

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the use of indigenous knowledge in development, and especially in early childhood development practices and policies. It examines the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU) program, which provides distance education capacity building programs in Africa. In particular, the article describes the generative curriculum model in which students contribute to the learning process by bringing indigenous knowledge and practices into the curriculum. The approach bears on ECD practice and curricula by seeking to better ground programs and policy in local, accepted, successful practices. By integrating indigenous knowledge into higher education addressing ECD, the ECDVU promotes more appropriate cross-cultural curriculum content, which can lead to more effective ECD policies and programs.

Introduction

One of the early Western academic uses of non-Western indigenous knowledge was the medicinal use of plants; the indigenous knowledge of botany served Western medicine and pharmacology. The value of indigenous knowledge has been increasingly recognized in other fields, including early childhood development, as development agencies and institutions of higher learning come to appreciate its contributions.¹ This paper focuses on the use of indigenous knowledge in development, and especially in early childhood development, to reach development goals more effectively, particularly given the failures of technical and technological fixes rooted in Western knowledge frameworks.²

¹In the last decades, the World Bank has created an Indigenous Knowledge Program (<http://www.worldbank.org/afr/ik/>); several journals have been created around indigenous knowledge (<http://www.nuffic.nl/ciran/ikdm/>; www.indigenouslawjournal.org/, *inter alia*); indigenous knowledge networks and websites have been created (<http://www.ik-pages.net/ik-network.html>; <http://www.africahistory.net>), along with a database of best practices using indigenous knowledge (<http://www.unesco.org/most/bpikreg.htm>).

²Robert Chambers (1983, 1994, 1997) has been a champion of this point of view.

Several arguments have favored the use of indigenous knowledge in development practices, ranging from the philosophical and ethical to the utilitarian and pragmatic. Philosophical and ethical arguments see the intrinsic value of cultural diversity and promote the tolerance or celebration of different worldviews and philosophical systems. Indigenous knowledge, with its roots in reciprocal and redistributive cultures, is perceived as providing the basis for an alternative to the dominant economic and moral system of the West, which has been blamed for damaging the planet and compromising the survival and quality of life of future generations (Obomsawin, 1993).

Pragmatic arguments are also given for valuing indigenous knowledge, which is perceived as having helped people survive and evolve in their specific context. Many positive perceptions about indigenous knowledge are based on widely-accepted assumptions about integrated ecological and cultural systems. Indeed, many indigenous worldviews posit a strong connection between humans and the natural world, much as Western ecology focuses on the connections between diverse elements of an ecosystem (*Ecos*, 2005). Indigenous knowledge is integrated in culturally-mediated world views and tends to be holistic (NUFFIC/UNESCO, 1999). Some see parallels between this holism and Western scientific theories such as relativity, quantum physics (Morgan, 2003, p. 39), and ecological theories focusing on interconnectedness.

Pragmatism joins with principle in some arguments: Judith Evans and Robert Myers, key figures in the field of cross-cultural early childhood development, argue that indigenous child-rearing practices and beliefs are important for early childhood care and development (ECCD) because they are both pragmatically sound and intrinsically valuable. Indigenous knowledge is important, they claim, to understand, support, and improve child-rearing; respond to diversity; respect cultural values; and provide continuity during times of rapid change (Evans and Myers, 1994, pp. 2-3).

Similar arguments are raised by Karin Hyde and Margaret Kabiru, who hold that ECD interventions in Africa are more successful when built on local knowledge (2003, p. 32). Alan Pence and his colleagues have demonstrated the effectiveness of including indigenous knowledge in ECD curricula within post-secondary education in Canada and Africa (Ball and Pence, 2000; Pence and McCallum, 1994; Pence and Marfo, 2004).

Many development agencies are thus attempting to design culturally appropriate interventions using indigenous knowledge. UNICEF's recent "Knowledge, Attitude and Practices" studies (see www.unicef.org) and the Bernard van Leer Foundation's "Growing up in Indigenous Societies" initiative (see www.bernardvanleer.org) are two examples. The World Bank's Indigenous Knowledge Program includes components touching on ECD, for example looking at indigenous knowledge related to postpartum maternal health care and child health (see <http://www4.worldbank.org/afr/ikdb/search.cfm>), as does UNESCO's NUFFIC program (NUFFIC/UNESCO, 1999). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes a child's right to cultural identity.

