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Cultures in early childhood care and education

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Cultures in Early Childhood Care and Education

A. Bame Nsamenang

Abstract

A remarkable feature of basic care and initial learning to children 0-8 years is its amazing worldwide diversity. Rights-based 'positioning' legitimates its multicultural forms. Colonization with Western institutionalization, educationalization and economization of childhood has problematised non-Western ECCEs, while identity rights and inherent apprehensions remain mostly unspoken. Claim of superiority denies equity to and excludes 'other' ECCEs. Thus the emancipatory potential of Anglo-American approaches visualized in the first EFA goals, though attractive, instead suppress goal-achievement by non-Westerners. Blind optimism in them stunts non-Western children. To empower most of the world's children and enrich the field, we simply need to accept and respect differentness.

Introduction

Worldwide, early childhood care and education (ECCE) for children 0-8 years is an actively negotiated set of social relationships (Prout and James, 1990). It has evolved from women's familial duty to professional work in need of more status and funding, which accrues from institutional universalism (Nsamenang, in press). The 'work' stands to lose the status and control that powerful interest groups feel is their right, although it is at the expense of those who the groups are expected to serve (Callaghan, 1998).

ECCE as promoted by the development community is the product of European and North American culture, which represents only a minority of the world's early childhoods in a multicultural universe in need of exploration (Nsamenang, 1999). This implies that the ECCE that was envisaged in the first EFA goal is Anglo-American, which may not translate to non-western cultures. A Eurocentric storyline is not problematic but it becomes tricky when its universalistic claims to absolute truth deprive the Majority World of the right to its own knowledge systems and practices (Moss, 2005).

"The evidence is clear" (Vogelaar, 2005, p. iii): ECCE is "an instrumental, frontline strategy for achieving poverty reduction goals" (Arnold, 2004, p. 2). The professed benefits from ECCE have been so emphasized as to render trite any imagination of obstacles or harm children may face when their ecological and cultural realities differ from those that inspire ECCE's emancipatory goals. It is not clear why advocacy or policy for investment in such goals focuses more on a universalism motive than on moving forward functional services that reach children in the cultural contexts in which their communities could fully participate (Lanyasunya and Lesolayia, 2001). Imagine that "At least 86 percent of all children and adolescents" (Gielen and Chumachenko, 2004:82) live in Majority World countries, but the judgmental norms for their 'appropriate development' originate in Western nations (Minority World) that house only a quarter of the world's child and adolescent population. Furthermore, because institutional ECCE stop on the fringes of most Majority World cities, they bypass the community-based ECCEs of the 70% of the world's peoples who are rural. ECCE programs appropriately

should draw strength from rich Majority World cultures and the wisdom of their timeless traditions (see Callaghan, 1998), but in the present forms they do not.

Every culture invests in children, not as an endstate but in recognition that today's adults are a product of their childhoods. Accordingly, all societies make provisions for children's basic needs and initial learning from the very earliest age to support survival and the development of their intelligence and personalities, as well as their integration into society (Evans, 2002). Despite the diversity that marks ECCE systems globally, their common attribute is ideological or philosophical positioning, which may be explicit or implicit, regarding the meaning and purpose of human life. We are referring here to worldview, which interprets as a theory of the universe, by which "A theorist's view of development," for example, "is closely tied to his or her view of human nature, a view intimately tied to his or her conception of how the universe works" (Nsamenang, 1992a, p. 210). The theory introduces diversity into visions and forms of ECCE by positioning every cultural community to cherish some but not other aspects of nature and child states.

There are of course, universal and universalizing 'standards', but they tend to be actualized differentially across cultures. In general, humanity's universal needs for survival, well-being and self-fulfillment are not satisfied in a universal manner. Often, one culture's most satisfying style turns out as another's most loathsome mode. Thus, an essential but rarely examined feature of ECCE is how the world's diverse peoples parent, educate and guide children into mature and responsible competence. But we cannot assume that all practices, in principle, are legitimate merely because they conform to specific cultural values and norms. Some of them can be as destructive as they are misleading. In every culture there are practices that may be disrupt human thriving and well-being, such as female genital mutilation, cultural attitudes that deprive children from protein-rich food items, and the paternalism of Europe's civilizing contribution to backward cultures.

