Whole School Initiative: Has Inclusive Education Gone Astray?

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the social theory concepts of Bourdieu (Field, Capital and Habitus) we explored and gained insights into the perspectives of sub-Saharan African refugee families and preschool educators regarding inclusive education of young children in the South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. The study is informed by two curriculum frameworks: The Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework [(VEYLDF) (0-8 years)]. These documents support a whole school approach to early childhood inclusive education and professional relationship with families to achieve common outcomes for all children in Australia. The findings point to marginalized identities which are induced by capital, field and habitus differentials, and have resulted in putting astray the achievement of successful early childhood inclusive education for the children of these families. We concluded with a call for teacher educators to engage preservice educators in what Freire called an 'epistemological curiosity' to help them reconstruct their profession to facilitate the empowerment and development of all children and their families.

Key words: Sub-Saharan African families, EYLF/VEYLDF, inclusive education

Introduction

This article explores and gains insights into the lived experiences of participating families of sub-Saharan African descent and early childhood educators as related to cultural and racial inclusion in early childhood settings in the South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. We conducted this study in light of two Australian new curriculum frameworks: the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), taking into consideration, the current dramatic shift in the population of children from diverse countries accessing twenty-first century early childhood education centers in Australia. We selected families of sub-Saharan African descent whose children attend preschools as the focus of study because they were described in previous research findings and the Australian media as vulnerable in view of the overt racial discrimination they face as a people (Due, 2008; Farouque & Cooke, 2007). The research report by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) also found that many Sudanese in Australian schools encountered structural and interpersonal discrimination which often caused them to leave the education system altogether despite the aspirations of their families and communities for them to persist and succeed (VEOHRC, 2008). This early termination of education is a primary risk factor in a cycle of disadvantage. Other Africans reported experiences of hostility in the school grounds from White peers demonstrating an underlying unease in racism in some schools (Agbenyega & Peers, 2010, VEOHRC, 2008).

The first section of this article briefly introduces the EYLF and VEYLDF and their main principles and how these framework articulate the whole school approach to early years inclusive education. The second part of the article introduces the theoretical and methodological approach to the study reported. The final part reports on the findings of the study in relation to the EYLF and VEYLDF, and the contribution the article makes to scholarship in the area of what to do to realize inclusive education for all young children in Australia.

With the influx of families of sub-Saharan African descent into Australia the early childhood education sector has faced a complex array of challenges in relation to how educators and the early education system is meeting the needs of African children (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2012). Changing circumstances in Australian population requires a swift curriculum response to ensure all children in Australian early childhood programs benefit from quality early years education. Not long ago, the Common Wealth government in Australia developed a national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) as part of the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) reform agenda for early childhood education and care. This framework also forms a key component of the Australian Government's National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care which aims at providing universal access to early childhood education, including ensuring delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education across sectors and jurisdictions (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009).

The concepts underpinning the EYLF framework are Belonging, Becoming and Being. The EYLF serves as a guide for every State and Territories to develop related frameworks to guide early childhood education in their jurisdictions. In Victoria, Melbourne where this study was conducted, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)

produced the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) to guide educators in their teaching and service delivery to young children and families (DEECD, 2009). The EYLF and VEYLDF are relevant to refugee populations in Australia. The three conceptual terms (Belonging, Being and Becoming) which underpin the frameworks, articulate respect and value for individual identities including, families of sub-Saharan African descent within a democratic society of Australia. The frameworks promote children's rights and acceptance and nurturing of their unique differences through which to lay a solid foundation for a cohesive and prosperous Australian society. The frameworks are also based on the principle that a good preschool education for all Australians, including children of refugee families is foundational for future school success.

The EYLF

The EYLF provides an inclusive vision for all children to "experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 128). In this document,

> Belonging acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities…In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging. Belonging is central to being and becoming in that it shapes who children are and who they can become…Being recognises the significance of the here and now in children's lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life's joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life…Children's identities, knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships change during childhood. They are shaped by many different events and circumstances. Becoming reflects this process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as young children learn and grow. It emphasizes learning to participate fully and actively in society (DEEWR, 2009, p. 7).

