

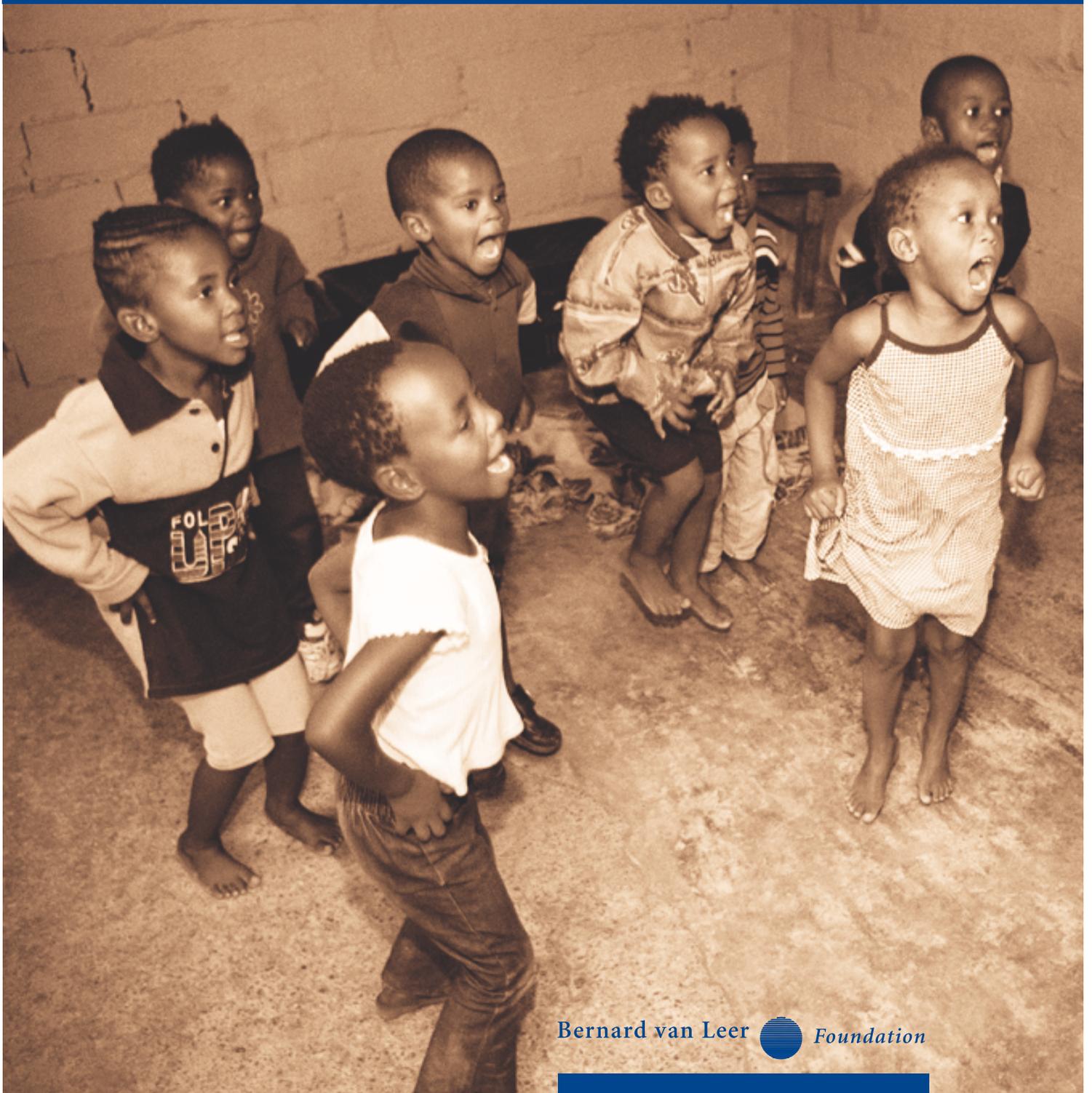
WORKING PAPERS IN

Early Childhood Development

51

*A case for early childhood
development in sub-Saharan
Africa*

By Alan Pence and Bame Nsamenang



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October 2008

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Executive summary

Issues connected with children's welfare and child development are appearing on national and international agendas with greater prominence and frequency. However, the international image of children is becoming increasingly homogeneous and Western-derived, with an associated erosion of the diversity of child contexts.

This essay explores the reasons behind such a reduction in diversity, factors that are often considered to be a necessary part of progress. The authors conduct an overview of relevant critiques in the literature of early childhood development (ECD). The paper focuses on international ECD since the UN adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and presents a review of key ECD developments in Africa since the early 1970s.

Culture, context, and diversity are central concerns that have led to the development of several different critical streams of work within early childhood care and education during the 1990s. The authors describe some of these 'reconceptualising' efforts and identify various

areas of promise for future cooperative work. The second part of the essay represents an effort to move beyond the singular image of the 'global child'. The authors address the need to support and promote local perspectives, questions and issues, and trace the 'triple heritage' of ECD in Africa.

It is hoped that this section, and the essay in its totality, will contribute to a much-needed expansion of thoughts and ideas about early childhood, both in Africa and the rest of the world, and to an appreciation that diversity is a strength to work with, rather than an obstacle to overcome.

