Early childhood development in Africa: Interrogating constraints of prevailing knowledge bases

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*T*he past two decades have been characterized by renewed attention to the importance of early childhood development (ECD) policies and services in the world's richest and most industrialized countries. During the same period, we have witnessed unprecedented efforts to place ECD policies on the national development planning agenda of the economically less advantaged countries of the Majority World. This paper is premised on the concern that the purposes that have led bilateral and multilateral international agencies to promote and support ECD services in Africa may also be paving the way for uncritical adoption of program and service delivery models grounded in value systems and knowledge bases that may not be appropriate for the continent. We present two critiques to highlight the dangers of ignoring the sociocultural contexts of the knowledge bases that inform ECD policies and practices. We describe one capacity-building effort, under the auspices of the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU), to promote culturally relevant knowledge and prepare leadership personnel for Africa's emerging ECD movement. Finally, based on an exercise designed for an ECDVU cohort to engage and reflect on critiques of mainstream research and theorizing on child development, we share insights that are suggestive of the ways in which African perspectives can contribute to and enrich a global knowledge base on child development.

*L*es deux dernières décennies ont été caractérisées par une attention renouvellée pour l'importance des politiques du développement à la petite enfance (DPE) et des services dans les pays les plus riches et les plus industrialisés au monde. Durant cette même période, nous avons assisté à des efforts sans précédent pour placer les politiques DPE sur l'agenda de la planification du développement national des pays du monde majoritaire qui sont économiquement les moins favorisés. Cet article est fondé sur le souci que les objectifs qui ont mené les agencies bilatérales et multilatérales internationales à promouvoir et à soutenir les services DPE en Afrique pourraient aussi être en train de frayer le chemin pour une adoption non critique de programmes et de modèles de livraison de services qui sont fondés sur des systèmes de valeurs et des bases de connaissances dont la pertinence pour le continent est questionnable. Nous présentons deux critiques pour souligner les dangers d'ignorer les contextes socio-culturels des bases de connaissances qui informent les politiques DPE et les pratiques. Nous décrivons un effort de renforcement de capacité, sous les auspices de l'Université virtuelle du développement de la petite enfance (ECDVU pour Early Childhood Development Virtual University), pour promouvoir une connaissance culturellement pertinente et préparer le personnel de gestion pour le mouvement émergent du DPE de l'Afrique. Finalement, en se fondant sur un exercise destiné pour une cohorte ECDVU pour engager et réfléchir sur des critiques de la recherche du courant principal et la théorisation sur le développement de l'enfant, nous partageons des idées qui suggèrent des façons dans lesquelles des perspectives africaines peuvent contribuer à et enrichir une base de connaissances globale sur le développement de l'enfant.

*L*as dos décadas pasadas se caracterizan por reiterada atención a las políticas y servicios para el Desarrollo Temprano de la Infancia (DTI) por parte de los países más ricos e industrializados. Durante el mismo período, hemos sido testigos de unos intentos sin precedencia de implantar las políticas del DTI en las agendas de planificación nacional de los países más desfavorecidos económicamente en la mayor parte del mundo. La base de este trabajo es el asunto de los propósitos que han conducido a las agencias multinacionales bilaterales y multilaterales a promocionar y apoyar los servicios del DTI en África y que éstos podrían también abrir el camino para adopción carente de sentido crítico de programas y modelos de reparto de servicios basados en un sistema de valor y base de conocimientos cuestionable para este continente. Se presentan dos críticas para resaltar

los peligros de ignorar los contextos socioculturales de las bases de conocimiento que informan las políticas y las prácticas del DTI. Describimos una prueba de construcción-de-capacidad bajo los auspicios de la Universidad Virtual del Desarrollo Temprano de la Infancia (ECDVU) para promocionar el conocimiento culturalmente relevante y preparar el personal directivo de los movimientos emergentes del DTI en África. Finalmente, basándose en el ejercicio diseñado para una cohorte de ECDVU para ocuparse de las críticas sobre la investigación mayoritaria y teorías sobre el desarrollo infantil, compartimos los conocimientos que pueden sugerir las formas de las que las perspectivas africanas pueden contribuir y enriquecer las bases de los conocimientos globales sobre el desarrollo infantil.