In this perspective, all children are born belonging to a culture, which influences their experiences, values and beliefs (DEEWR, 2009). All children need a sense of belonging, being, and becoming to feel included; to choose their own identity and have a sense of self-respect (Agbenyega & Peers, 2010). The quote above demonstrates the Australian government's effort to minimize discourses which centered around a normative White mode of belonging in which those located as racial Others – such as families of sub-Saharan African descent – have to abandon their identities and conform to a dominant White perception of the Australian 'way of life' (Due, 2008). The EYLF thus highlights new directions for building new identify forms for future Australians who should no longer consider 'White' in Australia as a priori for belonging within the Australian nation. By so doing the Framework serves to acknowledge the histories, culture and experiences of all those who constitute Australians thereby dismantling, hegemonic, racialized power relations.

The VEYLDF

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) is based on the national EYLF and shares the vision of the "Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood

Development." This document states: "Every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life, while contributing to their local and global communities" (DEECD, 2009, p. 5).

The principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 inform the framework. The framework has five learning outcomes for all children:

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators (DEECD, 2009, p. 6).

The interconnection between the EYLF/VEYLDF and Whole Schooling Approach

Belonging, becoming and being in the EYLF, and the learning outcomes in the VEYLDF interconnect with the philosophy of whole schooling approach to inclusion in the early years. A whole schooling approach is built on the following principles: democracy, space for all, include all, community, support, partnership, multilevel instruction and authentic assessment (for detailed explanations of these principles, see the whole schooling website at: http://www.wholeschooling.net/Journal_of_Whole_Schooling/IJWSindex.html).These principles are foundational regarding respect for children's rights and provide insights into how effective inclusive practices have the capacity to challenge and transform dominant, systemic, "political, epistemological, pedagogical and institutional" (Acedo, 2009, p. 8) boundaries such as institutional racism. In this way, a whole schooling approach serves as a reflective tool for critiquing social values, priorities and the structures that privilege some people over others. By dismantling institutional barriers all children are given the opportunity to develop their unique identities, connect and contribute to their world, become confident learners, become effective communicators and enjoy personal wellbeing as indicated in the VEYLDF document (DEECD, 2009).

A key concept, democracy in the whole schooling approach steers early childhood inclusive education as a process that gives children the opportunity to be active members in their learning community contributing to knowledge and meaning making with educators (Agbenyega, 2011; Brooker & Woodhead, 2008). The same can be said about the EYLF and the VEYLDF which articulate value and respect for individual identities and wellbeing. These documents further recognize that what children learn and how they learn, is informed by their cultural background, lived experiences, including educators' values and institutional practices (Ashman, 2012). Therefore to practice successful early childhood inclusion educators must embody,

the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities and society(Allen & Cowdery, 2012, p. 7).

Utilizing a whole schooling approach, inclusive early childhood education will no longer be about just enrolling children to attend preschool programs, childcare or recreational programs; it will be about accepting and valuing children's differences, including the provision of the necessary support for all children and families to fully participate in the programmes of their choice (Allen & Cowdery, 2012; Giugni, 2010). In this respect, the key aspects of early childhood inclusion framed in the whole schooling approach will consider relationships, well being, active learning environment and involvement as key drivers of successful inclusion for each child (Klibthong, 2012).

Theoretical exposition

Habitus

This section introduces Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field and how these conceptual lenses influenced our understanding, analysis of the data and discussions. Bourdieu defines the habitus as "internalized embodied social structures" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18), "cultural unconscious or mental habits or internalized master dispositions" (Bourdieu, 1989 cited in Houston, 2002, p. 157). Habitus therefore, is composed of values, beliefs and norms. Children, families and educators internalize their dispositions from the sociocultural environment which becomes, according to Bourdieu,

> a kind of transforming machine that leads us to 'reproduce' the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way, in such a way that one cannot move simply and mechanically from knowledge of the conditions of production to knowledge of the products (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 87).

Applying this concept to families of sub-Saharan African descent, we could argue that prior to entering into Australia; they have acquired existing internalised values, beliefs, dispositions from their long socialisation with a place in Africa. As they enter into Australia, a new form of socialization begins leading to a hybridization of habitus. Bourdieu further argues that people within their habitus impose constraints and demands on themselves (Bourdieu, 1998) and in so doing habitus allows for individual agency but it also predisposes individuals towards peculiar behaviour or dispositions. Peculiar behaviour in this sense implies behaviours that others may consider unusual or distinctive in nature from others belonging exclusively to some person or groups. In Australia for example, what may count as peculiar behaviour is determine by the standard imposed by the dominant white society (Due, 2008; Imtoual, 2007). Some of the research findings on belonging framed in critical race and whiteness studies in Australia highlighted how those identified as 'Others' have to express themselves as 'white' to be accepted as belonging within the Australian nation (Hage, 1998; Imtoual, 2007; Osuri & Banerjee, 2004; Perera, 2005).