The authors conclude that their role is to introduce a 'stutter' into a powerful international narrative, thereby creating a space for other ideas and perspectives, in this case from Africa, to be heard and considered. They reiterate the need for the Minority World to help the Majority World in its quest for child well-being, by supporting Africa's efforts to hear its own voices and seek its own way forward.



Acronyms

CRC	<i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>
ECCE	<i>early childhood care and education</i>
ECD	<i>early childhood care and development</i>
INGO	<i>international non-governmental organisation</i>
SRCD	<i>Society for Research in Child Development</i>
SSA	<i>sub-Saharan Africa</i>



Introduction

The Bernard van Leer Foundation has long played a key role in supporting diverse, community-sensitive approaches to child well-being in Majority World countries¹ around the world. The Foundation has also supported research and ‘thought-pieces’ that have challenged dominant discourses and opened relevant alternative ways of seeing and understanding (see www.bernardvanleer.org/publications). This essay is written in the spirit of those innovative activities and provocative works.

The authors are conflicted in their assessment of the current zeitgeist of children internationally. On the one hand, children and childhood are appearing on national and international agendas with a prominence and frequency that few would have thought possible barely two decades ago. On the other hand, they are concerned that the international image of children is increasingly homogeneous and Western-derived (Pence and Hix-Small 2007). The diversity of child contexts and of childhoods, are being steadily eroded. Human-kind is thereby being deprived in far-reaching ways not unlike those resulting from losses of biodiversity.

The means and rationales that drive this reduction in diversity are numerous – invariably they are presented as being necessary for the sake of progress and ultimately beneficial for ‘the

greater good’. But through whose eyes are such ‘improvements’ seen? Just as victors write the history of war, it is the dominant interests that define ‘progress’. The means of such improvement, including research, are also cloaked in virtue or, at a minimum, as objective and value-free. Instruments are presented as neutral, but their forms and foci, typically taken from outside immediate contexts, inscribe priority and preference, becoming tools that not only measure, but shape. Critiques of such activities, be they well intentioned or otherwise, are increasing in the literature of early childhood care, education and development. An overview of several critiques forms the first chapter of this essay. The second chapter focuses on efforts to apply critical perspectives to uncovering, promoting and appreciating child-related diversity in Africa – a too-long neglected activity.

The forces of homogenisation that concern us are largely invisible. Moving out from the Minority World, and in particular from the USA and the UK, their assumptions and understandings have become the normal and natural way to see and understand children, regardless of context or culture. Local perspectives, activities, and practices are all too often considered to be deviant or deficient by comparison and, like local languages, submerged in their wake.² To question these best practices, understandings

¹ The terms *Minority and Majority worlds* will be used rather than the more value-added terms *First and Third worlds*, or *developed and developing*.

² See UNESCO statements regarding the number of languages already lost, with many more projected to be lost over the next several generations. 2008 is the International Year of Languages.
http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=35344&-URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&-URL_SECTION=201.html

and priorities is akin to questioning ‘Motherhood’ – an apt analogy as ‘Motherhood’ with a capital M is itself one of the powerful constructs that has emerged from the West to become a lens to view, and standard used to assess, other societies, mothers and families around the world. Through such lenses differences become deficiencies.

The Western World’s construction of Motherhood (and the roles of children, fathers and families that accompany it) is but one example of numerous constructs formed in the Minority World that are increasingly visible and influential in the Majority World. Others include: the child as an economic investment in a neo-liberal society; various ‘best practices’ in policies, procedures, and programmes forged in one context and taken forward as universal exemplars; the dissemination of data-gathering tools that privilege certain indicators and objectives but disregard others; and long-standing constructions, such as linear ‘progress’ in child and social development, from less- to more-sophisticated with little thought given to the possibilities, perspectives, and insights that ‘progress’ erases. Each of these constructs is familiar and each is, or is becoming, foundational – they constitute the ‘grand narrative’ of early childhood care and development. To suggest that critiques of such approaches are useful and productive seem, for some, to beggar belief – but that is our purpose in this essay, as any specific narrative enables some, and restricts other, possibilities. It is these ‘other’ possibilities, and in particular possibilities within Africa, that are of interest here.

The broad history of how our current truths, our grand narrative regarding the early years, came to be is a larger story than this essay will venture, but parts of that history enter into this discussion. ‘Science’ is a key term in the contemporary story, but the tenets of that science, and its assumptions of ‘Truth’ have been shaken to their foundations in numerous disciplines, and some would argue to good effect. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that: “...scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism...” (Smith 2002, p. 1). Colonialism is another key term throughout much of this essay, and it is not just the physical colonisation perpetuated by empires, but also the colonisation of the idea of childhood by academia and associated professional organisations (Cannella 1997; Cannella and Viruru 2004; Soto and Swadener 2002). Those images, both limited and normalising, are restricting, colonising agents active in the processes of globalisation.

This essay ventures into this complex and increasingly contested landscape not with a mission to decide or resolve, but rather to consider how different perspectives and understandings take the field of early years’ work in very different directions, opening up some possibilities and foreclosing others. At the heart of our concern is that the polyphonic diversity of childhood globally is not being heard, and that homogenising forces are increasing in strength and reach.

