be provided.

On a practical level, it has been criticized for giving too much emphasis to the uniqueness of each child, which has led to too great attention to `individualized teaching.' If each child needs to be treated individually, it is argued, the complexity of classroom organisation can become overwhelming, while, at the same time, it becomes impossible to develop effective pedagogic means relevant to the needs of children in general (Simon, 1994, p. 14), just as what Darling (1994, p. 5) states, 'If twenty or thirty children were all pursuing individual interests, it would be difficult for a teacher to support and monitor their learning or to accommodate the enlarged freedom which these activities would require'. (p. 5) Too many teachers, it is simply too naive to think that they should not worry about what to teach and how to teach but just let children be self-directed and learn what they want to learn.

The Absence of Authentic Social Relationships

The seventh critique (Singer, 1996, 2005; MacNaughton, 2003; Connolly, 2004; Brooker, 2005; Graue, 2005) has recently emerged out of concerns that even though the adult-child relationship has been an integral part of the modernist concept of child-centered pedagogy, the adult roles of observer and facilitator within this relationship seem to be quite limited. MacNaughton (2003, p. 178) described the child-centered educator as having 'a moral imperative to enable the individual [child] to express themselves fully with judicious but minimal intervention.' Connolly (2004, p. 4), similarly, argued that 'Piaget's notion of child-centered development and his concept of "readiness" have ... relegated the role of adults in children's learning to the sidelines'. In theorizing boys and masculinities in the early years, Connolly (2004, p. 80) has proposed more direct work with young children, which accommodates the issue of gender. A postmodern perspective decentres the child, viewing the child as always existing in a particular social context and about others. Researchers such as Singer (1996, 2005) in the Netherlands and Brooker (2005) and Graue (2005) in the United States have raised critical questions about how child-centered pedagogy

functions to separate rather than attach adults and children within the early childhood setting. Singer (1996, p. 32) has argued that child-centered methods 'have the potential to estrange the children from their teachers.' According to Singer (1996), teacher methods such as observing and leaving the children to play freely, coupled with organizing the schedule with rules and routines, do not provide the 'basis for togetherness.' Singer elaborates, 'however, through all these 'children-centered' activities, the teacher sentences the children not only to a separate child's world but also to a world without participating adults ... If there is no togetherness or shared interests, there is nothing to talk about or think about together ... In this way, the would-be questions asked by the teacher come up; the answers are given by the children don't arouse any real curiosity from the teacher. (p. 32)

Not only is there an absence of authentic, meaningful relationships between children and adults in a child-centered learning environment, but also there is a devaluation of the social relationships among the children themselves. Singer (1996) has suggested that early childhood educators' focus on the individual child limits their ability to value and support peer interactions. Singer described how teachers all too often disturb children playing and solve conflicts between children rather than helping children work together and develop strong social relationships. According to Brooker (2005), much of child-centered pedagogy focuses on the child as a solitary explorer and knowledge construction as occurring within the individual child. In contrast, drawing upon Vygotsky's account of the social context of learning, she sees knowledge construction as occurring between individuals (Brooker, 2005, p. 127). Brooker (2005) states, 'There is much more to 'learning' than endless repetitive shoveling of sand or shuffling jigsaws; that moving children's learning forward requires the intervention of 'more experienced others,' adults and children who can support children in extending their existing knowledge into new domains. Without such interaction, children's play activities may keep them busy and occupied but fail to engage their thoughts'. (p. 124)

In her critique, Brooker has expanded the roles of the teacher beyond merely the observer and facilitator. Graue (2005) found in her research that teachers provide insufficient pedagogical support, particularly for those children deemed at risk. These individual children appeared invisible in the teachers' understanding of child-centered pedagogy. Graue (2005, p. 56) observed that these children were isolated and 'imperceptible' to teachers and at even higher risk in their learning.