> The habitus, as a system of dispositions to a certain practice, is an objective basis for regular modes of behaviour, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice, and if practices can be predicted ... this is because the effect of the habitus is that agents who are equipped with it will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances (Bourdieu, 1990b, p. 77).

The quote reinforces the idea about peculiar behaviour in the sense that the operation of the habitus of the dominant group regularly excludes certain practices, particularly those that are

unfamiliar to the cultural groupings to which the individual belongs (Charlesworth, 2000; Skeggs, 1997). If this happens, inclusion and exclusion of certain practices in early childhood education may occur, affording some children agency but restraining others from full participation in the program (Bourdieu, 1990a). Children feel accepted, included and learn better when early childhood professionals respect their diversity and provide them with the best support, opportunities and experiences (Saffigna, Franklin, Church & Tayler, 2011). For example, a small study of Sudanese mothers living in South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne in Australia found that there was a unified desire of Sudanese families to preserve their traditions and culture of child rearing but many mothers felt that child care educators did not understand their children and were not caring for their children in a way that was consistent with their values and beliefs leading to exclusion of their children from meaningful childcare experiences (Agbenyega & Peers, 2010).

Habitus therefore involves a complex interplay between one's past and present, and in the case of sub-Saharan African refugee migrants their historical habitus (beliefs, values and experiences of war and neglect) would influence the formation of their present habitus in Australia (Bourdieu, 1990c) creating a complex field to deal with.

Similarly, the way children of families of sub-Saharan African descent experience 'becoming', being and belonging are shaped by the habitus - personal beliefs and values, guidance, care, teaching from families and educators (Bourdieu, 1990c). Thus, the habitus (attitudes of families and educators) in early childhood institutions can disempower and devalue children or value and empower them (Mills & Gale, 2007). Valuing involves supporting children to develop an awareness of their social and cultural heritage and significance in their world (DEECD, 2009) which contribute to new formation of habitus, field, and capital.

Field

The second concept is field, which Bourdieu conceptualizes as a network of objective relations between positions (Bourdieu, 1988) that

> are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, etc.) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97).

Objective relations have rules and norms which determine the nature of interactions of the agents or occupants. Fields are arenas of social relationship and are characterized by power, capital, positional and cultural differentials among the actors who constitute them (Bourdieu, 1998). In early childhood centres, educators, children and families constitute actors in a field with power differentials which have influential effect on individuals, and their habitus. For sub-Saharan African refugee families and their children, finding themselves in an unfamiliar field, coupled with inability to negotiate new norms and rules, may lead to acceptance, neglect or rejection with long lasting problems including, the ability to live collaboratively with others. Bourdieu posits that the field is a battleground where interests, power and prestige all operate (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). This happens because some forms of power, dispositions,

cultural and institutional practices can become the determinants of domination, subordination, exclusion within cultures and educational experience for some children and families (Mills & Gale, 2007).

Considering the discourse of the African-native dichotomy, the arena of early years education could lead to constant struggle as those who have the power (Australian white educators) intend to impose and exclude and those seeking recognition and acceptance (families of sub-Saharan African descent) struggle for recognition and acceptance. It is argued that "the amount of power a person has within a field depends on that person's position within the field and the amount of capital she or he possesses" (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002, p. 23). Children's background and colour may become markers of class differential treatment in early childhood settings. This suggests that to develop a successful inclusive early childhood education, 'the struggle within the field' that means the tensions and neglect experience by children from families of sub-Saharan African descent as a result of institutional racism must be addressed. Institutional racism can be addressed by valuing diverse families and their children. Families feel more welcome in professional settings when their culture and child rearing practices are valued and respected (Saffigna, Franklin, Church & Tayler, 2011).