In no place is this growing hegemony felt more acutely than in Africa, where local and indigenous voices have long been suppressed. Aspects

of that history will be recounted in the second chapter of this essay and the forces of modernisation and globalisation considered as suppressive agents in the cause of ‘progress’. Ways forward, more respectful of indigeneity and diversity, will be explored. But first, a brief overview is given of early childhood’s recent entry onto the world stage with a follow-up focus on some key early childhood development (ECD) events that have taken place in Africa. These overviews will be followed by consideration of diverse critiques of what could be considered the monolith of a ‘Global Child’.

The child enters the world stage

ECD has a long history, with the institutionalisation of early childhood group care and education programmes moving out from Europe as colonising forces as early as the 1820’s Infant Schools (Pence 1980; Prochner and Kabiru 2008). This chapter focuses on only a small slice of that timeline: international ECD since the UN adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (www.un.org/documents/ga/res/44/a44r025.htm).

The period 1989/1990 marked significant changes for children and for ECD internationally. On 20 November 1989 the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was formally adopted by the United Nations General Assembly; signing commenced on 26 January 1990, and 61 countries signed the document that day. By September 1990, 20 countries had ratified the Convention, bringing it into international law. UNICEF noted in 2001 that it had been: “ratified

more quickly and by more countries than any previous human rights instrument” (UNICEF 2001, p. 1).

A second key event was the March 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand. At that conference the importance of ECD was underscored as a crucial part of basic education. The first four words under Article 5 provided ECD with a place at the table: “Learning begins at birth. This calls for early childhood care and initial education” (UNESCO 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, Jomtien, www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/background/jomtien_declaration.shtml). For many years ECD had been the ‘invisible child’, hidden behind ‘family’, and disconnected from the recognition afforded its ‘older siblings’: primary, secondary and tertiary education, as key contributors to international development. Through ECD recognition at Jomtien, the rapid ratification of the CRC, and the World Summit for Children held in New York, on 28–29 September 1990, the early years began to move out from the shadows to a place of recognition in their own right on the international stage.

Robert Myers’ publication of *The Twelve Who Survive* in 1992 was a third key international ECD event as that work began to refocus international attention from issues of child survival to a more encompassing understanding of what the increasing percentage of children who survived required in order to thrive. Myers’ volume was an advocacy as well as a policy and programming tool.

In 1994 the US-based Carnegie Institute's Task Force on Meeting the Needs of Young Children opened another influential front in efforts to advance an international agenda for the young child. With their 1995 report *Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children*, the importance of the early years as a key period of brain development became a central focus for ECD advocacy. The World Bank was quick to pick up the implications of the Carnegie Report for international development: healthy child development as a key to broader social and economic development. In 1996 Mary Eming Young of the World Bank edited *Early Child Development: Investing in the Future*, with the importance of brain development featured as a lead point. At approximately the same time, the first of what would become a rapidly growing set of loans for ECD development in various parts of the world was approved by the World Bank. In addition, by the late 1990s the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was moving towards making integrated ECD (IECD) a centerpiece of its activities, with a strong focus on the CRC. In less than 10 years ECD had moved from the periphery of concern for all but a few international donors, such as the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to become a major topic on a significant number of donors' and international organisations' lists of priority issues.

A follow-up to the 1990 Education for All conference took place in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000. At the Dakar World Education Forum the profile of ECD was further enhanced as the delegates committed themselves to a number of goals, the first of which was "expanding and

improving early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children" (UNESCO 2000).

A 10-year follow-up to the World Summit for Children was scheduled for New York in 2001, but was postponed as a result of the 11 September attack on the World Trade Center. The General Assembly's Special Session on Children took place instead in May 2002 and resulted in the publication of *We the Children* (UNICEF 2001) and *A World Fit for Children* (UNICEF 2002). The latter publication contains a copy of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Special Session on Children documents, and the CRC. *We the Children* summarises much of the international work on children's developmental statistics that had been done during the intervening decade. The document also notes the increasing challenges to achieving child well-being in many parts of Africa due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, civil unrest and wars, refugee situations, and other challenges.

The links between brain, child, and economic development, effectively advocated in the mid-to-late-1990s, have proven to be a potent message at national and international levels. In the 21st century the most powerful proponents of ECD are not parents, care providers/teachers, or child development specialists – but economists. And in a parody of a North American advertisement for economic advisors, "When Wood-Gundy speaks, people listen!", the voices of ECD-supportive economists are heard in international corridors of power and political importance, where the voices of children,

parents and teachers never reached previously. Nobel Laureate James Heckman has been a key US-based leader in this work (see Heckman and Masterov 2007), and such support is increasingly common internationally as witnessed by a 2007 exercise coordinated by the Copenhagen Consensus Center and the Inter-American Development Bank. That exercise involved an expert panel of nine economists who ranked ECD at the top of 40 possible solutions to developmental challenges in Latin America (see www.copenhagenconsensus.com).