Considerable knowledge exists about local cultural child-rearing, education, and socialization practices. It nonetheless remains difficult to integrate this knowledge into capacity-building efforts and development interventions (Ball and Pence, 2006; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Evans and Myers, 1994). In Africa, the legacy of "narrowly didactic" colonial education systems (Lelliott, Pendlebury, & Enslin, 2000, p. 50) and the Westernization of African decision-makers and policy implementers (Okolie, 2003, p. 240) continue to exert their influence; social changes result in the loss or irreversible transformations of indigenous knowledge (Hollos, 2002; Hyde & Kabiru, 2003). Other obstacles include the pressures of cultural and technological globalization; insufficient

contemporary research on indigenous knowledge; conceptual frameworks that remain Western and resistant to indigenous knowledge and “ways of knowing” (Morgan, 2003; Okolie, 2003); and poor training for ECCD teachers and practitioners (Dyer *et al.*, 2004; Hyde & Kabiru, 2003, p. 18). Several scholars of indigenous knowledge have criticized the universities and research centers involved in the “knowledge industry” for their failure to recognize multiple ways of knowing and their consequent tendency to exclude indigenous knowledge from current curriculum and theories (Morgan, 2003; Nsamenang, 2004; Okolie, 2003).

Despite the obstacles, this paper argues that integrating indigenous knowledge into higher education in ECD promotes more appropriate cross-cultural curriculum content, which can result in more effective ECD policies and programs. The generative curriculum model used in the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU) is an approach that has the potential to achieve these goals. The term “generative curriculum” was coined by Alan Pence and colleagues at the University of Victoria to describe the process of developing an ECD curriculum jointly with First Nations communities in Western Canada (see Ball and Pence, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2006; Pence *et al.*, 1993) that promotes the integration of aspects of indigenous knowledge into ECD curricula and programs without Westernizing or privileging one paradigm over another.³

The Creation of the Early Childhood Development Virtual University in Sub-Saharan Africa

The ECDVU program takes a similar approach to the First Nations Partnership Programs, and in so doing, offers an example of an effective way for higher education capacity-building programs to make a real impact on ECD policy and practice by integrating indigenous knowledge into higher education, ECD practice and programming. The program does this in several ways: i) by integrating participants’ contributions into program content; ii) by supporting participants to apply their learning within the community; iii) by encouraging the use of this knowledge in policy fora; and iv) by disseminating culturally appropriate ECD approaches at multiple levels from local to international.

The ECDVU was created in response to a recognized need and demand for capacity building in ECD in Africa. The process began in the 1990s when several UNICEF-supported residential seminars were organized in Africa at which participants indicated the need for further capacity building and requested that training be given in a distance education Master’s program. At the first African International Conference on ECD, held in Kampala in 1999, the World Bank, which had been involved in one of the international seminars in 1998, announced its commitment to support the development of the ECD Virtual University through the Norwegian Education Trust Fund. Alan Pence of the University of Victoria agreed to spearhead the initiative, in collaboration with international and Africa-based advisory groups that were formed in 2000. An ECDVU International Advisory Group met in Washington in April 2000 to discuss the proposed design of the program and to consider criteria for country and candidate selection. Driving the design was an agenda to build national capacity and to select students showing potential to lead these efforts and who would in turn promote contextually-appropriate ECD policies and agendas in their countries.

The University of Victoria’s School of Child and Youth Care was the institutional home for the program. Participants were registered at the university, instructors and supervisors were given an affiliation with the university, and the university granted degrees at the end of the program. Pence

³The First Nations Partnership Programs (FNPP) have integrated indigenous knowledge into higher education practice and achieved much in increasing opportunities for culturally appropriate ECD in First Nations communities.

assembled a small team to develop the curriculum and the technology to deliver it, to pursue necessary funding in addition to that provided by the World Bank, and to liaise with African countries with respect to the formation of committees and identification of potential program participants. A three-year pilot program including distance and face-to-face courses began in 2001. The initial cohort included thirty participants from ten Sub-Saharan countries: Eritrea, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Lesotho, Malawi, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, and The Gambia.