A rights-based position envisions ECCE as a 'liberal' project that can empower and guide societies to improve their ways of ensuring the development of young children. Although it is worthwhile investing in human capital to speed up per capita income growth, we consider such a strategy a partial solution to the healthy development of children. Wholesome development begins with the satisfaction of basic needs and involves much more than capital investment and intellectual enrichment (Nimnicht, Arango, and Hearn, 1987).

The goal of this paper is to explore the diversity that characterizes the global state of early childhood. While selectively exposing the different ways in which the world's cultures raise competent children in the light of available literature, it ponders why the field gives less attention to the vibrant variety of the ECCEs of the Majority World (Kagitçibasi, 1996) whereas it highlights those of Europe and North America. It wonders if rights activists and the development community are aware that many Majority World children 'hide' parts of their personalities because contemporary ECCE services render them ashamed to expose their differentness (Vandenbroeck, 1999). Questioning why the development community is reinforcing institutional ECCE that generally rejects Majority World peoples their ECCE systems, thereby denying them dignity, even humanity, cannot be a rogue concern.

Parenting Programs and Practices in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Across the globe, human beings survive and thrive in varied ecological and cultural circumstances. Similarly, cultures vary in the value they place on the child and the extent to which they organize the contexts in which children develop and how they learn. We consider the world's systems of how societies organize developmental learning in two basic forms: a didactic or instructional perspective and a participatory model (Nsamenang, 2005a). Islamic and Western systems of ECCE essentially are didactic, wherein children learn in contrived contexts remote from livelihood activities. By contrast, learning within the ECCE of Majority World family traditions requires children from an early age to engage in ongoing cultural and economic activities as valued *participants in cultural communities* (Rogoff, 2003).

The context, content and ECCE methods differ from one region to another as well as within the same region. In practical terms, "individuals and families have a complex array of different identities that derive from ethnicity, religion, profession and region. More of these can and should be accentuated" in ECCE work (Bram, 1998, p. 23). Differences equally emerge from political and other socioeconomic factors and the type of provision children attend to or receive. This portrays parenting, child development, and child outcomes as contextual phenomena, which demonstrate huge cross-cultural variation.

As ecology and culture, the developmental context constitutes a key factor that structures ECCE in every society. In fact, ECCE is context-bound. An important facet of early childhood context is *Parental Belief Systems* (Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, and Goodnow, 1992). These are cultural beliefs, scripts, and values (Super and Harkness, 1986) that confer on parents and other cultural agents the knowledge, affective disposition, and attentive orientation to raise culturally competent children, often without regard to whatever advocacy or 'civilized' interventions is in place. Given the difficulty, if not impossibility, of imagining parenting independent of culture (Krappmann, 2001), Super and Harkness (1986) offered the developmental niche as a theoretic heuristic to bridge the three core fields of early development, namely, anthropology, parenthood, and psychology.

Parenting within the Developmental Niche Framework

How children live, develop and learn are shaped by the ideological, historical, ecological, and sociocultural imperatives of their early years. Every culture offers parental ethnotheories or "a framework for understanding the ways that parents think about their children, their families and themselves, and the mostly implicit choices that parents make about how to rear the next generation" (Harkness et al, 2001:12). The multiple forces that shape childhood arrangements, parenting and the educational ideas on which children develop can be subsumed under the developmental niche paradigm.

The developmental niche model addresses the interrelated facets of the places in which children live and grow and how parents and others perceive their role and task of socializing and educating children. It also includes the social systems that organize parenting and education. As such, it is a holistic heuristic that permits structuring and integration of the different strands of any "niche" in which children

develop. As such, it permits weaving together of the diverse ways every cultural community arranges to handle the micro-niches and daily routines of early childhood as they link the child with different levels of the macro-system like the school, informal and formal sectors, and societal or religious institutions.

The framework consists of three components, namely, the physical and social settings of early childhood, the customs and practices of childrearing and the psychology of caretakers [including teachers and peer mentors]. This incorporates their beliefs, values and attitudes to children and their development and education. In arranging these sub-systems in their own terms, every cultural communities the world over prioritize and highlight different values, practices and child outcomes.