Keywords: Critique of knowledge bases; Cultural relevance; Early childhood development; ECD in Africa.

Early childhood care and development (ECD) is increasingly found on national agendas in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Three recent indicators of this trend are: the participation of 35 African countries in the 3rd African International Conference on Early Childhood Development held in May/June 2005 in Accra, Ghana, of which 21 were official delegations endorsing the Communiqué emerging from the conference (www.ecdafrica.com); the selection of early childhood education as the central theme at the 18th Congress of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) held in Gabon in March, 2006 (www.adeanet.org); and the launching of activities for the Education for All (EFA) (www.unesco.org) *Strong Foundations* report, focusing on early childhood care and development, held initially in New York, but also in various parts of Africa late in 2006 and in 2007.

This evidence of interest is accompanied by questions regarding the capacity of many SSA states to mobilize effectively the necessary planning, development, and implementation activities required to address the multitude of ECD challenges that lie between intent and outcome. Training, leadership, and capacity building are critical in order to effectively address those challenges (Pence, Habtom, & Chalamanda, 2008). Beyond these practical challenges lie other, more fundamental questions regarding the nature of the knowledge bases that are informing SSA's fledgling ECD movement.

Africa's contemporary dynamics are ones that have been profoundly impacted by colonial activities, primarily, but not exclusively, from Euro-Western sources. There is an increasing restlessness in many parts of Africa to identify what can be considered "indigenous" in current actions and future activities. Theories and practices of early childhood care and development are not excluded from that search (Nsamenang, 2008).

We have a threefold objective for writing this paper. The first is to draw attention to, and present critiques of, the influence of Minority World knowledge claims and traditions on the emerging global ECD movement, with a particular emphasis on Sub-Saharan Africa. The second is to illustrate how a particular knowledge and capacity-building initiative, the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU), is being used as a vehicle to elevate *local knowledge* and *contextual relevance* to a position of importance both in the conceptualization of developmental knowledge and in ECD practice. The third and final objective is to provide examples of local, SSA dynamics and knowledge that can help inform early childhood theory and practice in Africa and in other parts of the world.

Two critique forms are offered, as each of two initial courses incorporated a different critique. One addresses both the dearth of attention that globally influential American developmental research has paid to cultural issues and some of the forces that have rendered the appropriate study of culture such an intractably challenging task. Another critique considers recent post-structural, post-colonial and related critical studies being undertaken as part of a movement to reconceptualize early childhood education, and also introduces sociology's constructivist approach to childhood. Embedded in these critiques is the position that the implantation of Minority World ECD service delivery models and practices in the Majority World is symptomatic of the failure of Minority World systems and frameworks to fully understand and embrace diversity of cultural contexts.

CRITIQUES OF MINORITY WORLD-DOMINATED DEVELOPMENTAL KNOWLEDGE

The "culture albatross" in American developmental psychology

Decades of anthropological research have taught us about the many different dimensions along

which people and traditions differ from culture to culture. Admonitions to those who enter other cultures to be cognizant and respectful of these differences are not new. As far back as the late 19th century, E. B. Tylor (1881) warned ethnologists to avoid "measuring other people's corn by one's own bushel." Malinowski later reminded ethnographers "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, and his vision of his world" (1922, p. 25). Anthropological linguist, Edward Sapir, credited for his early efforts to outline an interdisciplinary agenda for the fields of anthropology, psychology, and linguistics, emphasized that "the world in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (1929, p. 209; cited in Shweder, 1991, p. 362).

Contemporary anthropological scholars have underscored the dangers of ignoring the different realities within different cultures and cautioned against the pitfalls of cultural juxtaposition. Whyte and Ingstad (1995) have characterized this pitfall in terms of the "tendency to look at other cultures in terms of our own problems," the result of which is our failure "to grasp the premises upon which other people are operating" (p. 5). Shweder (1991) frames this same issue around avoidance of this pitfall, proposing that the ability to "think through cultures," and thus understand the conceptions held by others, enables us to "recognize possibilities latent within our own rationality" (p. 5).