The Generative Curriculum

The ECDVU took an approach to higher education capacity building that differed in many ways from other graduate and distance education programs and from the African Virtual University (AVU), Africa's most well-known distance education initiative. Where the AVU sought to promote quality in tertiary education in Africa by purchasing curriculum content from prestigious North American institutions and re-packaging it (Donat, 2001),⁴ the ECDVU, by contrast, sought to incorporate African resources. The curriculum was based on Western and non-Western authors and research, and on participants' research and information from their communities; the latter being generated during the program. In this approach, students are part of a dynamic knowledge transfer between the university and the larger community.⁵

The innovative process was stimulating as for many ECDVU participants, the idea that the knowledge, traditions, and practices from other social groups within their own countries (particularly those previously deemed "inferior") had value, was relatively new and transformative. Western influences and urbanization have created social and cultural gaps between urban and rural, formal and informally educated, wealthy and poor. African institutions of higher education, governments, and development agencies' knowledge cultures are often removed from rural and overwhelmingly poor Africa. Several participants embraced the notion of indigenous knowledge enthusiastically in their research and subsequently in their programming in the agencies in which they worked and in the ECD networks in which they participated.

Students Selected for Leadership Potential

Student selection also differed from other institutions as students were selected on the basis of their potential to become national leaders in their field by local committees in their own countries whose members are knowledgeable about ECD issues.⁶ The committees are composed of members of key governmental and nongovernmental agencies involved in the field of ECD. In some cases, cross-sectoral ECD committees were already in existence and took on the task of participant selection. In countries where no such committee existed, the ECDVU stimulated the creation of a committee as part of the program formation. Some of these committees created for the purpose of selecting candidate(s) for the ECDVU program took on a life of their own and continued to work together on ECD issues outside the direct remit of the program committee. This can be seen as an important "ripple effect" of the program in the wider community. Committees identified a broad agenda for

⁴One 'lesson learned' from the pilot was the difficulty of a wholesale transfer of materials from one culture to another, and the reliance on teachers from outside Africa (Juma, 2003, p. 20; Wolff, 2002).

⁵The most influential articulation of the student-centered learning paradigm comes from Carl Rogers (1983). The literature on student-centered learning is extensive; see Brandes and Ginnis (1986) and Gibbs (1992) *inter alia*.

⁶The pilot ECDVU program experienced a few exceptions to this procedure. One participant moved to another country after the program had begun and was asked to create a country committee in the new country through which to set the country ECD agenda and priorities to be addressed during her program activities.

ECD in the country and selected students for the program on the basis of their ability to promote this agenda. The selection process seeks to identify future leaders on ECD policy and practice, and to ensure that there is a national willingness to invest in them. Students remain working within their employing agency while on the program, and their employers must commit to supporting them through material resources, allowing them the time necessary to attend seminars, and giving them flexibility to combine course work with other work responsibilities.

The students – referred to as ‘participants’ in recognition of their central role – must accept the responsibility to address the ECD agenda, in addition to pursuing their own goals for early childhood development in their country. This approach helps to foster accountability to a local body, as participants are expected to report to their country committees, and to ensure that participants’ activities and learning are relevant to the country context. It also means that local knowledge is used to create contextually-appropriate practices, programs, and ultimately policy.