A crucial but often ignored facet of early childhood realities is how humanity's universal needs of thriving, health, nutrition, education, intelligent behavior, responsible attitudes, social integration, and self-fulfillment, are guided and socialized or educated across the world's diverse cultures. Actually, the same need is often fulfilled in different ways by different cultures. Accordingly, we can presume that appropriate research on or monitoring how the developmental niche shapes ECCE services would reveal different parenting profiles and divergent ECCE arrangements.

Variety of Parenting Programs and Childcare Arrangements

The primary focus of ECCE is on basic early childcare arrangements involving the division of time, energy and responsibility among childcare, provisioning, and other activities relevant to child survival (Lancaster, Rossi, Altmann, and Sherrod, 1987). It is also about initial learning, ECCE practitioners and settings. While the satisfaction of basic needs is assumed, ECCE content, physical arrangements and human resources are problematic in every country. Although international advocacy prefers institutional ECCE, it is not yet universal, even in some industrial countries. For example, "at least 25% of children in the United States are cared for by family, friends, or neighbors" and "State regulatory standards for informal care vary quite a bit" (Susman-Stillman, 2005, p. 241). In industrializing nations like Nigeria, mothers combine mothering and paid work relatively successfully because housemaids, nannies, daycare centres, nursery schools and the kindergarten are available (Ogbimi and Alao, 1998). Even with the 'one child policy' in "the world's largest geopolitical community" (Ho, Peng and Lai, 2001, p. 7) – China – early childcare arrangements not only vary from family to family, but also change during the year to contain parental employment circumstances (Yajun, Li and Champagne, 1999).

Underlying parenting programs or ECCE arrangements in both industrial and industrializing countries are parenting motives and values, which vary across ecologies and cultures, illuminating the global variety of cultural conditions that are created for early childhood. In point of fact, children's behavior and activities tend to foreshadow parental beliefs and values (Acuna and Rodrigo, 1994; Nsamenang and Lamb, 1995). These "play a directive role in shaping the developmental niche and consequently the development" of children (Super et al., 1996, p. 3). Cross-cultural variation of parental motives and parenting programs inform an approach to ECCE that requires understanding the diversity of childhood context in historical

perspective. For instance, Uribe, LeVine and LeVine (1994) describe contexts in which Mexican children are reared whose “central point is that the Mexican communities generating immigrants to the United States have been changing as environments for child development, particularly in their conditions of health, fertility, parental education, and media exposure, as well as their family attitudes, childrearing practices, and differentiation by socioeconomic status (SES)” (p. 41).

A report of cross-cultural gender role differences by Munroe and Munroe (1975) and “the varieties of social behavior of children brought up in different parts of the world” (Whiting and Whiting, 1975, p. vii), like the mere acknowledgement of the diversity in early childhood conditions and childcare arrangements around the world, carry obvious implications for the status of ECCE in general and the GMR agenda in particular. The field would benefit from objective exploration of ECCE motives, that is, whose interests ECCE services and the child outcomes they produce serve. In addition, what child outcomes do varied parenting values and practices produce? It is in this light that the lack of homogeneity even in Western European and Anglo-American countries reported by Harkness and colleagues (2001); “differences that seem to be maintained in spite of geographical proximity or linguistic relatedness” (Grusec and Rudy, 2001:16), add force to inclusivity thinking in ECCE.

In other terms, it is essential to realize and act on the fact that ethnocultural models foster ECCE under a variety of circumstances of child life and parenting, ranging from contexts in which parenting and sibling caregiving are normative (see Krappmann, 2001; Weisner, 1987), albeit advocated against by the development community, to settings in which deliberate childlessness and sneers against welfare services for parents and their children are growing. Imagine that in Britain, for example, a pension scheme that proposed to offer working mothers some time off work to care for children was challenged as “unfair,” in the face of a declining population (Winnett, 2005). A more extreme experience in ECCE history is the ‘one-child policy’ in China (Ho, Peng and Lai, 2001).

It seems obvious from the foregoing discussion that even a cursory appraisal of the cross-cultural evidence and state of the ECCE field would expose multiple ways of raising culturally healthy and competent children. It would further reveal children’s resilience in amazingly divergent circumstances.