One of the profound challenges facing the ECD movement in Africa and other parts of the Majority World is that much of the research traditions and knowledge bases shaping ECD program content and delivery mechanisms do not benefit from the wisdom reflected in the foregoing observations and admonitions regarding cultural differences. Today, over 90% of the world's children live outside the Euro-Western Minority World; yet the vast majority of developmental and ECD literature comes from the Minority World, and in particular from the US. Paradoxically, even with increased recognition of the importance of ecological and eco-cultural contexts in North American theoretical formulations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 1990, 2003; Weisner, 1984), the systematic study of culture remains an unfinished business within mainstream, North America-dominated developmental science.

Among factors behind the slow progress in ensuring cultural studies' inclusion within North American developmental psychology, several are particularly relevant here. Betancourt and Lopez (1993) see the absence of a clear definition of culture as a major impediment to the integration of cultural concepts into the formulation of developmental frameworks. They note that in much of the empirical research involving groups whose identities are defined in terms of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, researchers often make inferences about cultural influences without even defining culture. Thus, definitional problems have made it difficult to make sense of even the relatively small body of research purporting to examine the role of culture in human development within the North American context.

Progress toward the positioning of cultural psychology within mainstream developmental science has been constrained by a fixation with social address taxonomic "definitions" of culture, with their emphasis on such discrete variables as race, ethnicity, linguistic heritage, and social class as core independent variables. The implicit but fallacious assumption within this characterization of culture is that groups so identified by these taxonomic categories represent either mutually exclusive or homogeneous entities (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002). Bronfenbrenner (1986) lamented over social address labels because of their tendency to turn cultural environments into little more than a name, with little attention paid to "what the environment is like, what people are living there, what they are doing, or how activities taking place there could affect the child" (p. 29). If the central premise of cultural-contextualist views of development is that human functioning cannot be understood independently of either the immediate situational context or the broader cultural milieu in which it occurs (see Rogoff & Morelli, 1989), then developmental research that relies solely on social address variables to make inferences about cultural influences on development has little relevance, if any at all, for context-sensitive applications.

The sentiment that both cross-cultural psychology and cultural psychology have failed to offer a remedy to this predicament is not new. Price-Williams (1979) observed that cross-cultural researchers have viewed culture largely as a qualifying variable. As one illustration, Price-Williams underscored the all too frequent tendency to attribute observed differences between two cultures on any given phenomenon to features embedded within the cultures without necessarily specifying and explaining the within-culture processes and dynamics accounting for the observed differences.

Michael Cole (1996) framed some of his reflections on the stillbirth of cultural psychology around the question, "Why do psychologists find

it so difficult to keep culture in mind?" (p. 1). He attributed cultural psychology's failure to thrive to a combination of academic focus and research method: "The experimental, quantitative approach of methodological behaviorism assumes the generation of context-free laws, but the phenomena of interest can be explained in such terms only in a reduced fashion that does not remain true to the facts of everyday, lived experience…" (p. 328).

LeVine (1989) captured other elements of the problem vividly in the following assessment of the cultural and socioeconomic biases endemic in North American developmental psychology:

> Many child development specialists implicitly assume that the conditions of infants and children among educated middle-class Anglo-Americans represent, or at least approximate, the optimal environment for individual development in humans—in terms of parental commitment, health care, nutrition, living space, domestic facilities, physical protection, emotional warmth, cognitive stimulation, communicative responsiveness, and social stability. Deviations from this pattern are interpreted not as alternative pathways for normal child development but as conditions of deficit or deprivation, representing less adequate environments in which to raise children ... (p. 54).

The optimality assumption depicted above is problematic even in the North American context because the Euro-American middle-class child-rearing values and practices presumed to represent the ideal optimal conditions for children's development have limited applicability across other American subcultures. It is axiomatic, then, that the exportation of such values and practices to other parts of the world is even more problematic. Today, however, implicit variations of the universality and optimality assumptions underlie the uncritical transport of developmental knowledge and practices from societies of the Minority World to the profoundly different cultural contexts of the Majority World.