Sources of Indigenous Knowledge

Participants were encouraged to study and critique existing concepts, methods, and approaches in the field of ECD, to contribute their own experiences, and to study the contributions of non-Westerners, specifically by Africans.⁷ Participants contributed their research and writing, most significantly in their major project reports which were circulated in written form and posted on the internet. These included studies on “The Status of Coordination and Supervision of Early Childhood Education in Ghana” (Margaret Amponsah); “Coordinating the Development and Implementation of the 2003 – 2013 National Action Plan (NAP) for Children in Malawi” (Francis Chalamanda), “Building Community Leadership for Quality Sustainability in Madrasa Preschools: The Case of Madrasa Preschools Post-graduation Support” (Asha Mohammed Ahmed), inter alia. (See Annex for projects and theses, with contact details). Many channels were used to disseminate the reports: a special issue of the *International Journal of Educational Policy, Research, and Practice* (2004), featuring ECDVU student work, was edited by Pence and ECDVU Professor Kofi Marfo; the ECDVU website; participants’ organizations; presentations at conferences sponsored by ECDVU including the 2002 and 2005 African International ECD conference in Asmara, Eritrea and Accra, Ghana. Program participants conducted local, regional and national training sessions; wrote newsletters; formed networks and associations; established resource centers; and shared course materials widely. Participants reported to each other and to their country committees at each phase of the program on the “ripple effects” they perceived of their activities beyond the immediate workplace.⁸

ECDVU participants examined indigenous knowledge about early childhood in many areas, from practices of enculturation to social institutions and health care practices. Story-telling was one of the most valued sources of information about indigenous knowledge and also was used as a vehicle for incorporating culturally relevant information into early childhood development programs. Participants collected indigenous stories (such as folk tales) from Malawi, Lesotho, Nigeria, Uganda and Tanzania and explored the traditions and beliefs that they transmitted. In Malawi, Mary Phiri collected indigenous stories and songs aimed at children for her Major Project.

In addition to the innate appeal that songs hold for children, and the opportunities they create for children to improve their language, pitch, and rhythm skills, songs can be used to communicate certain mathematical concepts, hygienic habits and gross motor activities to preschoolers. As children grow up, these sung concepts are translated into applied understanding. Phiri, 2004, p. 4

⁷Marfo, 1999; Mwamwenda, 1995; Nsamenang, 1992; Swadener *et al.*, 2000.

⁸<http://www.ecdvu.org/ssa/ripple.asp>

In Lesotho, Phaello Ntšonyane investigated the contemporary meaning and values attached to indigenous stories in local culture. He learned from focus group discussions with caregivers and elders of the many advantages of traditional stories (*litšomo*) for teaching young children how to develop their memory, how to acquire pre-mathematical skills, for moral, social and language development, and the propagation of culture (Ntšonyane, 2004). Caregivers and elders alike advocated the use of *litšomo* in ECD centers; caregivers advocated for story books while the elders felt that elderly women should be brought to the centers for storytelling. The alignment of elders with the oral tradition and performance and modern caregivers with a more modern vehicle for transmitting culture requiring a reader rather than a storyteller initially created some tension.

Mgbechikwere Ezirim in Nigeria conducted research on story-telling in the context of Ibo culture. She writes that “Confirming the effectiveness of proverbs in story telling and child rearing in Ibo land, Achebe (1986) noted that proverbs are the palm oil that Ibos use in eating yams (Ezirim, 2004, p. 3).⁹ Stories were submitted and analyzed by people of the Umuchigbo community in a participatory activity, which had the added benefit of helping to train ECD caregivers in participatory methodology for group work. Ezirim found that stories generally conveyed strong morals, and that themes differed depending on the gender of the storyteller and the audience (for example, men typically tell stories of bravery while women tell stories of love and care).

In Uganda, participants placed the use of indigenous knowledge high on their agenda for ECD. Ugandan participant Anne Gamurorwa created a competition in a number of districts across the country to encourage people to submit indigenous stories. For her major project, she analyzed the content, themes, and contributions of the stories to early childhood development in order to create ECD programs that incorporate this indigenous knowledge. Gamurorwa used focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and story content analysis as methods of study. She found that stories typically pertained to identifying and solving problems, and helping children to distinguish between good and evil. The vast majority of themes were lessons in shaping character and promoting children’s education in specific social values, such as encouraging resilience, bravery, cleverness and intelligence, care for others, family life, obedience to elders, hard work, while criticizing greed and corruption.