Teacher's Roles

The eighth criticism focuses on the neglect of the teacher's roles. In child-centered education, with the emphasis shifted to the child, there is an obvious play down of the teachers' roles. Some educational philosophers, such as Peters and Dearden, are sharply critical of child-centered ideology for its neglect of teachers' roles and the lack of recognition of instructions (Darling, 1994). Some critics strongly argue for the teacher's position as the authority. They believe that children are not without limitations; it is the teacher's responsibility to assess and guide their spontaneous and unguided choices of activity. Also, the teacher has a disciplinary role in encouraging insistence and efforts in learning. `To ignore the teacher's legitimate disciplinary function is to assume that the child can discipline himself from the start, thus making schooling redundant' (Entwistle, 1970, P. 208). King (1978) criticizes the Plowden Report by arguing that there are 34 entries on `learning' but none on `teaching' in the index of the report. The questions he asks are: isn't teaching a process which is to bring about learning? What is a paid primary teacher supposed to be doing except `teaching'? With stress on pleasant climate and interpersonal relations, child-centered rhetoric effectively diminishes the importance of teachers' tasks on developing purposeful and valuable activities to achieve curriculum goals. Alexander (1984) strongly argues that the emotional commitment to an ideal is no substitute for intellectual engagement' (p. 15).

Some scholars in language teaching hold similar reservations. O'Neill (1991) argues for the teacher-centered approach by saying that people take the wrong assumption about the teacher-centered attitude. They often ignore the likely effects of the teacher and his/her instruction on the learner. He believes that what usually happens in proper

`teacher-centered' lessons is that `teachers are starting from and paying close attention to those factors in a lesson they believe will promote learning and which are most directly under their control' (p. 301) (Original emphasis) and he calls for the importance of doing ordinary things well' (p. 293). Wong-Fillmore (1985) found that `by and large, the most successful classes for language learning were the ones that made the greatest use of teacher-directed activities' and classes that `made heavy use of individual work was among those found to be among the least successful for language learning' (p. 24). Holliday (1994a) also explicitly criticizes learner-centered ideology for its lack of recognition of the roles played by the teacher. He makes the point that teachers play a crucial role in ensuring learning, and they are also very important participants in the classroom. They possess a great deal of knowledge about the subject matter, the requirements from the curriculum, and about the needs of their students in their social context. He calls for teachers from other cultural and teaching backgrounds to reflect on and develop teaching techniques `to suit real classrooms' (original emphasis) rather than to meet the standards of the borrowed notions (p. 9).

Natural Sequence of Development

The ninth criticism is leveled at the claim that all children follow a logical sequence of development repeatedly stressed by many writers such as Rousseau, Froebel, and Dewey and further intensified by Piaget. The validity of the theory and the way it is used, particularly by Piaget, were challenged by some scholars and researchers in education (Donaldson, 1978; Alexander, 1984; Wood, 1998). Donaldson (1978) was critical of the tasks constructed and the ambiguity of the language used in Piaget's tests, thus the validity of the results. By modifying the way tasks were designed, and the instructions given with the same intention to test children's ability to reason, Donaldson and other researchers proved that even very young children showed the capability of deductive reasoning and abstract thinking. She argued that Piaget's theory on children's stages of development was not only inaccurate but also damaging as it had had a direct impact on the everyday practice of many teachers in

primary teaching resulting in an underestimation of children's capabilities in logical thinking. It also led to the neglect of individual differences or uniqueness of each child, which is in contradiction with the basic ideology of child-centered education (Desforges and McNamara, 1979).

The Powerless Female Teacher and Child

The tenth criticism focuses on power relationships. In Britain, drawing upon feminist, psychoanalytic, and postmodern theories, Steedman (1985, 1987) and Walkerdine (1985, 1990) began to question the underlying tenets of child-centered pedagogy about the teacher who is most likely to be female. Critiques thus focused extensively on the experiences of female teachers. Throughout the next two decades, other scholars in Britain, Australia and the United States (Cannella, 1997; MacNaughton, 2000), often drawing upon the scholarly works of Walkerdine and Steedman, sustained a feminist critique within a broader focus on early childhood education as a site of social equity and justice. For this reason, Steedman's and Walkerdine's critical analysis of child-centered pedagogy is more fully explained.