Other critiques and possibilities

Post-structural thought and sociology's recent constructivist approach to children offered a different critical lens for the second ECDVU course. Diversity is central to post-structural thought. While structuralism represents a "closed system" (Morss, 1996, p. 125), post-structuralism opens up to diverse possibilities, allowing the observer to consider not just the child, but the

discipline itself, as the focus of interest. The ability to move beyond the discipline-identified "object" of study, to consider the dynamics through which the discipline comes to identify its particular form and focus, is an essential "through the looking glass" step for the Majority World to gain a foothold in proposing their own foci of study, ways of understanding, and approaches to research. At present, psychology's hold on child development (through research funding, publications, conferences, and other means of professional and academic control) ensures that agendas contemplated outside of Western academia typically will not receive serious consideration and will continue to be marginalized.

The 1990s saw the rise of several discourses that are useful in "opening spaces" for other ways of seeing and understanding. For example, both the International and American Associations of Sociology created sections for those interested in childhood issues, which accompanied the publication of a number of books that advanced a "constructivist" approach to childhood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Mayall, 1996; Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta, & Wintersberger, 1994). Also commencing in the early 1990s (Jipson, 1991; Moss & Pence, 1994; Swadener & Kessler, 1991), the early childhood care, education and development field (ECCE, ECCD) was soon to witness a proliferation of publications contesting dominant discourses in the field, including the field's heavy reliance on child development theory. While threatening to some, others see this injection of different perspectives as a welcome renaissance for the field.

Work in the diverse disciplines noted above forces us to consider other ways of seeing and understanding children's care and development. These "other ways" are critically important if the Majority World is to claim a voice in its own development. At present, globalization is the 21st century's version of 19th-century Western colonization—and academia is now, as then, complicit in these activities. Issues, perspectives, and methods that are contextually significant in the Majority World rarely find their way into leading journals, or receive substantial funding support. Fortunately, some are challenging these systems and "regimes" and some voices from the Majority World are beginning to be heard (Kagiticibasi, 1996; Nsamenang, 1992, 2008; Viruru, 2001).

It is such *other* voices and *other* perspectives that the ECDVU feels an obligation to note and to assist in having a place on the "agenda of the world's children." The effort is not to advance one perspective over another (a problematic *either/or*

binary), but to help ensure a polyphonic sound commensurate with international diversity (a *both/and* dynamic).

ADVANCING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND RELEVANCE THROUGH A GENERATIVE CURRICULUM MODEL: CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ECDVU

Our critiques are in no way intended to overlook recent trends in the indigenization of developmental research and practice across the Majority World (e.g., Kagitcibasi, 2000; Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006; Nsamenang, 2000). Rather, they are offered to remind the field that, notwithstanding the increased trend toward indigenization, research methods and conceptual orientations embedded in the intellectual traditions of Minority World cultures continue to shape developmental inquiry in the Majority World (Hwang, 2004). Similarly, it is a significant challenge that there continues to be uncritical consumption, within the Majority World, of knowledge and traditions generated in cultural contexts with decidedly different values and assumptions about human development. The solution to these and other challenges that are so germane to a contextually sensitive ECD movement in Africa requires multifaceted approaches: continued cultivation of appropriate attitudinal responses to the challenges posed by decades of colonial and post-colonial cultural domination; accentuation of culturally situated research education within the continent's institutions of higher learning; promotion of context-sensitive policy formulation and implementation within relevant societal institutions, including governmental and nongovernmental organizations; and the appropriate preparation of leadership and frontline ECD personnel. The Early Childhood Virtual University (ECDVU) has emerged as an important vehicle, among many efforts currently in place across the continent, for ECD capacity building, especially with regard to leadership development and the promotion of local or indigenous knowledge (for synthesized research from the first ECDVU cohort, see Pence & Marfo, 2004).

The ECDVU program is a graduate level, primarily web-based ECD program that incorporates 2-week, face-to-face-seminars (in Africa) at the mid-point of 6-month course-delivery terms (two core courses per term). The mission of the ECDVU program is to support ECD leadership promotion, capacity building, and network enhancement in Sub-Saharan Africa (see www.ecdvu.org). The pedagogical underpinning of the program is based on a co-constructed, generative curriculum approach originally developed in work with Aboriginal First Nations Communities in Canada (the First Nations Partnerships Program—FNPP; see Ball & Pence, 2006; Pence & McCallum, 1994). The FNPP developed as a university response to a request by an Aboriginal Tribal Council to create an ECD training program that would prepare community members to work professionally either on or off reserve. The FNPP was piloted in 1990–1993, producing unexpectedly strong results not just in terms of student completion rates and assessed competence, but also, in the words of a tribal administrator, in "transforming the tribal communities" that participated in the program (Pence & McCallum, 1994).