Parenting Practices and Child Outcomes: Children’s Resilience in Adversity

Parental values organize daily parenting programs and routine child and family life (Harkness and Super, 1996; Palacios and Moreno, 1996). Parents’ cultural belief systems channel elements of the larger culture to children. Zeitlin (1996) for one explains how the feeding habits of Nigerian parents that non-Africans regard as counterproductive are useful. On their part, Weisner, Matheson, and Bernheimer (1996) thought that American parental beliefs on the importance of early ‘stimulation’ for optimal child development could lead to an unnecessary concern about the earliest possible interventions for children with developmental delays (Harkness and Super, 1996). Thus, the huge diversity in parenting practices results in differentiation in desirable child outcomes.

Whereas Miller and Chen (2001) reviewed research on culture and parenting whose diversity Goodnow (2001) claimed to be daunting, Sagi and Aviezer (2001) reported examples of what, in principle, looked like unfavorable child rearing conditions, which produced positive child outcomes. One plausible explanation for this possibility is that rarely have theorists and interveners focused on understanding the “surrounding support network” (Sagi and Aviezer, 2001) of the adversity which provides a secure base for healthy development of disadvantaged children. Thus, across the posited adversity of Majority World ECCE, children are more resilient than we have imagined conceptualizing. The regrettable reality is that current ECCE interventions tend to theorize and design into informality or extinction ideologies and practices that are quite functional and useful to many children, whose routine conditions are judged as adverse.

But “What the dominant group calls deviant or dysfunctional might be quite functional from the point of view of the people involved. If this were the case, then street boys might be the more resilient children among the urban poor, while the less resilient children are unable to leave home, and are forced to live in circumstances that are inappropriate to child rearing practices (deviant!)” (Aptekar, 1994, p. 2).

Thus, exclusivity is pervasive in the field because what fails to conform to Anglo-American developmental appropriateness or has never been “imagined in developmental theories” (LeVine, 2004, p. 163) simply becomes adversity. It is therefore decisive to ponder whether Majority World peoples “neglect the needs of their infants and toddlers for stimulation, interaction, and affection, or these needs have been exaggerated by child development specialists [and advocates] who mistake Anglo-America ideologies of the second half of the twentieth century as the universal requirements of human infants” (LeVine, 2004, p. 158).

Prospects for Contribution by the Majority World to ECCE

Culture defines competent parenting and desirable child outcomes and “colours all the activities connected with a particular group” (Bram, 1998, p. 23). This fact of culture obliges contextualization of approaches to initiating children into lifelong learning. That “In all societies, throughout human history, people have educated their children” (Reagan, 1996, p. ix) reinforces this obligation.

Although every culture introduces children to learning its cultural curriculum, ECCE services for the majority of the world’s children, as with Mayan-Ixil children in Guatemala, is offered within a deficit model: “none of these children receive initial education” (Tzay, 1998, p. 18). As such, ECCE interventions, as exemplified by that of San preschool children in Botswana, are best interpreted “Against a background of people forced to adopt a new lifestyle” (Cohen, 2002, p. 5). This is an affront on the children’s right to own identity, as it undermines their background and represents intolerance of human diversity (Vandenbroeck, 1999). Most of the recommendations promoted by ECCE ‘experts’ for developmentally appropriate and ‘scientifically’ based parenting and childrearing practices tend to denigrate alternative parenting values and practices in the non-Western world.

For most Majority World children and those in minority enclaves of Western societies, the advocated ECCE services are restrictive and inappropriate; they

ignore and circumvent the worldviews and values of the beneficiary communities. Thus, in common with similar cultural groups worldwide, the Mayan-Ixil people, experience institutional ECCE as “rigid and mechanical, and it does not allow laughter and play;” (Tzay, 1998, p. 19). By contrast, in the free spirit of the activity settings of Majority World peer cultures, children are not prodded into learning by intervention; they mostly undertake self-generated activities, therein engaging generously in play and self-motivated learning (Nsamenang, 2005a). “Play, which is the essence of childhood, should be a quintessential feature of a child care program, particularly as the child may spend the majority of his/her waking hours in the child-care setting” (Jacobs, 1994, p. 1).

Even more stimulating is the fact that the unavailability of commercial toys disposes most non-Western children into imitating making objects available in their environments or ‘creating’ their own playthings from local materials. Such ‘creations’ express ingenuity and recognizing them as ‘products’ enhances children’s self-worth. There is therefore need to recognize and learn from an open community-based ECCE curriculum, which, more than a didactic institutional one, rouses and reinforces children’s abstract and spatial thinking and cognitive and creative abilities (Segall, Dasen, Berry, and Poortinga, 1999) that exist already in the culture, which needs them (Ogbu, 1994).