In a variation on the story-telling theme, Leoncia Salakana of Tanzania collected proverbs relevant to ECD and child-rearing practices. Salakana collected 86 proverbs from three cultural groups and identified 25 as holding special relevance for young children. The general themes identified in the proverbs collected were warning, reconciliation, obedience, cooperation, charity, respect, dependence, wisdom, self-reliance, advice, forgiveness, hospitality, patience, appreciation, persistence, solidarity, struggle, and imitation/modeling (Salakana 2004, 57). Other findings were that only one of the three cultural groups had preserved indigenous proverbs to a great extent, and that people over age 45 were more conversant with proverbs than the younger generation.

Other participants looked at indigenous knowledge and attitudes towards psycho-social and cognitive development, and its potential for promoting ECD goals. In his major project, Jenieri Sagnia of the Gambia explored local practices and beliefs around play and psycho-social stimulation of children in order better to understand local perceptions of play.

⁹Proverbs are like the grease that oils the wheels of society and are integral to the culture.

In terms of ECD [in The Gambia], little is known about what parents and caregivers believe and practice in promoting psycho-social development of their children. Identifying indigenous knowledge and practices supports government and other interested stakeholders' efforts to develop suitable programs that assist communities to address the holistic development of children more meaningfully. Sagnia, 2004, p. 14

Sagnia took a critical look at approaches to ECD that use a “deficit model” focusing on what parents and communities need to learn rather than on what they already know and do. He reviewed evidence about the effectiveness of ECD programs that devalue indigenous knowledge compared to those that incorporate and build upon it. His research also brought attention to potential conflicts and tensions between “traditional” and “modern” practices, terminology used in ECD circles in The Gambia. He noted the danger of romanticizing indigenous knowledge in families and communities challenged by poverty, unemployment, and dislocation. He raised the important question of how indigenous knowledge and practices relate to gender issues and how they might enhance or impede children’s psycho-social development, especially for girls (2004, p. 15).

Several ECDVU participants explored the link between indigenous knowledge and social institutions that affect ECD practice and policies. Felix Agorsah explored the practices of informal caregivers in Accra, Ghana and helped to integrate their knowledge into broader programming within formal ECD institutions. Also in Ghana, Susan Sabaa researched local practices of orphan care and the potential for using these practices to make institutionalized care of orphans more culturally appropriate. In her research, Lydia Nyesigomwe of Tanzania identified the traditional child-care roles of grandmothers and their transformation in contemporary urban contexts, especially in communities heavily affected by HIV/AIDS. She developed ways of supporting grandmothers’ contributions to ECD, combining her research with her professional duties in a local non-governmental organization (NGO).

Applying Research to Practice

Several participants began to incorporate what they had learned into ECD programs in their countries, most often by developing curriculum activities for ECD centers based on their findings. Phaello Ntšonyane’s major project work in Lesotho included assisting the elders and ECD caregivers at a community center to develop a strategy for incorporating elder participation and indigenous stories into the curriculum. Those discussions became the basis for a program that regularly brought elders into the classroom to speak to children and tell traditional stories in their mother tongue.

Anne Gamurorwa’s project similarly focused on traditional stories, using story-telling “competitions” judged by local audiences. This approach proved highly successful and adjacent districts requested support in creating similar events. Gamurorwa found in her research that the culture of storytelling has been dwindling in Uganda with the rise of urbanization and the shift from extended to nuclear family living arrangements, modern cultural influences, the demands of formal education, and family struggles for economic survival. Her work aimed not only to document existing storytelling, therefore, but also to revive interest among the current generation of parents, caregivers and children, creating “awareness among parents and caregivers about the rich indigenous knowledge that can be tapped in promoting holistic development of children, morally, spiritually, intellectually and emotionally” (Gamurorwa, 2004, p. 5). After receiving approval from story tellers, Gamurorwa developed learning modules for pre-school programs based on the stories provided, which then became part of training seminars she conducted for preschool instructors.