The wide-ranging impacts identified through the initial FNPP evaluations surprised the director of the program (Pence), and led to further explorations regarding the ability of tertiary education, when appropriately reconfigured and reconceptualized, to achieve broad community development and capacity building impacts. A key dynamic of the generative curriculum approach was the creation of space for "other" perspectives to be respectfully heard and considered. The lessons of the FNPP generative curriculum approach were included in the design of the ECDVU when it received funds to commence development for a Sub-Saharan Africa delivery in 2000.

An initial, 3-year Masters degree program delivery took place between 2001 and 2004, with a second cohort commencing a 1-year, six course professional development program in December of 2006. Students in the ECDVU program are, typically, nominated by intersectoral ECD committees based in approximately 12 participating countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nominees are typically leaders, or potential leaders, in areas related to child and family well-being in their respective countries. Their participation is designed to promote capacity development with regard to children's issues (policies, programs, practices, and training) in their country and more broadly across Sub-Saharan Africa. Typically, an intersectoral, multiorganizational team of 3 to 4 individuals is nominated by each country, resulting in an overall cohort size of 24 to 27 individuals.

Brief profiles of two courses within the African ECDVU program

Pence and Marfo were the instructors for the two lead courses in the 2006–2007 delivery. Marfo's

course, *Child development in eco-cultural contexts*, has its foundations in western development theories, while the accompanying course, *The past, present, and future of ECD: Understanding children, families, and communities over time and across cultures*, takes a more post-structural and "constructivist" approach to understanding children and childhood.

Child development in eco-cultural context. Developed originally in 2000 by ECDVU faculty members Jessica Ball, Kofi Marfo, and Alan Pence, this course was premised, in part, on the importance of providing students with foundational grounding in the established knowledge base on child development. While theoretical frameworks and research knowledge produced in the Western World serve as the core of this foundational knowledge, the course also emphasizes the contributions of African and non-African developmental scholars within Africa. Particularly important is the framing of the course around the principle and value of *development in context.* The study of Western conceptions, theories, and research regarding human development is not an intended end-point; rather it is a means to the crucially important objective of preparing students to bring critical analytic perspectives to this knowledge base so as to be able to assess its strengths, limitations, and relevance for the African context. By understanding that developmental theories and research are shaped by value systems, philosophical mindsets, and historical circumstances within specific cultures, students are more likely to appreciate the urgency of understanding and framing African child development within the context of local knowledge, values, traditions, and practices.

The past, present and future of ECD. This companion course in the first term takes a constructivist approach to ECD, employing historical and cross-cultural perspectives to examine how children are understood differently across time and space. Sociology's relatively recent entry into a literature of childhood is put forward as a contextualist alternative to psychology's universalizing tendencies. The even more recent ECD reconceptualist literature (as identified earlier) is also introduced. The course also anticipates a later leadership course requiring students to identify a major country-specific project that they will seek to implement during the 6-month term. Typically the project will engage country/community members' understandings of children and/or their care. Both the sociological and the reconceptualist

literatures are seen as helping to "create space" for other perspectives to enter into discussions regarding children, their roles, images and possibilities in society.

Thus, consistent with the *generative curriculum* approach that helps drive the conceptualization and delivery of the ECDVU courses, an important objective is to encourage and empower African ECD professionals not only to harness and apply their own local knowledge but also begin to develop competencies and perspectives that would enable them to make original contributions to a formalized knowledge base deemed to be adequately reflective of the realities of child development in the African context.

Illustrative cases from a reflective exercise

The 2006/2007 delivery of a 1-year ECDVU program in Sub-Saharan Africa gave the authors the opportunity to look more closely at student reaction to and engagement with critiques of established, Western-based theories of child development that have grown in number and visibility since the early 1990s. Having exposed students in the cohort to diverse conceptual "lenses," the authors sought to explore, through a *meeting of the two courses* in a deliberative process, the degree to which the resulting "dissonance," and the implicit urge toward regard for multiple perspectives, were facilitative of: (1) students' exploration of their own backgrounds, traditions; and understandings of children's development, and (2) the degree to which such knowledge could be facilitative of effective, contextualized, capacity building activities. The insights emerging from this exercise included recommendations such as the importance of avoiding overgeneralizations and placing findings on African child development within the context of the specific subcultures studied in any given investigation, enhancing the inclusiveness of Western texts through positive, nonsensationalized pictorial representation of children from Majority World cultures, and observations pointing to fundamental ways in which the African context can expand, enrich, or refocus the field of developmental psychology at both the conceptual and applied levels.