Through the assumption that all children learn a universal culture, the dominant ECCE narrative introduces an insidiously destructive factor of naïve acquiescence to the institutionalization of ECCE (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Moss, 2005) as a ‘right’ of all children and their families regardless of their circumstances. This approach not only marginalizes other forms of ECCE, but also fails to recognize a child’s right to own culture and identity. It is contrary to the ‘new commitment’ to the ‘discovery’ that “All cultures can contribute scientific knowledge of universal value” (UNESCO, 2003, p. 1). Culturally oriented approaches to support development during the early years necessitate understanding difference in all the complexities and subtleties which, for example, incoming cultural groups encounter as they attempt to integrate into established cultures. A major program of settlement of Jewish immigrants from Russia and central Asia into Israeli society exemplifies this approach. A culturally appropriate approach to EECE can build on the strengths that exist already in the community, therein permitting knowledgeable community participation and more effective reaching out to children in their own cultural contexts. As Bram (1998) perceptively highlights, accurate knowledge of the cultural group is an essential and salient factor in developing and applying culturally sensitive services, particularly against the dominant values of “*Western* societies that tend to lump all cultural groups from developing countries into one category” (Bram, 1998, p. 24).

Generalized perceptions like the above constitute blinders that prevent advocates, policy planners and researchers as well as practitioners and field staff from distinguishing subtle differences between cultural communities. In the Israeli settlement program, “the sociological distinction went hand in hand with negative labeling attitudes that ranged from a sense of superiority to contempt” (Bram, 1998, p. 24). In fact, “Many child development programmes around the world fail to recognize and respect families’ and communities’ achievements and

resourcefulness in raising their children, often against extraordinary odds” (Arnold, 2004, p. 25). Indeed, “Those who have worked in international development are keenly aware that research based on a predominantly Western paradigm is part of the story, but not the full story needed to move forward effectively in local development” (ECDVU, 2004, p. 46). Yet, culturally oriented ECCE approaches and sensitivity to context-relevant services remain an illusion in the field.

The field has yet to realize that the ‘differentness’ of Majority World “cultures provide opportunities for learning and development which simply do not exist in the West and therefore are not considered by the predominant theories” (Curran, 1984, p. 2), policy, research and practice. Two contributions of Majority World conditions are Kagitçibasi’s (1996) image of family and human development ‘from the other side’ and Nsamenang’s (1992a) interpretation of human ontogenesis as a cumulative process of social integration into the cultural community that “differs in theoretical focus from the more individualistic accounts proposed by Freud, Erikson, and Piaget” (Serpell, 1994, p. 8). The field can gain from early care and socialization research in Africa (e.g., Nsamenang, 1992a; Serpell, 1996), Japan (Chen, 1996), and Navajo (Chisholm, 1996), which depicts child development in garden metaphors (Cole, 1992) as alternative to the organismic and mechanistic models dominant in Western worldviews. Garden metaphors connote not only vitality but also a gradual unfolding of human abilities and sequential attainment of levels of maturity and responsibility throughout ontogeny. However, Japanese metaphors have undergone greater adjustment to Western ‘modernity’ than those of other parts of the Majority World.

The Changing Patterns of ECCE: Different levels, Different scales

Most children around the world survive and thrive not only in the purported adversity and poverty that is their daily routines but must equally cope with waves of societal change and technological transformations, often with considerable resourcefulness and resilience that expertise seldom perceives. ECCE ‘experts,’ who are in short supply or non-existent in most parts of the world, appear to have been ‘educated’ not to see and value the niches to which children belong. Majority World peoples have successfully practiced their cultural forms of ECCE that are alive and ever changing within their unwestern worldviews (Callaghan, 1998) for centuries. Thus, it is best to understand ECCE in the light of the cultural practices and circumstances of children’s lives – which change (Rogoff, 2003).