The international early childhood community has never enjoyed such high levels of support and visibility, and there is much good that can come from such support. We reiterate, however, that such reports and testimonies are not the full story. There are other voices from other places that are not being heard in national and international corridors of academic, professional, or political power. Among these voices are those of children and of families in local

contexts, and indeed at whole regional levels – such as sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (and other parts of the Majority World). The events described above, and the emergence of the child onto the international stage, have not gone unnoticed in Africa. Box 1 highlights a number of these key ECD events in SSA starting with several key donor supports early in the 1970s. At the same time that children have become a more central concern for governments in Africa and around the world, characteristics of the ‘global child’ and other homogenising and dominating projections that lie at the heart of this essay have been increasingly critiqued, and from a growing range of disciplines and perspectives. Although most of these critiques are not presently well known in the world of international ECD, they are increasing in visibility within the broad field of early childhood studies and they have significant potential for those concerned with issues of diversity, social equity, and development.

Box 1. Brief overview of key ECD events in sub-Saharan Africa (1971–2008)

Early 1970s: Bernard van Leer Foundation supported development of ECD in Kenya through the Kenya Institute of Education, and the Educare project in South Africa. (Its first ECD supported programme started in Jamaica in 1966).

Early 1980s: Aga Khan Development Network began planning for Madrasa Resource Centres (MRCs) in East Africa and formulating internationally informed approaches to Islamic early childhood education and development. (First programme at Liwatoni Mosque in Mombasa in 1986.)

1980s: A small number of other donors and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) came forward in support of ECD in various African countries.

1990: Many African countries were quick to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). President Traoré co-hosted the Summit, and Senegalese President Diouf was a key figure in its promotion.

1991: Bernard van Leer Foundation-supported ECD seminar held in Maseru, Lesotho, led to the publication *Building on People's Strengths: Early Childhood in Africa* (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1994).

1992: First Africa Region International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD) meeting held in Yaounde, Cameroon on the theme 'Child Development and National Development.' Subsequent regional meetings held approximately every two years.

1992: Organization of African Unity (OAU)/UNICEF published *Africa's Children, Africa's Future: Human Investment Priorities for the 1990s*. (OAU/UNICEF 1992).

1993: EFA international forum in New Delhi, India put ECD on the agenda. The development of ECD in Kenya presented as a case study.

1993: October meeting of the Donors for African Education (now the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, ADEA) created a Working Group on Early Childhood Development (WGECD). The WGECD was first hosted by UNICEF, followed by the Government of The Netherlands. Currently the Secretariat is hosted by Save the Children US in Nairobi with UNESCO's Bureau régional pour l'éducation en Afrique (Regional Bureau for Education in Africa – BREDA) in Dakar serving as the Chair of the WGECD.

1994: Early Childhood Development Network in Africa (ECDNA) launched with support from UNICEF.

Mid-to late-1990s: World Bank ECD funding credits in SSA (Eritrea, Kenya, Nigeria [limited], Uganda).

1994: Joint Training Initiative, Bernard van Leer Foundation with local/country partners.

1996: Regional seminar on 'Early Childhood in Francophone Africa' held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso supported by UNESCO.

1996: Creation of Réseau africain francophone prime enfance (Early Childhood Francophone African Network) through UNESCO and UNICEF.

1996: Colletta et al. *The Condition of Young Children in Sub-Saharan Africa* published as World Bank Technical Paper No. 326.

1997: Regional ECD Training Seminar ('Summer Institute') held in Namibia. UNICEF provided seed funding with University of Victoria, Canada, co-organising and University of Namibia hosting.

1997: Colletta and Reinhold, *Review of Early Childhood Policy and Programs in Sub-Saharan Africa* published as World Bank Technical Paper No. 367. Their assessment of the expenditure on education in Africa showed needs and the percentage of education budgets allocated to ECD (only 4 of 25 countries had any expenditure, and it was minimal).

1998: 7th Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States (MINEDAF VII) accepted recommendation noting that: "clear policies be formulated to promote early childhood education and development" (Report of the VII Conference, April 1998, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/>).

1998: Regional ECD Training Seminar ('Summer Institute') held in The Gambia, organised by University of Victoria, Canada, supported by UNICEF and World Bank.

1999 to date: African International ECD Conference series:

- **1999:** 1st African International Conference on ECD, Kampala, Uganda (see Proceedings at www.ecdafrica.com).
- **2002:** 2nd African International Conference on ECD, Asmara, Eritrea (see 2002)
- **2005:** 3rd African International Conference on ECD, Accra, Ghana (see 2005)

Late 1990s: UNICEF shifted to greater ECD emphasis (integrated ECD = IECD).

2000, January: Funding received from the World Bank and the Norwegian Educational Trust Fund to develop the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU); programme. Delivery (with multiple donors) started August 2001 (see www.ecdву.org).

2000: Swadener et al. *Does the Village Still Raise the Child? A Collaborative Study of Changing Child-rearing and Early Education in Kenya* published by State University of New York Press.

2000, April: World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal (10-year follow-up to Jomtien Conference and EFA initiative). "The Dakar EFA goals are intended as an 'education wing' of the MDGs of the UN, also adopted in 2000" (NEPAD Education Sector Framework, draft, February 2004, p. 9).

2000–2001: ADEA–WGECD policy case studies carried out in Ghana, Mauritius, and Namibia, plus a questionnaire sent out to 49 African countries (33 responses=70% return).

2001, May: Cairo, Egypt, Africa Fit for Children published by UNICEF (Pan African Forum for Children, Africa Common Position, Cairo Declaration, and Plan of Action).