To illustrate, we draw from two of the many strands that arose in deliberations. The first not only evidenced a deep awareness of the importance of context and continuity in the lives of children living under the trauma of war but also underscored the *centrality* of communitarian solutions to experiences that threaten children's optimal

development. The second brought forward a critical issue concerning the impact of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on local, village-level processes and how implementation of the CRC, by virtue of its universalist nature and potential for lack of local consultation and input, elicited reaction and resistance on the part of adult primary caregivers.

Communitarian ethic as foundation for prevention, intervention, and resilience—the case of Eritrea's war-affected children. Throughout Eritrea's war of independence from Ethiopia and during periods of renewed hostilities following formal declaration of independence, Eritrea was confronted with large-scale population movements away from war-affected areas. The camps established to accommodate internally displaced persons (IDPs) throughout the nation are perhaps better known to the rest of the world as a joint-venture humanitarian response undertaken by the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Commission and the United Nations. Less known are the indigenous values and the centrality of principles that guided Eritrea's own approach of recreating village configurations to support the preservation of familial and communal ties as far as possible within relocation camps. Thus significant efforts were made to keep families and whole communities together in relocation camps and to preserve pre-existing social organizational structures, such as maintaining key individuals with leadership roles in the same positions within the relocation camps. Indeed, as far as possible, the physical layouts of the villages were approximated, with neighbours in the village becoming neighbours in the camp, seeking to maintain sociogeographic connections that were deemed important for the overall psychosocial well-being of the displaced persons.

Eritrean ECD leaders shared their impressions on the differential impact of the war on children as a function of the level of protection provided for children. Their characterization of the national experience was that children given protection in safe relocation villages with relatively intact familial and communal care practices were in much better shape, psychosocially, than children in camps that were under Eritrean control but which lacked the preservation of familial and communal practices. The children who fared worst were those in relatively unsafe areas under Eritrean control or those caught in areas under enemy occupation.

As instructors who engaged in the deliberative process, it was clear to us that the situation with Eritrea's war-affected children provides a case study of the power of indigenous approaches to prevention and intervention. Deeply steeped in the cultural values and communal childrearing practices of the society, the re-creation of village configurations to provide protection and assure continuity of care in the hands of familiar adults and peers is an ecologically sound system of prevention and intervention that supports resilience in the face of exposure to the trauma of prolonged armed conflict. Such a culturally embedded system of ecologically sensitive response offers profound lessons and insights into the conceptualization and delivery of crisis interventions (one is tempted to reflect on the chaos that followed Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the continuing social dislocation that still marks its aftermath). By implication, the developmental psychology knowledge base, as we know it today, stands to be enriched by the inclusion of the Eritrean approach to addressing the needs of war-affected children.

Decontextualization and the threat to information regarding children's rights. Addressed in another group discussion was the issue of how implementation strategies designed to advance the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) were manifesting themselves in some countries. A concern was that implementation strategies have disregarded the principle that successful protection of children under CRC requires careful consideration of the cultural contexts of children, their custodians, and their advocates. The cohort's informal impressions and concerns are captured independently in a project implemented by a member of the cohort.

In her case study of the impact of a children's rights awareness campaign within a Central Ugandan village, Jagwe (2007) went beyond parents' awareness of children's rights to determine the effectiveness of the processes that had been used to bring such information to the attention of parents. Interviewed parents appreciated the children's rights awareness campaign because they saw it as a "reminder of what they are supposed to do to ensure proper development" just as it helped to "pin down negligent parents who do not show concern for the well-being of children in general" (p. 16). However, these parents also detested the way that the campaign was launched without appropriate consultations with the adult village community. By starting the rights education process with children in schools, with no corresponding program for the adult community, the campaign seems to have made

"children rebellious and parents totally against these rights" (p. 16). Parents felt that their authority over children had been undermined by the encouragement given to children to report their parents and guardians to local authorities, especially when the abuses children were encouraged to report to authorities included practices such as caning, which were deemed to be appropriate disciplinary measures within the culture.