Capital

The third theoretical lens we borrowed from Bourdieu for this work is capital which we described as accumulated assets. Capital may manifest in terms of economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1998). In economic terms capital refers to wealth defined in monetary terms; cultural capital involves a person's or institution's possession of recognized knowledge; social capital is constituted by social ties; and symbolic capital refers to one's status, honour or prestige (Bourdieu, 1998). These assets influence everyday relations children and families of sub-Saharan African descent have with Australian White educators. We argue that the White educators' capital, the families of sub-Saharan African descent's capital and the early childhood centre's capital all have implication for the ways the children are educated and socialized. Capital gives children, families and educators agency – the ability to strategically engage in and manipulate the rules of their social situations (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Placing less value on the capitals (cultural, symbolic, etc.) of sub-Saharan African families and their children early childhood education systems impose restriction on families to strategically participate inclusively in early childhood education. This may also reduce their opportunity to manage their social situations in future. This suggests that the outcome of the struggle one engages in within education are determined by the amount of capital (or resources) possessed by competing actors in that given field (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). An individual's position in the social hierarchy is therefore determined by the amount and type of capital possessed (Wacquant, 1998). Often educators perpetuate inequality without knowing that or desiring to do so (Bourdieu 1998; Mills & Gale, 2007), particularly when they do not have the required cultural or pedagogical knowledge to utilise.

Children can transform one form of capital to another form, for example knowledge capital to economic capital or economic capital into knowledge capital. A child from families of sub-Saharan African descent background who receives a good foundational education has greater chance of being successful in gaining employment and economic capital advantage over a child who is rejected and 'othered'. Habitus, field and capital therefore help explain the experiences of educators and families of sub-Saharan African descent in relation to their children's early

childhood education in this study in Australia. In light of this, the importance of a whole schooling approach is fundamental to the processes of readjusting perceptions toward children of refugee families and creating new practices which embrace access for all. The process of creating these new paradigms begins with transforming the habitus of educators to consider that,

> equity means giving the same to all, which, in the case of education, amounts to offering ''equal opportunities'' of access to schooling. The second, prospective point of view, sees equity as giving to each according to his or her needs; that is, giving something different (and possibly more) to whomever is different (and possibly has less) (Aguerrondo, 2008, p. 54).

This poses a great challenge for early childhood education systems to respond to questions such as how can the new early years learning and development framework meet the need for an equitable distribution of capitals?

Method

This article is based on a qualitative research project that explored and gained insights into the perspectives of families of sub-Saharan African descent and preschool educators regarding the implementation of the VEYLDF for all young children. The research questions are:

- What are the perceptions of families of sub-Saharan African descent with regards to their children's experiences in the preschools?
- What is it like for early childhood educators to be working with children from families of sub-Saharan African descent in implementing the VEYLDF?

Using a critical framework informed by Pierre Bourdieu, we interrogated the gaps between EYLF/VEYLDF and approaches and practices that include or alienate children of these families, to provide the evidence that informs the development of effective inclusive education for all young children. In order to answer the questions we posed in this research we adopted a qualitative research approach with interviews as the data collection tool (Newman & Benz, 1998; Onwuogbuzie & Leech, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Participants

The study took place in the South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne, Australia, a location with high concentration of families of sub-Saharan African descent. We were interested in these families because we are broadly examining the nature of equity in early childhood education in these settings in Australia, and because families from sub-Saharan Africa are automatically identified under current Commonwealth government policy as falling into a category of vulnerability. Understanding the nature of experience of families of sub-Saharan African descent helps to provide further evidence of this vulnerability that extends to early childhood settings and how we might as a nation confront institutional vulnerability. Participating families were met during a multicultural event in September 2011. This event is held by the families of sub-Saharan African descent on a monthly basis to promote networking and offer support for members and new migrants. The research was explained during this event and those who qualified as refugees were invited to voluntarily participate in the research. Ethical approval from the University's Standing Committee on Research involving Humans was obtained. Families who do not have

young children attending early childhood centres were excluded. In all, 25 families (both families) agreed to participate with the children of these families attending five different early childhood centres. We invited the educators of these five settings to also participate. Out of the five centres, two declined to participate and three educators volunteered to participate.

Data Collection

We interviewed 25 families at their respective homes during the evenings. Each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes. We also interviewed three educators after school in their respective childcare centres. The theme of the interviews was the nature of experience for families in this community accessing early childhood education for their young children in Melbourne, and the interview with the educators centered on their experiences of working with the Sub-Saharan African children that attend their centers. We did not interview any child in this study as our focus was on the adults only. The questions we asked during the interviews were open-ended. We used a digital voice recorder to record the interviews which we the authors later transcribed separately and compared. We then sent the transcripts back to the participating families and the educators for validation (Creswell, 2008), and permission to include them in our analysis and publication.