2001: The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) formed. NEPAD is the merger of two initiatives: Millennium Partnership for Africa's Recovery Programme (MAP), associated with President Mbeki of Republic of South Africa, and the OMEGA Plan, associated with President Wade of Senegal

that emphasised sub-regional development. Much of the intellectual and policy work behind NEPAD was done by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (www.dfa.gov.za/au.nepad/historical_overview.htm).

2001, August: ECDVU 3-year MA programme commences on-line delivery with 30 participants from 11 SSA countries.

2002, September: 2nd African International Conference on ECD held in Asmara, Eritrea. Produced *Asmara Declaration and Proceedings* (www.ecdafrica.com/).

2002–2003: ADEA–WGECD Project to Support National Policy Planning for ECD in Three Countries of West Africa (Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Senegal).

2003: Publication by UNICEF of *The Young Face of NEPAD: Children and Young People in the New Partnership for Africa's Development* (www.unicef.org/publications/files/NEPAD_FINAL.pdf).

2004: 27 of 30 (90%) ECDVU participants from 10 African countries completed the full 3-year programme.

2005, May 30–June 3: 3rd African International Conference on ECD held in Accra, Ghana. Produced *Accra Communique and Proceedings* (www.ecdafrica.com).

2006: ADEA Biennial Meeting, Libreville, Gabon, with a focus on ECD programmes (www.adeanet.org).

2006: Hyde and Kabiru, *Early Childhood Development as an Important Strategy to Improve Learning Outcomes*, published by ADEA Working Group on ECD.

2006, December: Launch of 2nd ECDVU programme in SSA, a one-year professional development programme, in cooperation with University of Education Winneba, Ghana and Chancellor College, University of Malawi.

2007: ADEA–WGECD changed sponsorship; Save the Children US, based in Nairobi, becomes the home for the Secretariat, and UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (BREDA), based in Dakar, now serves as the Chair.

2007: December: ECDVU one-year SSA programme (SSA-2) concluded. 23 of 24 participants (96%) completed the programme.

2008: *Africa's Challenge: Early Childhood Care and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Garcia et al. (Eds.). 24 chapters, with 56 authors, mostly based in Africa, published by the World Bank.

Chapter 1: A question of diversity: childhood or childhoods?

At one level, most individuals reading this essay appreciate that childhood is not the same across time or across cultural space. At another level, we participate in the promulgation of policies, practices, codes, and conventions that are not only acts of ‘imprint’, but are also acts of ‘erasure’, of standardisation, and of assimilation. The dramatic reduction in world languages, referred to earlier, is but one example of such erasure. These are not necessarily objectives sought, but they are nevertheless outcomes of progress and globalising activities.

Several streams of critical literature will be considered in this chapter, before focusing on reconceptualist and reclamation possibilities for SSA in Chapter 2. While these critiques are presented separately, and their histories are typically discipline-specific, there is an increasing and stimulating synergy amongst these works. Individually and collectively, these discourses open up the field of ECD and the lives of children globally to possibilities and potentials foreclosed by positivist and reductionist approaches that continue to dominate the field and that constitute key forces within the current early years ‘grand narrative’.

Discomforts within the discipline of child development

A cultural critique

The discipline of child development has long

been criticised for its failure to appreciate the importance of culture in its formulations. Cole in his 1996 critique, *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*, noted Wundt’s 1921 formulation of “two psychologies”: a ‘physiological psychology’ focusing on the experimental study of immediate experience, and a ‘higher psychology’ (*volkerpsychologie*) that could not be studied using laboratory methods, but had to be studied by the methods of the descriptive sciences, such as ethnography and linguistics (Cole 1996, p. 28). Cole went on to note that: despite Wundt’s standing as the ‘founder of scientific psychology’: “The only part of his scientific system to win broad acceptance was his advocacy of the experimental method as the criterion of disciplinary legitimacy”, and with that focus we witness the truncation of culture within the discipline of child development.

Other leaders in the emerging social sciences echoed Wundt’s sensitivity to the importance of culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For example, E.B. Tylor warned ethnologists to avoid “measuring other people’s corn by one’s own bushel” (Tylor 1881 cited in Sturtevant 1974), while Malinowski emphasised that one of the key goals of ethnographic work was: “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, and his vision of the world” (Malinowski 1922 cited in Sturtevant 1974). The foremost linguist of his time, Edward Sapir, emphasised that “the world in which different societies live

are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached” (Sapir 1929, p. 209, cited in Shweder 1991).

Cole documents efforts by some psychologists in the 1960s and 1970s to bring culture into their work, noting publications by Greenfield and Bruner (1966), Segall et al. (1966), Witkin (1967), his own work, Cole et al. (1971), and the launch of the *International Journal of Psychology* in 1966 and the *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology* in 1973. Nevertheless, and despite such efforts, Cole’s central question remained, “Why do psychologists find it so difficult to keep culture in mind?” (1996, p. 1). Towards the end of his 300-page book, Cole ventures answers to his question – answers that link psychology’s interest in generalisable, ‘universal’ theories, and the use of particular research approaches to the stillbirth of culture within the discipline. The relationship between research method and message is another key influence on the suppression of a culturally diverse literature in child development (see Pence and Hix-Small 2007). While some see developmental science as a wondrous opener of doors, others understand it as a univocal gatekeeper that privileges certain understandings and perspectives while restricting other, diverse forms of knowledge.