Defining "abuse" in relation to children's rights within cultural contexts is certainly a complex issue over which the attainment of global consensus is virtually impossible. However, the point to be made here is a simple one: It is foolhardy to expect successful implementation of a children's rights agenda without engaging the associated sociocultural issues. From our perspective, the disregard for local knowledge, traditions, and the roles of communities is one more illustration of how hegemonic thinking within Minority World knowledge bases can lead to counterproductive results even on matters as important as the promotion and protection of children's rights.

We believe that the examples that came forward, and the related discussions that ensued, were in part the result of students accepting counter and critical discourses within the courses themselves— troubling the dominant discourses—then moving to open spaces within the seminar to allow expressions of diverse experiences grounded in local contexts. Bame Nsamenang's recent work regarding the hegemony of Western ECD and its suppression of local perspectives and knowledge (Nsamenang, 2008) is an example of one "local" scholar working to open space for a counter, critical perspective to emerge that has the potential to fundamentally reshape both the means and the ends of ECD development in Africa. There are countless nascent examples of such possibilities throughout Africa, awaiting the opportunity to be heard and seen.

CONCLUSION

Sub-Saharan Africa faces tremendous challenges in its efforts to promote the well-being of its children. Many of these challenges are obvious and well known, such as health and nutritional needs; some are more subtle and are not infrequently presented as part of the problem, rather than as a potential resource for solutions. Local or indigenous knowledge is one such contested contribution. From the earliest days of Western contact, the knowledge, values, and beliefs of indigenous Africans have been challenged and dismissed by colonizers. And while colonization is no longer considered an acceptable geo-political activity, it lives on in many facets of economic and social globalization, and now, as then, science and the work of the academy is complicit in its perpetuation.

A growing literature sees the continuation of a Darwinian legacy in the discipline of child development (Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997; Morss, 1990). The child development literature has historically been based on Euro-Western perspectives and populations, and has long resisted the inclusion of other perspectives. As one illustrative example, while the phenomenon of children rearing children is a common and legitimate medium of socialization in much of the Majority World, it has, to date, received virtually no attention in Minority World-based developmental inquiry and scholarship because it flies in the face of Western "knowledge" and childrearing values. Our views are consistent with those of Robert LeVine who, in response to the Society for Research on Child Development's (SRCD) contemplation of a call to "strengthen the international focus within the organization" (July 16, 2005 e-mail communication), responded as follows:

> I want to add a suggestion about the prevailing mindset of SRCD, which affects the quality of the science published in Child Development and the monographs. It starts with the fact that only a little more than 10% of the world's children live in the developed countries of Europe, North America and other European outposts …, yet the research is heavily concentrated on children from these places …. Insofar as a science of child development ignores most of the world's children and the conditions in which they develop, its claims to be science are dubious …

We view the contribution of our article within the larger context of LeVine's comments—the need to support the development of a science of child development that is not narrowly constructed on the lives of a small minority of the world's children, but rather a science that opens up to other populations and other possibilities. Addressing this imbalance will not be achieved through sending ever more Minority World researchers to the Majority World, or through bringing increasing numbers of future academics from the Majority World to the Minority World for decontextualized education (and brain drain). Different processes and different paradigms must be considered. One such other process is to accept the admonition of philosopher Kahlil Gibran that,

"God created Truth with many doors, to welcome all who come there" and to actively involve diverse carriers of knowledge in an exchange of perspectives and possibilities. As seen through the experiences of the First Nations Partnerships Program (Ball & Pence, 2006; Pence & McCallum, 1994), and through the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (Pence, 1999; Pence & Marfo, 2004), such a polyphonic activity and appreciation of diverse knowledge allows not only new understandings and possibilities to emerge, but also helps to address critical Majority World issues such as reducing brain drain, building local capacity, addressing program and service relevance, promoting local pride and commitment, and achieving higher levels of sustainability. The way forward, then, is not "more of the same" or to "try harder"—but to try differently.

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