ECCE expertise seems to engender a blindness and inability to conceptualize the child as growing within a nested system of relationships affected by multiple levels of surrounding environments which influence the child directly and indirectly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Chauhan and Kshetrapal, 2004). This blindness forcefully contributes to the apparent lack of scale, impact and replication of most ECCE programs that so far reach only a tiny minority of the populations they are meant to serve. Although the idealized centre-based ECCE facility is useful to working parents who have access to no other means of ‘arrangement’ for their children, this model only serves a minority of the world’s families. Accordingly, in most communities the mainstreaming and idealization of centre-based ECCE only undermines people’s strengths and their more functional community-based ECCE

services. In fact, Western concepts of educationalization “have devalued indigenous cultures and traditions so much that they are seen as being anti-progressive and somewhat outdated” (Callaghan, 1998, p. 30).

In reality, due to its high cost and the differing resource bases, the replicability and sustainability of institutional ECCE still remains questionable for the majority of the world’s peoples (Callaghan, 1998). It is for this reason that ECCE programs that **support** rather than **replace** parents in their role as children’s first educators (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1994) and cognitive stimulators (Nsamenang, 2004) are needed and deserve lobbied support. This insight convinced Callaghan (1998) that “the future of the African child lies deep within the African family and the rich, strong, living, growing, sustaining African culture which is reflected” in Africans (p. 33), but which ECCE experts and interventionists insidiously condemn by out-phasing from service programs, school curricula and development planning (Nsamenang, 2005c). Community-oriented programs are common in Latin America. They offer useful extension opportunities, which assist families and communities to increase income by generating resources within the community as productive services for children (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1986).

All Majority World cultures have been exposed to external, especially Western, influences, the effects of which should not be underplayed. But despite tumultuous changes, nowhere in the Majority World has this led to the total collapse of local institutions and indigenous knowledge systems, but they are in difficulty. Instead, indigenous and imported psychologies now live together in the same individuals and communities (Nsamenang and Dawes, 1998), and are both useful, although they sometimes collide or transgress one another. The intermingling or rivalry varies greatly within and between continents, regions, nations, communities, class lines and ethnicities, even within the same family and across developmental stages. Thus, Majority World children receive ECCE in a disorganizing hybridism that does not receive sufficient pragmatic responses to address inherent conflicts and tensions.

Indeed, contemporary childhood realities and parenting values in the colonized world are a hybrid cultural character, a product of indigenous and modern factors. As a result, in most Majority World societies, as in middle-class Argentine society, for example, “there are no clear rules about how to behave as a parent” (Bornstein et al., 2004, p. 183). Similarly, Kenyan parents “have been caught up in the web of cultural transition where there are no longer clearly defined values and moral codes of behavior that should be instilled in children and young people” (Cohen, 2001, p. 6).

In actuality, across the globe ECCE has undergone “a dramatic transformation from a service for women who ‘unfortunately’ had to be employed out of the home, to a service enabling independence and liberation for women from full-time mothering” (May, 2000, p. 56). In consequence, the total responsibility for children, which was accepted by most parents and local communities in earlier times, has altered radically as a result of ‘modernization’, as institutions and social structures have become larger and less identified with specific communities. In New Zealand, as in most hybridized societies, ECCE ideologies vary from beliefs in children being “better off in their own homes no matter how miserable their conditions may

be” to being cared for in advocated full-time, sponsored institutional day care (Meade and Podmore, 2002, p. 7). The most blinding and upsetting error with the transformations in Majority World contexts, however, is the attractive temptation to approximate them to a desire to ‘civilizing’ to be like Europe and North America. They are not, and are best interpreted as reactive responses to inescapable but tolerable irritants that are perceived as unfair and ephemeral. The clear evidence the field would gain from accepting is: despite so much suffering in the Majority World against the promissory and progressive stance of scientific positivism and the allure of modernizing developmentalism (Nsamenang, 2005c), most non-Western cultural communities, like “the Mayan Ixil people have jealously preserved their culture and its values” (Tzay, 1998, p. 18).