Leoncia Salakana's methodology for collecting local proverbs and her strategy for incorporating this information into local program planning were developed to contribute towards meeting Plan International's goal of facilitating communities to develop culturally relevant ECD programs in rural districts of Tanzania. She prepared learning activities using the proverbs and presented them to nursery and preschool teachers, who were asked to adapt and plan lessons based on these materials. She sought feedback on these activities locally, and through presentations to in-service preschool teacher trainees at a training college. Responses from preschool teachers who attempted to implement the learning activities were encouraging. Some of these teachers had been teaching children on themes similar to those identified in the proverbs, but they became aware that they had not connected this teaching to the local cultural context, which would have created a stronger linkage between home and school life. Teachers generally expressed the opinion that the proposed approach would be useful in pursuing their ECD goals. In the future, Salakana plans to use the proverb collection and learning activities to develop a caregivers' handbook to distribute to preschools and other interested ECD stakeholders, which would allow the model to be disseminated more widely and adapted for use in a variety of contexts.

Mgbechikwere Ezirim developed an innovative approach to parent support programs in parts of rural Nigeria by linking her research on indigenous stories to ECD programming by encouraging parents to come to the center to tell stories. She also developed strategies for reintroducing storytelling into annual festivals. A final aspect of her project was to disseminate the outcome to ECD practitioners in the ten states covered by the UNICEF field office in which she works. As a result of her efforts, manuals being developed for training ECD caregivers in these states now include indigenous story telling. In addition, teachers in the first years of primary school are also being trained in story telling and crafting to ease children's transition from ECD to primary school.¹⁰ At the local level, story telling has become an important component of ECD activities in both community-based centers and those linked to primary schools.

In The Gambia, Jenieri Sagnia followed up his research on perceptions of and practices surrounding young children's play with recommendations for UNICEF on the programming implications of this research. He also held a series of local workshops to disseminate findings and assist with the integration of this knowledge into programming. Other project work by Sagnia, stimulated by his learning in the ECDVU program, included the development of a local toy production project using indigenous knowledge and local materials.

An Eritrean participant, Wunesh Woldeselassie, was involved in designing evaluation tools for the Eritrean Integrated Early Childhood Development Project. As part of her ECDVU course activities, she worked on developing indicators for measuring the program's effectiveness. One of the project's goals was to improve beneficiaries' awareness of ECD components. Although many indicators for such programs are derived from externally developed goals and objectives, Woldeselassie included a crucial activity incorporating indigenous knowledge: inter-community visits for the exchange of indigenous knowledge. The aim was not to derive central benefits from extracting indigenous knowledge, but rather to develop contacts between communities and provide space and opportunity for them to learn from each other. A further possible benefit of community-to-community indigenous knowledge exchanges is the strengthening of communities' position in relation to centrally-directed

¹⁰For literature on the importance of the transition to school, see Alexander and Entwisle (1988); Early *et al.* (1999); Fabian and Dunlop (2002); Kagan and Neuman (1999); Luster and McAdoo (1996); Neuman (2002); Podmore *et al.* (2003); Shepard and Smith (1989).

initiatives. Woldeeslassie developed the visits into a discrete program component, which meant that they would receive attention and evaluation. She documented a growing awareness within ECD spheres of the need to bring communities into program evaluations and to include local people in discussions around their own knowledge production and its uses.

Lydia Nyesigomwe's work has had some very concrete "ripples" already. Representatives from the Bernard van Leer Foundation representatives went to Uganda in September 2003 to visit her project and asked her to write a proposal for a three-year program, which was subsequently funded. Community members have also received further training for their ECD work, including community participation, psychosocial support and counselling, using an approach that built on their existing strengths. A group of grandparents was taken for study tours to similar projects in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania.

From Practice to Policy

ECDVU participants have been active in disseminating their ideas on incorporating indigenous knowledge, their research findings and their practical applications by participating in local, national, and international fora to develop and promote culturally appropriate ECD policy.