Post-structural critiques

In addition to cultural critiques, a quite different line of critical thought has emerged within psychology since the early 1980s. This one is based on a post-structural approach to the discipline wherein the ‘object of gaze’ shifts from the child, to the discipline itself. Influenced

by the work of Michel Foucault, works such as: *Changing the Subject* (Henriques et al. 1984), *The Psychological Complex* (Rose 1985), *Evolutionary Gradualism and the Study of Development* (Costal 1986), *The Crisis in Social Psychology* (Parker 1989), and *The Biologising of Childhood: Developmental Psychology and the Darwinian Myth* (Morss 1990) place psychology and the discipline of child development in a social-historical context deeply influenced by 19th century evolutionist thought. Extrapolating from various lines of Darwinist discussion and pre-Darwinist evolutionist thought, a ‘science-based’ justification for the domination of ‘less developed’ peoples (non-Europeans) by those ‘more developed’ (Europeans), was an expedient and useful alternative to earlier spiritually based justifications for conquest and control. In this evolutionist construction both children and ‘natives’ were seen as representing less evolved forms, and parallels were often drawn between the two.

Haeckel, a follower of both Darwin and Lamarck, was to have a particularly profound effect on the emerging science of psychology: “In order to understand correctly the highly differentiated, delicate mental life of civilised man, we must, therefore, observe not only its gradual awakening in the child, but also its step-by-step development in lower, primitive peoples and in invertebrates.” (Haeckel 1879, in Morss 1990, p.18). Sully, in *Babies and Science* (1881), continues the theme, firmly embedding the origins of child development theory alongside rationales for colonisation and control: “...the modern psychologist, sharing in the spirit of positive

science, feels that he must...study mind in its simplest forms...[He] carries his eye far afield to the phenomena of savage life, with its simple ideas, crude sentiments and naïve habits.... Finally he directs his attention to the mental life of infancy, as fitted to throw most light on the later developments of the human mind.” (Sully 1881, in Riley 1983, p. 47). By the onset of the First World War (WWI) imperialist powers “controlled or occupied 90% of the world” (Cannella and Viruru 2004, p. 12), and the extension of evolutionist ideology to the discipline of child development was firmly in place.

Psychology sought the legitimising mantle of science, as did all the social sciences. The accessible door was biology – evolutionary biology. The idea of progress, from lesser to greater, and the pursuit of a universal ‘developmental pathway’, lies at the heart of child development theories and also of discredited theories of social development (Social Darwinism). The images of progress, from ignorant or ‘savage’, through lower, then higher levels of thought and ability and on towards ‘civilisation’, are mirrored in the stages-terminology of child development. Both are envisioned by, and predicated on, a European, male norm that pathologises ‘the other’. Neither children, nor ‘natives’ (nor women) were considered to have reached such heights of development, but each is deemed capable of some level of advancement, through appropriate guidance. Such guidance is the obligation of the superior, as is the determination of the means and appropriate markers along the ascent. Such markers, over time, are construed as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’, becoming

rarefied as ‘universal milestones’ to be sought and achieved. Their desirability, once internalised, becomes the means through which individuals and societies are re-formed in the image of the master and the master’s world. The artifacts and instruments of ‘progress’ are also powerful, consistent with the observation that the first automobile was ‘man-made’, but that industrial societies, and the fate of humankind, have ever since been shaped by that machine. The institution of schooling is another potent tool, maintaining remarkable uniformity despite a great diversity of contexts, not only providing information, but also defining what constitutes knowledge, who is qualified to provide it, where it is to be provided, and to what ends it is to be used.

Guidance by those defined as ‘higher on the ladder’ can take the form of colonisation in regards to other cultures and societies, and close adult supervision in regards to children’s development. Consistently, the image of the child found in late 19th and early 20th century researchers’ statements is that of incompetence and deficiency. From Darwin’s own observations of his son Doddy’s inabilities: “not able even when 124 days old easily to recognise whence a sound proceeded”, to William James’ classic description of a newborn’s world: “the baby, assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin and entrails at once feels that all is one great blooming, buzzing confusion.” (James 1890, reprinted 1981, p. 488), the image is one of incompetence and incompleteness. This image persists in Gesell’s work and can also be found in the 1945 United States Department of Labor

Children's Bureau publication, *Infant Care Manual* "by the time the baby is 3–4 months of age his eyes are more or less complete,...but it is not until he grows older and his brain and nervous system develop that he is able to tell, for example, the difference between discomfort due to hunger and discomfort due to a pain in his ear" (US Department of Labor 1945, pp. 22–23).

Such 'scientific' images of deficiency nest comfortably into various rationalised social structures and roles, from those found within colonial empires to the male-saturated paid labour force of the US extolling an image of the 'ideal mother' as a full-time, home-based caregiver of an incomplete child that is deeply in need of such maternal attention. The contours of this 'perfect match' (linking industrial needs to family structure and familial roles) are clear in statements that arose early in the establishment of the 'cult of true womanhood' in the mid-19th century:

"The greater physical strength of man, enables him to occupy the foreground in the picture. He leaves the domestic scenes; he plunges into the turmoil and bustle of an active, selfish world...Hence courage and boldness are his attributes....Her inferior strength and sedentary habits confine her within the domestic circle; she is kept aloof from the bustle and storm of active life...timidity and modesty are her attributes. (Jonathon Steares 1842, in Kraditor 1968, p. 47)

Such constructions, influential for generations, clearly advance the interests of some, while suppressing those of others.