The dualism of contemporary childhood contexts come alive, to cite only two sources, in *Images of Childhood* (Hwang, Lamb and Sigel, 1996) and the Bernard van Leer Foundation *Following Footsteps* studies in “countries as widely spread as Jamaica and Kenya, Ireland, the USA, Botswana, Colombia, Trinidad and Honduras” (Cohen, 2003:7). The evidence from these and other sources abridges into the point that most ECCE programs are narrowly focused on distinct aspects of early childhood, failing to attend to the wider context of program delivery that impacts development. This is because in the overwhelming majority of cases the emphasis is on marketing and delivery of the programme (Callaghan, 1998) rather than on meeting the needs of real children and their families in the contexts of their daily lives. It is not difficult to discern the hesitation, which stands against the evidence, to voice the failure of the ‘capturing’ narrative to understand diversity and differentness in order to address the ECCE needs of Majority World children. The confusion and tension this engenders remains largely unattended, as the ECCE field instead jilts and estranges most children from the meaningfulness of their cultural life into aspiring for an elusive ‘modernity’ in Eurocentric ECCE.

To summarize, the field has failed to contemplate and theorize the complexity of contemporary childhood conditions in Majority World interventions. This implies that the ECCE field in these parts of the world is only partially and ‘belligerently’ being tackled. Although its restive cultural dualism perceptibly exists for edifying and empowering scholarship, innovative theorizing and creative methodologies, Majority World contexts and ECCE realities continue to be marginalized.

Issues of ECCE Policy Development and Quality of Best Practices

Broadly perceived, the story of ECCE services stretches into the history of every culture’s inclusive fitness considerations to prepare its next generation. A narrower perspective begins with Western Infant Schools in the 1820s and accentuates internationally with the UN adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child on November 20, 1989 (Pence, 2004). The narrower version has become the dominant narrative, which now frustrates drawing strength and wisdom from the fountain of rich and timeless traditions of ECCE cultures in the Majority World.

Of course, a lopsided history such this, which is as constricted as it engenders exclusion, carries far reaching policy implications. First, core ECCE issues remain largely unspoken. Discourse on ECCE quality, for instance, typically posits Anglo-

American values as a frame of reference to which all other cultural groups should aspire, instead of perceiving quality in terms of a holistic development of children and their learning competencies in familiar contexts in which they understand themselves and make sense of the universe.

Second, when ECCE discourse maintains 'informed' silence over how interventions are portrayed as 'neutral', this depicts Majority World livelihoods and conditions as inimical to 'appropriate' development. For one example, the list of 'inappropriate' practices resembles "practices that are culturally preferred among various peoples outside the United States, whereas the 'appropriate' list describes the practices preferred by contemporary upper-middle-class Americans" (LeVine, 2004, p. 152). It is as if the Majority World has nothing of merit for ECCE. Because Euro-American truth claims dominate policy development, therein localizing and excluding locally embedded ECCEs, many strategies even fail to acknowledge the natural settings of Majority World children. Third, the advocated ECCE is not articulated from childhood realities but mostly contrived from the perceptions and theorizations of astute gatekeepers in agencies that essentially are allergic, if not hostile, to Majority World mentalities, lifestyles and forms of ECCE.

Fourth, there are no universal child-outcomes to which all cultural communities aspire; there is great diversity in desirable child states. Majority World peoples have as much a right as Minority World populations to have culturally preferred practices regarding the care of their offspring (LeVine, 2004). That forms of ECCE the world over are franked in cultural agendas for desirable child states somehow limits the possibility of a universal ECCE approach that is culturally appropriate for all peoples. Although the Treaty on the Rights of the Child internationalizes ECCE issues, it resolutely bestows "a legal status on the right of one's own identity; on respect for the background of every child" (Vandenbroeck, 1999, p. 13). In so doing, it tacitly inserts the accommodation of human diversity into ECCE policy planning and programming.

Fifth, although the guidelines donors and experts offer are a "roadmap" or "toolkit" for visualization of policy (e.g., Vargas-Baron, 2005), such guiding principles, regrettably, are a virtual 'prescription' in much of the Majority World. This is because the scourges of colonization and the unforeseen effect of Western schooling now constitute roadblocks that incapacitate Majority World policy planners from stepping out of the Eurocentric policy box to creatively develop lucid and coherent policies and programs that appropriately address their stark realities.