These policy-making fora include crucial national committees designing early childhood policies such as the ECD Technical Forum in Uganda (Hilda Nankunda); the Zanzibar five-year ECD action plan (Asha Mohammed Ahmed); the Tanzanian ECD Network's policy development committee (Leoncia Salakana); Zambia's National Resource Group on ECD (Margaret Akinware); the Multi-sectoral Working Group on ECD in the Gambia (Jenieri Sagnia); ECD communication sub-group of the Ministry of Education, Eritrea (Abeba Habtom); Integrated Early Childhood Development Task Force in Lesotho (Edith Sebatane); national policy drafting on ECD in Ghana (Margaret Amponsah, Stelle Etse, Felix Agorsah, Susan Sabaa); national policies on ECD and Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Malawi (Francis Chalamanda, Charlotte Day, Mary Phiri, Chalizamudzi Matola) and the National ECD task force and National Child Rights committee (Chalizamudzi Matola); Kenyan Ministry of Education's Strategic Planning committee (Samuel Ngaruiya); State Plan of Action for Education for All in Nigeria (Rosemary Hua) and other input into Nigerian national ECD policy (Mgbechikwere Ezirim). They have achieved some successes in shaping policies to reflect the importance of indigenous knowledge within ECD.

Participants also disseminated their learning and research and course materials to colleagues within and outside their own agencies. Virtually all (96%) of respondents to a survey noted that the ECDVU participant had shared course materials and shared program resources;¹¹ 94% noted that participants showed increased initiative and took a leading role in their work. Participants also self-assessed the increase in their leadership and communication skills: 96% noted an above average or significant increase as a result of participation in the course.¹² They are disseminating knowledge and participating in new networks outside their immediate sphere: 86% of colleague respondents reported that the ECDVU participant had improved their organisation's links with other in-country or external

¹¹Near the end of the program (late 2003), participants' colleagues identified by the participants were surveyed. These had to include at least one colleague from within and one from outside their organization. Colleagues responded anonymously but were given the option to self-identify; approximately one-quarter of the colleagues did identify themselves. Of 67 questionnaires distributed, 48 were returned, giving an impressive response rate of 71%.

¹²Participants responded to a survey in the final year of the program, assessing the impacts of the program on their knowledge, skills, practices, networks, and overall philosophy of ECD.

networks focused on ECD, 92% felt the same at the country level, and 94% observed an increase in participants' attendance at conferences, forums, discussions and meetings on ECD since the beginning of the course. ECDVU participants have therefore created many opportunities to share their research and to recommend that indigenous knowledge be drawn upon for early childhood development in a variety of contexts.

Program participants were recognized in various ways for their efforts to create innovative, culturally appropriate ECD programming that promotes the use of valuable indigenous knowledge, and for their work to influence their institutions' and countries' agendas for ECD. Colleagues consider them to be a strong force for positive change in ECD by developing new program models to be replicated across the country; disseminating their learning through training and developing informational and instructional materials; improving their organisation's links with other in-country or external networks on ECD; conducting research relevant to the local context, showing respect for local child-rearing practices, and demonstrating a culturally sensitive approach to ECD. In their own assessment, 89% of participants felt their skills in incorporating indigenous knowledge into programming had improved. Importantly, 57% found their work more focused on ECD since beginning the course, thereby increasing their impact on their country's ECD agenda. External recognition of their improved leadership skills is also evident in the fact that fully 62% of the participants had received a promotion by the end of the course.

Conclusion

The Early Childhood Development Virtual University provides an example of an approach to capacity building in early childhood development in Africa that values local and indigenous knowledge. Its curriculum is built with the participation of student-practitioners who draw from local knowledge and draw upon the experience of others to learn and disseminate what they learn, ultimately in order to change ECD practice and policy. Learning becomes a multi-directional process of interaction and exchange¹³ that builds the capacity of participants to make new and unique contributions to the body of knowledge on African early childhood development built around these culturally grounded bodies of knowledge. Participants themselves generate new knowledge that starts from a community base and has an impact at the national level. The ECDVU approach brings its cross-cultural philosophy of learning to a pedagogical model that has ripple effects on ECD policy and practice in participants' countries. Ultimately, this approach helps to change the agenda for early childhood development in order to advance the consideration, respect for, and inclusion of indigenous knowledge in early childhood development curricula, programming and policy. The challenge continues to design and promote policy aligned with knowledge about what actually works on the ground.

¹³In this respect, the generative curriculum approach shares elements of Freire's Liberation Pedagogy (see Blackburn, 2000) albeit with some distinct differences as Freire made a stronger push for students' consciousness to arrive at "his place" than does the ECDVU approach.