Data Analysis

We followed "general inductive analysis approach" (Thomas, 2006, p. 238) to analyse the interview data. This analysis approach included five steps: preparation of raw data files (data cleaning), close reading of text, creation of categories, overlapping coding and un-coded text, and continuing revision and refinement of category system (Thomas, 2006). To ensure reliability of inter-coding, we both (authors) compared the completed themes and discussed discrepancies until we reached agreement between them. The "general inductive analysis approach" was augmented with Bourdieuian theoretical lenses as this study involves people originally described in previous research as vulnerable individuals. This involves a four-step approach of scrutinizing the data and the inherent themes. In doing so, first we analyzed the position of the field in relation to the field power (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This approach involved critically examining the comments made by families and educators in relation to the children and how the families felt their children were positioned in relation with the educators. This also involved an examination of situated power. Situated power in this sense relates to unequal access to care, classroom power, and symbolic capital such as social status. The second step involved mapping out the interview data to determine the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by families who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority for their children. Legitimate forms of authority here imply authority that has always existed, where educators in power usually enjoy it because they have inherited it from the dominant social order. Those who are privileged with such authority show that they possess the right to manage others by virtue of their privileged positioning. In this process, we examined the families' and educators' recurrent comments to establish how educators, children and families struggle for recognition and acceptance in their learning centres. Third, we analyzed the habitus (beliefs, dispositions, values) of the agents involved in the research (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). We concluded the analyses by examining the forms of capital that were privileged within the field (relations). Our analysis identified one major theme which we named marginalized identities. We reported our findings as aggregates without any identification of individuals.

Findings

Marginalized Identities

It is recognized that a good early start to life is the key foundation for future development, health and wellbeing (Hertzman, 2004). For young children of families of sub-Saharan African descent, refugee and asylum-seekers, early childhood education provides stability and normality that mitigate the negative effects of past traumatic experiences. However, the results of this study demonstrate that the optimism of some families of sub-Saharan African descent for their children to be equally included, safe and well cared for is often disappointed due to marginalization.

> *They don't take good care of my child…they never get a blanket to cover the kids and they just lie down even without giving them pillows…when my child comes home he says pain in the neck …my child says they don't give them pillows when they sleep... I went to pick my child one day was sleeping but he had no pillow under him. The other children had pillows and I don't know why. I am not happy because everyone is paying the money why all the children don't have pillows? …I took my kids from the child care because they don't look after them… Kids are kids they have the same everything but because the colour is different they don't look after my child well…but what can you do eh? Why…why they treat us like this I don't know but God give all the children to the African mother or White mother… what worries me is that most of the time if you go to the school to pick them up the African kids they leave them dirty, nobody is caring for them the nose is running the mouth is "yaak" (extremely dirty). No one is active to clean their nose and when I see my kids like that it is sad but the other children, the white kids are clean... when you come in to pick your child, and then they pretend to be running to clean the kids this is not good at all (Family transcripts).*

The comments above showed that families were frequently dissatisfied with the care and service their children were receiving in their respective childcare settings. They claimed that their disadvantage is regularly exacerbated because of how procedures are implemented in the childcare without regard for cultural differences.

Another contentious issue raised consistently in the interviews with families is related to childcare staff treating African children quite differently to other children who were not Africans. For example, African children who were born in Australia and have acquired citizenship and an Australian passport were not accorded the status as Australians. Families reported that the educators often refer to their children as the '*Sudanese child'*, the '*Liberian or the Sierra Leonean'* whereas other nationalities like the Italian, Greek etc., were not named as such.

> *I don't know what is happening…my kids are born in Australia, they not refugees…they are supposed to have equal rights but it is not the same…the educators know this, they have the records in their books that they are Australian children but they still separate them by calling them Sudanese or something else…why don't they call other children like that? (Family transcripts).*

Across the research it was clear that while many families were satisfied with the childcare learning activities their children participated in, they were quite emotional and unhappy about the frequent suggestion that their children were the trouble makers.