The WWII years, with a need for a revised role for women in the labour force (for example, 'Rosie the Riveter'), followed by a soul-searching about the role science (a force for 'good') had played in unleashing the fury of the atom and revealing the capacities of civilised societies to inflict pain and suffering at unprecedented levels, represent cracks in the foundations of positivist science and social beliefs that would widen in the coming decades. Foucault, among others, began the work of expanding cracks in the illusion of objectivity through his works from the mid-1950s to his death in 1984. With Foucault we have the laying bare of the intertwined relationships among power, knowledge, and institutional structures, and while Foucault himself did not address the topic of child development, his critique of other professionally driven and academically buttressed institutions provided a suitable base for Henriques et al.'s observation that: "The scientific object of developmental psychology, namely the developing child, is a product of a particular kind of discursive enterprise and not an independently pre-given object about which psychologists make 'discoveries'" (1984, pp. 101–2).

Henriques et al.'s critique goes beyond the insensitivity and arrogance highlighted in cultural critiques of child development, to a deeper position that questions any attempt by structuralists to "present us with a complete picture: a place for everything and everything in its place", to a post-structuralist position "with an emphasis on diversity" (Morss 1996, p. 125). In this way the post-structuralist critique is different in character from most earlier critiques, including Marxism (the substitution

of one structure for another) or, more recently, the work of Bruner (1986), Rogoff (1990), and Harre (1986, 1992), whom Bradley notes “still assume the subject-position of one who in principle can know about human development in general” (1993, p. 406). With a post-structuralist position the door is open to a diversity of voices, and the role of researcher opened to the possibility of becoming an ‘enabler’ of other voices – voices that are authentic within their own context and heard through enabling (as opposed to interpreting) activities.

Enabling diversity and rethinking professionalism

The role of enabler has not been common in child development, psychology, or any of the social sciences. Academics and professionals have traditionally been taught that their knowledge trumps others (which are less fully informed), creating a dynamic that counters enabling processes and disables diversity. Forged in the privileging, western structures of academia and conjoined with professionals shaped in those same institutions, the field of international ECD may wish to consider the words of one who came through similar corridors and into international development somewhat earlier than most ECD specialists – the respected agronomist Robert Chambers, who advises that:

“[We], who call ourselves professionals, are much of the problem, and to do better requires reversals of much that we regard as normal....Normal professionalism means the thinking, concepts, values, and methods

dominant in a profession. It is usually conservative, heavily defended, and reproduced through teaching, training, textbooks, professional rewards, and international professional meetings” (1993, p. ix and 62).

Chambers’ caution (and ire) was directed at himself and his colleagues who had long sought to shape Majority World agriculture and development to their own understanding of the world (with invariably problematic results), but his cautions apply equally well to the field of early childhood care and development. Chambers’ new-found commitment was to participatory approaches, approaches that seek to create an exchange, a hearing of different voices, and not privileging one over the other. Such approaches have been successful as part of indigenous ECD training and education (Pence et al. 1993; Ball and Pence 2006). They form the basis for Maori influence in the national ECE *Te Whariki* curriculum in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Carr and May 1993; New Zealand Ministry of Education 1996), but are limited in the world of ECD and international development (Pence and Marfo 2008).

Returning to the Western-based heartland of psychology and child development, there is evidence that the critiques noted above, perhaps by post-structuralists as well as by cultural critics, have not gone unnoticed. The dominant child development academic and professional association in the US (and the world) is the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD). In 2005 the Society was engaged in soul-searching about ways to

“strengthen the international focus within SRCD” (16 July 2005 website communication from SRCD). The responses to SRCD’s search are indicative of the challenges academia continues to face in its ‘internationalisation’ efforts. For many the question was understood as one of ‘access and participation’, for example, where to hold the meetings, who to include on editorial boards and committees, and so on. But some framed the issue differently, for example this comment from a high-profile member:

“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 ...” (e-mail communication, July 2005)

Another commented on the ‘provincialism’ that stands in the way of internationalisation:

“Broader topics of exploration, as well as broader methodological approaches in SRCD publications and conferences, could signal that the gates are open globally, and that methodological/theoretical provincialism should not be assumed.” (e-mail communication, July 2005)

Late in 2007 the authors were pleased to note that the SRCD Executive was evidencing a degree of commitment to diversity that was not expected. A 16 November e-mail from the SRCD Executive Office noted that “proposals are sought that will further three of the strategic priorities and goals in particular:

- Increase appreciation for the fact that an understanding of development requires the perspectives and methods of multiple disciplines
- Increase cultural and contextual diversity in all aspects of the study of child development
- Increase international perspectives in the study of child development.”