Although there is some disagreement about Frobels's conceptualization of the female teacher, Steedman, in tracing the historical origins of child-centered pedagogy, located it in Frobel's description of the teacher who is 'the mother made conscious' (Steedman, 1985, p. 153) and who is the 'reification of feminine within the pedagogy' (p. 160). Steedman (1985, p. 156) writes that Made conscious then, [the teacher] can start to construct the delicate equilibrium between the desire to teach, to influence, to fill children with the knowledge and the recognition that she must drawback at each moment of desire – wean and let the child go free. (p. 156) Steedman (1987) states, 'the social context for the dissemination of the mother-made conscious teacher was the 'feminization of the trade' of teaching.' Steedman (1987) argued that in contrast to nineteenth-century mothers who were quite distant from their children, the prescribed psychological dimensions of modern good mothering [were] forged by waged women, by working women-by nurses, nannies and primary school teachers (p. 122). For, it is these women who

represent the ideal mother who spends the entire day in one room with children, watching and nurturing them.

Within this one room, Walkerdine (1990) described the construction of a self-regulating and rational individual child liberated from the overt control of others. Walkerdine viewed this construction as connected to the macro-project of the formation of the modern state and the modern concept of democratic government in which citizens act autonomously and rationally in pursuit of individual rights and interests. More recently, Wong (2007) has described this social construction as 'national work' for women. Walkerdine (1990) argued that female teachers, as nurturers, are responsible for the creation of each self-regulating and free child and, thus, for the management of the idealist modernist project. But, in Walkerdine's view, this project puts impossible demands on the female teacher. Burman (1994, pp. 165-166), writing from the viewpoint of a developmental psychologist, reiterated the impossibility of a teacher's attempts to conform to child centredness: '[the teacher] encounters an untenable conflict between the mandate for non-interference to promote independence and her institutional position as responsible for children's learning'. Thus, Walkerdine (1990, p. 19) stated that the female teacher is 'caught, trapped inside a concept of nurturance.' The child-centered teacher is constrained to display only particular behaviors consistent with child-centered pedagogy. Yet, this nurturance is unattainable in practice. The teacher must be lovingly responsible for meeting all of the individual needs of the children at every moment-her failures in this task are guiltily interpreted as barriers to the realization of the modernist project. And, child-centered teachers feel particularly guilty, Walkerdine (1990, p. 25) suggested, when they resort to traditional teacher strategies in the face of the realities of 'the impossible dream.'

The Male Child at the Centre

Walkerdine questioned how women and children are positioned about one another in child centredness, and how these social relations reproduce particular relations of power that produce the free male child and constrain and regulate the activities of female teachers and girls. Walkerdine saw the child in a child-centered environment constructed as active, free, autonomous, omnipotent, and essentially male. About this child, the female teacher is passive to the child's active; she works to his play. She is the servant of the omnipotent child, whose needs she must meet at all times-the price of autonomy is a woman. The price of intellectual labor (the symbolic play of the Logos) is its Other and opposite, work. Manual labor makes intellectual play possible. The servicing labor of women makes the child, the natural child, possible. (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 24) Walkerdine described the teacher who is female and who watches, observes, monitors and facilitates the male child's development and the child who actively inquires and constructs knowledge.

This opposition of the passive teacher to the active child is necessary to support the possibility of the illusion of autonomy and control upon which child-centered pedagogy is founded. The capacity for nurturance becomes the basis for women's fitness for the facilitation of knowing and the reproduction of the knower, which is the support for, and yet opposite of, the production of knowledge. The production of knowledge is thereby separated from its reproduction and split along a sexual division that renders production and reproduction the natural capacities of the respective sexes. (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 61)