Most of the educators and directors are lovely and they talk to me about how the children are developing. What I dislike … if anything happens in the school… when they are playing they say it is my child who is the problem...Always the educators tell us the African kid cause problem it is not good to point to one side. Kids are kids so when something happen they should not say it's the African child…White kids too make trouble…or am my lying? (family transcripts).

The findings also revealed that the families were concerned about the pejorative and derogatory comments made about some of the children. In severe cases some of the African children's behaviours were likened to those of animals.

…my little one came home crying and I asked what happened? and he said somebody called him monkey so when I went to the director…I asked the director, what happened?...this is a big embarrassment and they said … it was just a joke but it is not like that it happened to my friend's son too… I ignore it first but it happened again then I went to the school and I said I am not happy about that word monkey and I told the director that I don't want other children or educators calling my son this word, we are all equal only the colour is different and I don't like that word. I was sad for a week because of that word (family transcripts).

Another compounding issue emerging from this study is the lack of families' understandings of childcare procedures and practices. For example, families did not understand the play-based curriculum in the Australian childcare settings as opposed to rote learning and memorisation method that the families of sub-Saharan African descent were used to in their home countries. This made them feel that learning was not taking place in the childcare settings their children were attending. In addition, the families were concerned that their children were not being taught anything related to their homeland Africa.

We don't know how to complain if we are dissatisfied with something… you have to keep quiet because you don't know how to express what you feel. If we tell them something we don't like they would say we don't understand what is going on. If you ask them something about your child they just speak about policy… Last year both families were invited to see how the children are doing so I went and looked at the work my children are doing but it is hard because everything they do is different and all the things are White things they don't do any Sudan or African thing. It is like everything about Africa is bad (family transcripts).

This study also uncovered that the families of sub-Saharan African descent, who were equally qualified childcare workers, have difficulty securing jobs in the sector compared to their White counterparts.

Many of us Africans are qualified to work in child care but they don't give us the job. We did the course here when we came to Australia…I looked for job for 2 years nobody gave me the job… They look at you and they would say no vacancy but if you have a friend who is White she can go to the same place and get the job. I am frustrated so I went to look for job in a factory. My friends too have the same experience, one of my friends after doing childcare course she did not get the job she is now doing another course in Aged-care (family transcripts).

Across the interviews, families described African infants being made to sleep on the floor when the white children were allowed to sleep in bedding; childcare staff often used derogatory terms such as "monkeys" about African children, blaming them for fights and other bad behavior, and associating the children's race with behavior in ways that were deeply offensive to children and families. Across the interviews, families indicated that childcare staff made it normal practice to avoid wiping noses and changing nappies, or generally cleaning and toileting the children from African backgrounds. Family after family reported collecting their children at the end of a day, and finding them needing to be cleaned, and at the same time, noticing White children alongside their own were apparently clean and well presented.

Interviews with educators revealed that the educators were confronted with many issues in teaching and caring for children from sub-Saharan African families. Key issues the educators pointed out included misunderstanding between families and educators due to language barriers, families not adhering to policy guidelines, for example, letting minors below the age of 18 years escort young children to childcare instead of adults, cultural expectations, for example, explicitly teaching children school work instead of learning through play, and some inappropriate behavior exhibited by the African children in play group time. Some of the behaviors the educators consider inappropriate during play-time included, climbing trees, roaming wild, and throwing things at other children. Also, the educators identified the persistent refusal of some White children to play with the African children in a group. The educators further reported that the majority of the African children they worked with could not communicate their needs in English which made it difficult. The transcripts below sum up some of these issues.

Some of the families have low English skills and often, need interpreters…given their lack of knowledge of preschool culture they are very suspicious of us regarding their children…they have different expectations quite different from the childcare routines. Some of the African children require one-on-one attention but it is difficult to provide this because other children need attention too… Some of them, I mean the African children seem very nervous of the White kids and are constantly checking to make sure they got the same items and amount as the others…others have acted wildly in the centre and don't seem to respond to caution; they have sometimes kicked other children, or have gotten up on top of things and jumped down (Educator transcripts).

These collective responses from the three educators provide insights into some of the issues of working with cultural groups whose norms, beliefs and values (habitus) are quite different from those of their new setting. In addition, different cultural practices in Africa, for example where children are allowed to roam freely their neighborhood without constant surveillance from adults might have played a part in the way the children behaved in the learning

centres, which the educators considered were contrary to the childcare norms. In light of the families' and educators' reported experiences we provided analytical discussion of the major finding that emerged from the data.