Sixth, ECCE policy and program development demands evidence-based policies, but it is unclear why donors and international experts formulate into policy and design programs on childhood realities that grossly diverge from those they experience in the field. The emphasis is on indicators devised by experts aligned to the United Nations system, the World Bank and other international donors but not on the needs of children in their daily routines. It is not a rogue concern that the toolkits of ECCE these advocates and policy makers contain negligible to no content on the ECCEs of the bulk of humanity. In addition, concerned attention must be given to why the development community hesitates to acknowledge diversity and address the apprehensions and conflicts inherent in ECCE work. Can we pose to imagine the mischief and disempowerment inherent in approaches that

formulate into informality a people's parenting and childcare arrangements, which is what current strategies do to people of the Majority World? Such approaches persist in the face of evidence that "there is far more to child development than preschool, and that if the school system is not congruent with home circumstances, the children will have to make immense efforts to achieve any form of success" (Cohen, 2002, p. 7).

In the seventh instance, ECCE has evolved into a professional field that requires experts, who are notable by their scarcity and cultural irrelevance in the Majority World. However, this requirement rouses apprehension whether expertise is a procedural issue, a matter of universal knowledge and know-how or that of applying context-relevant knowledge and skills (Nsamenang, 2005c). Scott (1998) contends that experts lack the knowledge that can come only from practical experience. Given the lack of consensus amongst experts and the shifting realities diversity and pluralism stir, to what extent can an expert, native-born or expatriate, objectively and sensitively ground best practices on the daily routines and expectations of children and their families in recipient communities? This casts in sharp relief not only the apparently ambiguous role of the expert policy planner but equally provokes a call to critical discourse of what ECCE expertise portends for and the shape and direction it has given to the field. Recognizing that everything is not bad, but that everything is potentially dangerous (Foucault, 1980), the critique of ECCE policy and program development should expand to include even the best intentions of researchers and the development community.

Eighth, an ultimate policy matter pertains to 'rights.' Although a rights-based approach, in principle, recognizes the legitimate right of a people to beliefs and practices that accurately reflect their worldview and cultural values, no ECCE policy should condone the destructive elements of any culture, such as female genital mutilation, child marriages, marginalization of the girl child, etc. While the focus ought to be on 'guided' empowerment to reinforce positive and constructive aspects of every ECCE system, keen attention must focus on eliminating the negative or destructive elements of any culture's ECCE. A rights-based ECCE policy ought to instantaneously formulate into extinction present strategies that marginalize or exclude non-Anglo-American ECCEs from the field.

Finally, an urgent policy matter and a missing link concerns the little serious attention given to fathers in particular and in general men in children's lives. This is the case in spite of science-based evidence that men are significant to children. Although the paternal role is one half of parenting, it largely still is a "forgotten" contribution (e.g., Lamb, 1975) to ECCE services in the 21st century. We must see the big picture of *Supporting Fathers* (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2003) to reverse this state of the field by engaging boys and men in ECCE work.

Concluding Thoughts

It seems implausible to objectively and genuinely monitor the ECCE field without acknowledging that the dominant Anglo-American ECCE story is only one, arguably a motivating, example of the staggering diversity of ECCEs that oblige discovery not replacement. The elasticity with which the human offspring adapt and thrive in starkly differing ecocultures has not been contemplated nor theorized

to enrich ECCE visions and methods. Rather, compulsive devotion to Anglo-American realities and values instead disrupts and traumatizes Majority World children, therein denying them a right to their identity and knowledge systems. What right do we have to 'move' children and families forward by intervening into informality or nostalgic extinction their daily routines? Can the development community give healthier and respectful attention to the ECCEs of Majority World children by improving their differentness instead of investing in replacing or homogenizing them, as if diversity were wrong?

The Eurocentrism of EFA first goal evokes ECCE services that initiate Majority World children into an educationalization process through which, at varying stages of development, they systematically gain in unfamiliar knowledge and skills, which increasingly alienate them from their cultural roots and livelihoods. It stealthily transforms them into 'ignorant experts' who are inept about their own undesirable circumstances. As such, it instead stifles Majority World achievement of EFA goals.

The unequivocal evidence that investment to replace the timeless community-based ECCE systems that have successfully served Majority World children has failed, compels a paradigm shift to introduce culturally sensitive inclusive methods that expand visions and creative service delivery structures. A perceptible but unvoiced moral hub drapes ECCE work. It is about whose interest truly is in focus in policy development and program design – that of donors and experts or children and their communities! It is mutely compelling and in dire need of concerned scrutiny. The field needs it to move forward the ECCE agenda in contexts for its is designed and in which it is delivered.

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