Drawing upon Walkerdine's critique, Cannella (1997, p. 132), an American scholar, stated that child-centered pedagogy positions the child, then, at the center as a pioneer, explorer, constructor and developer of independence, which is a stereotypic masculine image. In Cannella's view, counter to a tendency to view early childhood education settings as 'feminized' as a result of the predominance of female teachers, early schooling is actually 'masculinized' through the enactment of liberal child-centered pedagogies. Skelton, a British researcher, has also argued that 'irrespective of the predominance of women teachers' employing child-centered pedagogy in primary schools, this educational environment is not 'feminized' (2002, p. 78). By adopting a somewhat simplistic and naïve interpretation of gender as something constructed along stereotypical lines, and located exclusively

in male and female bodies, inhibits understanding of how primary schooling is becoming more masculinized. Current educational policy is not moving forward in a direction that will actively challenge conventional gender stereotypes. Rather, the emphasis on testing and assessment, performance indicators, league tables, stratified and hierarchical management, and administration structures, have replaced the masculine nature of schools identified in the late 1980s with a postmodern 're-masculinisation' of primary education. (Skelton, 2002, p. 92)

In the 1980s and 1990s, Australian scholars Clark (1989), Davies (1989a, b) and MacNaughton (1997) maintained that child-centered discourse, which is understood as gender-neutral in practice, functions to reproduce 'narrow regimes of gender' (Clark, 1989, p. 254). Clark has described the uncomfortable position female teachers are in when they allow extreme expressions of masculinity within the free child-centered setting and the undermining of their confidence and 'teacher self.' More recently, Maher (2001, p. 23) drew upon Walkerdine's description of the 'masculinized grounding of progressive education' and re-examined Dewey's understanding of progressive education. Maher maintained that Dewey's understandings of teaching and learning were limited by his tacit acceptance of gender differences and male privilege, and by a resulting lack of consideration of the role of the teacher. Progressive educational theory constructs the teacher/child dyad in a reversal of traditional educational theory, replacing the powerful teacher with the powerful child but leaving the oppositions themselves unchallenged. The facilitative teacher, with little ground to claim an authority that is often seen as illegitimately restricting the free-ranging child, is called upon nevertheless to be fair and equitable, to be inclusive of all students. And yet the teacher, particularly as a woman, may often be at a loss for bases to construct her relationships with students to ensure this fairness to all. Thus her relative passivity in the name of facilitation leaves in place and reinforces the power relations brought into the classroom from the outside society. (Maher, 2001, p. 27)

The Female Child Outside of the Centre

If the child at the center of pedagogy is the male, where is the female child? Several writers (Walkerdine, 1985; Clark, 1989; MacNaughton, 1997) contend that essentialized gendered dichotomies between male and female children within child centredness render regulated and constrained girls outside of the center. Walkerdine (1985, p. 231) described how, within a gendered dichotomy, the female child's independent explorations are ignored and repressed while certain feminine qualities, such as conformity, good behavior and neatness, are reinforced. Drawing upon interview material collected from over 40 primary and early childhood teachers, Clark (1989) found that the teacher participants who employed child-centered pedagogy simultaneously maintained a belief in the individuality of each child and their self-direction and self-motivation while holding a belief in gender differences. Thus, Clark (1989, p. 246) argued that 'the combination of the child-centered theme of individuality and the regime of femininity' ensured that the girls could not be successful in their terms. Clark wrote: 'Boys, on the other hand, experience [d] an affirmation of their socially produced individuality through both discourses' (p. 246). Clark found that gender stereotypes of boys ('boys will be boys') can coexist in the construct in child-centered pedagogy of the universal and essentialized child because the 'logics of naturalism and individualism inform both' (1989, p. 248). Clark concluded that child-centered discourse worked against 'the possibility of equitable practice because it does not make available to the teacher ways of identifying and dealing with inequitable relations of power and gender production' (p. 243). MacNaughton (1997) maintained that the key barrier to seeing gender lies in the understanding of a humanist belief in the child's individuality. In MacNaughton's view, the solution to making girls central to pedagogy, then, would not be to individualize girls' needs more but to make visible how teachers participate and intervene in girls' and boys' experiences of gendering.