Discussion

This article addresses particular issues regarding the perspectives of families of sub-Saharan African descent and three childcare educators through the dimensions of early childhood education and care. The authors discuss this in the context of EYLF and VEYLDF as curriculum documents employed in early childhood education in Australia for mitigating marginality. The EYLF and VEYLDF espouse respect, acceptance and value for individual identities. The purposes of these documents are to guide early childhood educators to practice democratic early childhood education that creates space for all children. Rather than experiencing such a democratic early childhood education, families of sub-Saharan African descent shared their daily battles with overt racist practices. We therefore placed the empirical data analysis and discussion within the context of marginalized identities theorized in Bourdieuan habitus, field and capital.

Overall, the data in this research suggest a presence of systemic racism and racist attitudes directed towards children of families of sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, families' lamentations about their perceived racial treatment of their children demonstrated a feeling of marginalization as a result of disparity in treatment when comparing a racial or ethnic minority to non-minority children. The incidents cited by families such as differential treatments in care, calling some of the children as monkeys and attributing the source of misbehavior to the African children, suggest discrimination based on colour and culture, leading to oppression. It is argued by Young (2004) that "marginalisation is the most dangerous form of oppression" (p. 53) because it denies people the access to societal resources and full participation in social life. In the case of the experiences shared by families above, the feeling of marginalisation, which amount to oppression can limit their children's potential to be what they want to be in their new found Australian society. The goal of EYLF is to promote equitable society through belonging, becoming and being but children who are marginalised and oppressed through institutional racism may find it difficult to experience these outcomes. Similarly, the VEYLDF aims to develop children's strong sense of own identity; to connect with and contribute to their world; to have a strong sense of wellbeing; to be confident and involved learners; and to be effective communicators (DEECD, 2009, p. 6). We argue that it is not possible for marginalized and oppressed children to realize these outcomes because marginalization entails the deprivation of capitals to certain people considered illegitimate inhabitants of certain societies. For example in this study, the data showed how some children born in Australia to families of sub-Saharan African descent were considered illegitimate Australians by their educators. In this way cultural and institutional practices are framed in the childcares to prevent some of the children from exercising their unique cultural identities.

We acknowledge that these Africans are given protection in Australia but Young's (2004) cautions that marginalisation does not ceases to be oppressive when marginalised people are provided with food and shelter. Marginalization will continue to persist unless there is value and respect for everyone's identity, acceptance and celebration of everyone's symbolic and cultural capital. It is then that the individual will feel included. We reflect on the possibility that such actions by the childcare workers may express compliance with community values, authority and power (Apple, 1999) and that in this context, the practice of cleaning children and/or not

cleaning becomes a means of upholding prevailing cultural mores. By prevailing cultural mores we are referring to Anglo-Saxon cultural practices in Australia. Inclusive participation in early childhood settings take place in contexts of organised social cooperation and mutual respect for other cultures.

The findings reiterate Bourdieu's position that different forms of capital - cultural, social, economic and symbolic determine various forms of social power and relationships in different social contexts (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002). Some of the children for example, were likened to animals, which is a form of derogatory symbolic capital. These children might have been accorded different symbolic capitals that would accentuate their individual identities if they were in their own homelands. Arguably, the status (symbolic capital) of the educators as Anglo-Saxon identities automatically ascribed to them a privileged position of power over those whose skin colour and status are considered inferior in Australia. This is evident in the attitudes, dispositions, perceptions (habitus) displayed towards the children of refugee families in the childcare settings which were made visible through the practices.

In fact, habituses generated through one's cultural history can enable or prohibit effective exchange in early childhood education where the population is from diverse cultural backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1998). In this study the educators and children from families of sub-Saharan African descent occupy multiple, contradictory and complex subject/object positions (Robinson & Diaz, 2008). For example, as discussed earlier, to marginalize and oppress someone begins with how the person is positioned. For children of families of sub-Saharan African descent as the data portrayed, they were situated as objects to be manipulated according to the 'White' norms in Australia which are a priori for belonging within the Australian nation. Subject/object positions such as these arise as a result of the different values, beliefs, dispositions (habitus) and capital that the various actors bring to the childcare (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002).