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Participants and Research Projects

Major projects and theses written by the pilot cohort are available at www.ecdву.org. Participants' names and the titles of their research project follow. Please consult the website for contact information.

Felix Agorsah, Ghana: The Development of an Integrated Early Childhood Development Urban Model Training Program for Informal Minders and Community Volunteers in Ghana.

Asha Mohammed Ahmed, Tanzania: Building Community Leadership for Quality Sustainability in Madrasa Preschools: The Case of Madrasa Preschools Post Graduation Support.

Margaret Akinware, Zambia: Pilot Study of the Adaptation of an Established Measure to Assess the Quality of Child Services in a Selected Orphanage in Zambia: The Inclusive Quality Assessment (IQA) Tool.

Olive Akomas, Nigeria: Assessment of the Caring Practices in Two Motherless Babies' Homes in Abia State, Nigeria and the Development and Delivery of a Nutrition Training Program to the Staff of These Homes to Improve Nutrition of Children in Their Care.

Margaret Amponsah, Ghana: The Status of Coordination and Supervision of Early Childhood Education in Ghana.

Francis Chalamanda, Malawi: Coordinating the Development and Implementation of the 2003 – 2013 National Action Plan (NAP) for Children in Malawi.

Charlotte Day, Malawi: A Community-driven Rural Early Childhood Development (ECD) Project, with Emphasis on Culturally and Developmentally Appropriate Exploratory Learning Concepts.

Stella Etse, Ghana: Parents' and Other Caregivers' Perception of Early Childhood Development Needs and Quality: A Study of the PLAN-Assisted Programmes in Bawjiase, Ghana.

Mgbechikwere (Uche) Ezirim, Nigeria: Integrating Indigenous Knowledge in ECD Training and Services.

Anne Gamurorwa, Uganda: Utilizing Indigenous Stories in the Promotion of Early Childhood Development Programs in Uganda.

Abeba Habtom, Eritrea: Improving the Quality of Childcare Through Parenting Enrichment and Training of Trainers: The Eritrean Model.

Rosemary Hua, Nigeria: Involving Fathers in Early Childhood Care and Development.

Celestina Ibetoh, Nigeria: A Guide for Effective School and Parent Collaboration: A Cooperative Development and Delivery Approach.

George Kameka, Tanzania: Improving Multi-sectoral Cooperation and Coordination in Support of Early Childhood Development Programs in Tanzania.

Chalizamudzi Matola, Malawi: Assessment of Interaction and Stimulation in Single-Mother Low-Income Families.

Benedict Missani, Tanzania: Leadership Skills Training for Administration and Parent Support Training for Caregivers

Monica Muheirwe, Uganda: Professional Associations in Support of Child Well Being in Uganda: Establishment of ECD Newsletter Series.

Hilda Nankunda, Uganda: Policies and Programs in Support of Childcare for Working Families: A Case Study of Data Sets and Current Activities in Uganda.

Samuel Ngaruiya, Kenya: Assessing the Influence of Different Early Childhood Development Models of Pre-School Children's School Readiness in Kenya.

Phaello Ntsonyane, Lesotho: Incorporating Indigenous Stories of Basotho in an ECCD Programme at Leseli Community Centre.

Lydia Nyesigomwe, Uganda: Strengthening the Capacity of Grandparents in Providing Care to Children Less than 8 Years Old Affected by HIV/AIDS.

Mary Phiri, Malawi: Using Indigenous Material for ECCD Curriculum in Malawi.

Susan Sabaa, Ghana: Development of a Model Framework for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in their Early Years in Ghana.

Jenieri Sagnia, The Gambia: Indigenous Knowledge and Practices of Parents and Families Regarding Psychosocial Care for Children in Three Rural Communities in The Gambia: Implications for UNICEF Programming in IECD.

Leoncia Salakana, Tanzania: Traditional Child Care Practices in Tanzania: Supplementing PLAN Training Programs.

Edith Sebatane, Lesotho: Developing an ECCD Teacher Training Curriculum in Lesotho as Part of a College Education Program.

Wunesh Woldelessie Bairu, Eritrea: Curriculum Development Using Community Resources.