The Free and Individual Child: an Illusionary and Decontextualized Construct

Last but not least, criticism is related to a free

and individual child. Child-centered pedagogy each (male) child is constructed as liberated and free to pursue his interests and to suit himself when he is free to choose. Nevertheless, feminist critics of child-centered pedagogy have maintained that, in reality, female and male children are constrained in their activities by others (adults and peers). Walkerdine began to question the premise of the free child in child centredness as an illusionary construct. Post-structuralism, in particular, with its emphasis on power as a fluid and central aspect of social lives, offered a way to challenge a premise that seemed 'conceptually incoherent' (Burman, 1994, p. 163). In child-centered pedagogy, the teacher discovers the needs and interests of the children through ongoing observations. In Walkerdine's view, these observations are, in reality, covert (and oppressive) surveillance of many irrational children (particularly those from racialized and poor backgrounds), who must be shaped benevolently into rational beings. Thus, the child-centered teacher does exercise some power that is denied through various discursive strategies, including that of child-centered pedagogy. The teacher is there to help, to enable, and to facilitate (Walkerdine, 1990). Only those children with a 'poor grasp of reality,' those poor 'pathological' children, see her power. Because of their own authoritarian families, they react in a paranoid fashion to this nurturance-they are aggressive, they do not speak. They feel they are being watched, not nurtured. (p. 23)

Burman (1994) argued that child-centered approaches are still concerned with social control and regulation, but this concern is articulated in the discourse of self-regulation, suggesting that freedom and choice are readily available. Cannella (1997, p. 121) maintained that 'choice for children is an illusion' and 'adults control the choices that surround children and the capacity for follow-through when choices are made.' The singer put it another way: All-new forms of progressive education that put the child's activity and creativity in the center imply new forms of disciplining the child. All methods can turn into orthodoxy ... and can be translated into practice in a mechanical and child-silencing way. (Singer, 2005, p. 618)

McArdle & McWilliam described the ironic category of 'teach without teaching' to express a similar view: *[This category] holds together the two opposing areas of freedom (child-centeredness) and discipline (teacher-directed pedagogy). This category is not proposed as a paradox, an either/or proposition, or a problem to be resolved by 'finding a balance.' It is a rhetorical device for thinking and speaking about the border war, where teachers are compelled to 'teach' but ... to do so with the appearance of 'not teaching.' (McArdle & McWilliam, 2005, p. 330)*

More recently, Ryan (2005) questioned whether child-centered pedagogy promotes educational equity and whether all children, irrespective of their background, have access to a variety of learning opportunities and can engage in learning in individual ways. Her research, which focused on the experiences of a girl and a boy during choice time in a child-centred classroom, demonstrated that 'choice time and the kinds of play these children engaged in were also a discursive practice that perpetuated stereotypical gender differences that provided quite different opportunities for [the two children] to exercise authority in their world' (Ryan, 2005, p. 111). On the basis of her research findings, Ryan (2005, p. 112) recommended that rather than 'choice being conceptualized as freedom from adult authority, [teachers need to] focus on helping children understand the choices offered by different classroom discourses [i.e., what it means to be a boy or a girl] and the power effects of such choices'.

Often accompanying the genderless construct of the free individual child, or in addition to it, is the absence of the child's culture, race, and social class. Thus, it has been argued that child-centered pedagogy is a decontextualized construct. Cunningham (2006, p. 9), in his study of the influence of Piaget in the oral histories of early years teachers who began their careers in England between 1927 and 1955 and continued teaching into the 1960s and 1970s, found that Piaget's work was increasingly used over that historical period to provide a 'scientific rationale [rather than a moral one] for child-centered pedagogy'. Walkerdine (1990) referred to this as the coupling of the discourses of developmental theory and child-centered pedagogy into a modernist representation of the child. The intertwining of the

two discourses made each one an essentialized truth. The developmental theory itself has been critiqued extensively since the mid-1990s (Bernhard et al., 1998; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Bernhard, 2009). For this article, I will concentrate on critiques that focus simultaneously on developmental theory (the individualized child) and child-centered pedagogy. To the extent that progressive educational theory is enshrined and not critiqued, its pervasiveness as a model of 'gender-blind' (not to mention race-, class-, and culture-blind) inclusiveness will blind us to what needs to be done to create genuinely inclusive classroom environments. (Maher, 2001, p. 29) Similarly, O'Loughlin has called for early childhood educators to imagine for a moment that instead of thinking in terms of normalization, individual achievement, and totalizing forms of pedagogy that seek to shape all children inexorably in predetermined ways, we entertain the notion of child growth that acknowledges that children grow up in contexts. (O'Loughlin, 2009, p. 14)