We also think that families' subjectivities may influence the ways they perceive and give meaning to the treatment meted to their children by the child care educators. This is not to say that we are discrediting what families told us - their perspectives were collectively similar, suggesting some truth. Similarly, the educators' master dispositions (habitus) (Bourdieu, 1989) may also have played a role in the way they perceived and cared for the African children. It could be possible that the educators have difficulty working with cultures that they were not very familiar, which may even been exacerbated by the lack of some of the families to communicate to the educators in English, the medium of communication between families and educators. If what families told us in the interviews represent a trend in the child-care practices then one conclusion we can draw from this study is that early childhood inclusive education as it is currently practiced, somewhat drifts away from the radars of EYLF, VEYLDF, whole schooling and inclusive practice.

As we have argued in the previous sections of this article, there is a close link between the two frameworks and the whole schooling principles. There cannot be belonging, being and becoming without democracy, that includes all, has space for all and so on as the whole schooling principles suggest. Similarly, none of the five outcomes listed in the VEYLDF can be realized without implementing the principles of the whole schooling. The VEYLDF states that "children have a strong sense of identity; children are connected with and contribute to their world; children have a strong sense of wellbeing; children are confident and involved learners; and children are effective communicators" (DEECD, 2009, p. 6). The achievement of these outcomes is not possible in early childhood education systems where distributed power is

skewed towards the dominant group (Apple, 1999). The findings of this research call for what Paulo Freire called epistemological curiosity (Freire, 2007). This involves moving beyond the obvious into the unknown which is possible through dialogue. When trying to understand and work with families and children of other cultures we need to draw on Freire's position that dialogue among cultures should have two dimensions - spontaneity and love and not only epistemological (Freire, 2007). Embracing an intercultural dialogue moves beyond our rationality covered by our habituses to involve affect and demonstrate the political quality of acceptance in working with diverse families and children. Engaging in epistemological curiosity promotes new consciousness in educators to challenge their comfortable positions and to construct new modes of habitus (dispositions, values, beliefs, trust) and valuing of each actor's capitals to enact possibilities for a whole schooling approach to inclusion in early childhood education. Epistemological curiosity will also enable educators to observe and deconstruct the self in order to interrogate and disrupt normalizing practices that privilege some cultural groups and disadvantage others (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

As the data from this study suggests, the practices of the educators have strayed from the key principles and outcomes of the EYLF and VEYLDF and away from fundamental inclusive values. However, we strongly believe that EYLF and VEYLDF are appropriate curriculum documents for educating Australian children and can bring the stray early childhood education back on the inclusive education radar, if "all educators take a reflective approach to their practice. This means supporting all Australians families to understand how their subject positions in discourses can perpetuate, consciously or unconsciously, the social inequalities that prevail in society" (Robinson & Diaz, 2008, p. 169). However, we argue that to change the given racism situations in early childhood education settings is not simply through awareness or the best of intentions, or through unguided action. Educators need to be activists to continuously move from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action (Robinson & Diaz, 2008). Being activists means educators must accord children and families of all descents subject positions in the field (Bourdieu, 1989) in order to fully appreciate their symbolic, social, cultural and knowledge capitals for their empowerment (Apple, 1999). This is the way we believe marginalization and oppression of individual identities can be eliminated.

Conclusion

In concluding this article we would like to acknowledge a major limitation that since observation of the practices of these centers was not allowed, we could not ascertain the nature of practices. Also the number of educators who participated was small (three), but our intension was to problematize what the families and the few educators have told as their experiences. A follow up larger scale ethnographic study has the potential to glean insights into the true nature of the early childhood sector practices in relation to how African children are cared for and taught across Australia.

Through this study, the marginalized identities of African families has been identified as the main finding and is clearly problematic. We agree that in order to fulfill the promise for all young children attending early childhood education in Australia as intended by the current curriculum frameworks:

educators need to decenter their location in discourses that pathologize difference as abnormal or deficit, as well as acknowledge and incorporate in child-rearing, family

and language practices that are represented by families and children attending the setting (Robinson & Diaz, 2008, p. 80).

Teacher educators need to adopt an inclusive whole schooling approach to educate all teachers to understand the complexity of diversity in a democracy. This understanding requires "multifaceted appreciation of people and is informed by knowing individuals through relationships" (Rutherford, 2012, p. 331) so as to avoid one-dimensional labeling and marginalization. When this occurs, there will be more opportunities to bring Australian early childhood educators, children and families back on the inclusive radar.

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