Beginning in the 1980s and into the 1990s, Delpit (1995) and Henry (1996) raised questions about the efficacy of child-centered pedagogy for promoting academic achievement for African-American and African-Canadian children. They argued that child-centered pedagogy should not be regarded as 'developmentally appropriate' and best for all children. Both Delpit and Henry offered ways to conceptualize a culturally appropriate pedagogy. Norquay (1999, p. 183), a Canadian researcher, also questioned the 'uneasy legacy of child-centered pedagogy' because it not only denies the social difference between children but also shapes and limits the ways teachers talk about social difference. At the same time that the deracialized child is identified and positioned as a unique individual detached from any social context, the deracialized teacher is identified and positioned as a neutral facilitator and nurturer. Child-centered pedagogy, Norquay (1999, p. 194) argued, 'is very much a White-Centred discourse in that it shares many attributes and effects of White privilege' so that educators regard whiteness as fundamentally neutral. Brooker (2005), in a recent study on cultural diversity and early years ideology, investigated how the assumptions of child-centered play-based learning benefit young children from diverse class and cultural backgrounds. She found that the Bangladeshi children in comparison to their Anglo counterparts were not assessed as 'ready for school' (Brooker, 2005, p. 125) based on the children's ability to learn independently through play. Brooker (2005, p. 127) recommended that 'rethinking the characteristics we value in children would require us to rethink the entrenched cultural bias shown in our provision of learning.' Child centredness seems to be such concrete and unproblematic concept. But in practice, it is very abstract and rather problematic. The very term child-centered might be thought to embody a particular modernist understanding of the child, as a unified, reified, and essentialized subject-at the center of the world-that can be viewed and treated apart from relationships and context. (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 43).

Conclusion

Child-centered education has been the focus of the 1990s. Although child-centered education has supported by many educationists, the notion of child-centered education has been criticized on several grounds. Most of the opponents of child-centered education express their view that there is a danger of centeredness. The problem with too much concentration of anything, especially in the educational method, is that it easily leads to rigidity or orthodoxy, which may not give allowance for new ideas and changes. Rigidity at a certain time will certainly result in educational irrationality, bigotry, and lack of balance. Accordingly, Reconceptualists and poststructuralists criticize child-centered pedagogy as being overly reliant on outmoded notions of developmentally appropriate practices. Reconceptualists believe that developmental theories should be critically examined cross-culturally, whereas poststructuralists work from a social perspective to reconstruct views of a child based on his or her multiple meaning-making and discourse.

Another criticism focuses on the validation of child-centered theory and educationists call for validation of child-centered education. The opponents criticize CCE for giving too much freedom to children, making them unwilling to accept reasonable authority and letting their impulses lead

their actions resulting in discipline problems. It is also criticized as it is treated much as an inspiration, and the reality failed to provide much evidence in its implementation.

Another criticism falls on the paradox between the individual and society. Opponents point out that in both political and educational theories, there is a well-established assumption that society stands opposed to the individual; that social education is a threat to individual integrity, and for this very fact, child centeredness is the focus of much criticism. Another criticism has recently emerged out of concerns that even though the adult-child relationship has been an integral part of the modernist concept of child-centered pedagogy, the adult roles of observer and facilitator within this relationship seem to be quite limited. Accordingly, some educational philosophers, such as Peters and Dearden, are strongly critical of child-centered ideology for its neglect of teachers' roles and the lack of recognition of instructions. The validity of the theory and the way it is used, particularly by Piaget, were challenged by some scholars and researchers in education (Donaldson, 1978; Alexander, 1984; Wood, 1998). Donaldson (1978) was critical of the tasks constructed and the ambiguity of the language used in Piaget's tests, thus the validity of the results. Another criticism is related to gender and power relationship. And lastly, it is critical that focuses on the free and individual child. This is how child-centered Education (CCE) has been criticized on several grounds.

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