Such announcements, coming from the institutional heart of the child development discipline, provide hope that efforts to broaden, deepen, and de-privilege discourses about children’s care and development, and to make them more amenable to diversity and contexts beyond the Western experience, may yet be realised. It is critical that if the objectives sought are to be attained that SRCD assumes an enabler role – a role that does not force diversity through the strainer of conformity to Western ways of seeing and believing, assessing, and doing. The changes proposed are none too soon. There has long been a deafening silence from the Majority World, where most children live. And when voices from there have been heard they are only rarely children’s, and more rarely Africans’. While the discipline of child development may only now be on the verge of new perspectives and new voices, other fields of early childhood

have been experimenting with diverse perspectives for some time. Joseph Tobin, trained as an anthropologist, with colleagues David Wu and Dana Davidson (1989) employed a methodology of videotaping pre-school practices in three different cultures: China, Japan, and the USA (Hawaii). They played these tapes back to audiences of parents and of staff within each country, and then to parents and staff from the two other countries. Very consistently, the parents and staff from the same culture felt positive about what they observed, but were concerned about practices in the other two contexts. What begins to emerge are very different constructions of the child, and therefore of the programme approach taken in each country. Tobin subsequently noted his efforts to publish an article in a respected Western journal noting the high levels of satisfaction indicated by Japanese parents about their programme and its dissonance with the Western literature on indicators of quality. The journal was not interested in publishing the article unless it was recast as a 'negative example' of an early childhood programme (Tobin 2005, p. 423). Tobin's experience is confirmation that Chambers' assessment of "normal professionalism...[as] usually conservative [and] heavily defended" is also alive in the world of early childhood.

Tobin's work stood out in the ECD literature, and to a degree it is still relatively unique. While there have been efforts to collect 'samples' of child care from other parts of the world, these have typically been developed as 'snapshots' with an overall framing provided by one 'outside' the observed context (even if written

by one from 'inside'). The opportunity to take one's own photos, tell one's own stories, and then share such different perspectives in an open and accepting environment is seldom encountered in the world of academia or professional practice. The terms and structures themselves, as well as the tenets that frame them, already preclude various possibilities. The search for universals, long the pre-occupation of child psychology, and the similarly restrictive tenets of logical positivism and quantitative methodologies, have limited psychology's ability to understand itself as only one, quite bound and limited piece in a much larger puzzle – rather than a representation of the puzzle itself. And with the design of that puzzle piece guided by Darwinian principles of hierarchy, 'fit'-ness, and progress, the presence of, and rationales for, privilege and domination were foretold. It is principles such as these that empower the dominant and restrict the 'other'. It is a 'science' that is well suited to colonisation and control, more so than to equity and diversity. Sociology's late 20th century interest in, and theorising about the child, better suits a world of diversity.

A different view from a different discipline

During approximately the same period of time that a post-structural critique of psychology and child development was emerging, in approximately the mid-to-late 1980s, sociology was experiencing a growth of interest in the child. In 1982 Jenks edited a volume entitled *The Sociology of Childhood – Essential Readings*. The readings were largely borrowed from other disciplines, history, psychology, and literature

for example, but in the Introduction Jenks introduces an orientation which would become the touchstone of an emerging sociology of childhood literature, and which would fundamentally distinguish it from the mainstream of psychology and child-development literature: “Childhood is to be understood as a social construct...” (1982, p. 12). Jenks went on to note that: “most social theories, through their emphasis on a taken-for-granted adult world, signally fail to constitute ‘the child’ as an ontology in its own right.” (p. 13). O’Neill, writing in the collection, notes that “any theory of child socialisation is implicitly a theory of a social reality...” (1982, p. 77).

By the late 1980s the discourse had begun to grow substantially (Ambert 1986; Qvortrup 1987; Alanen 1988), and Qvortrup, with several European colleagues, received funds to mount a series of forums within a guiding project to investigate ‘Childhood and Society’. Those forums (1988–1992) led, in the early 1990s, to the publication of *Childhood Matters* (Qvortrup et al. 1994), the founding of the journal *Childhood*, and the creation of a thematic group addressing childhood issues in the International Sociological Association.

The sociology of childhood is a rich resource of ideas and perspectives building on the basic tenets of constructivist theory. Through situating the child as a ‘social construct’ it has an immediate relevance to, and utility for, the great diversity of child contexts found throughout the Majority World, yet it is a literature that is seldom cited by those active in ECD. It is encour-

aging that anthropology is also evidencing a renewed interest in the child as witnessed by a special issue of *American Anthropologist* in 2007 (Bluebond-Langner and Korbin) and *Anthropology News* (April 2008). Nevertheless, the mainstays of ECD literature remain mainstream psychology and child development perspectives, despite their having been effectively critiqued both from within and outside the discipline, and despite their continued focus on a universalising, normalising message that pathologises the ‘other’.

Culture, context and diversity were central concerns that led to the development of several different critical streams of work within early childhood care and education in various parts of the world in the 1990s. Those ‘reconceptualising’ efforts will be considered in the next sub-chapter.

Reconceptualising early childhood education (ECE)

Child development theory has served as an anchor for work led by the influential American early childhood professional group, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). In the late 1980s NAEYC turned to ‘developmental science’ to bolster its argument that ‘best practice’ in ECE should be ‘child-centred’. The result of this adoption was the publication of position statements on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Bredekamp 1987).

For the most part the publication was well accepted within the ECE field in North America.

However, and perhaps not surprisingly, based on inherent cross-cultural limitations and the emergence of a variety of critical theories informed by feminist, post-structural, post-colonial and post-modern perspectives, key members of the ECE academic community in the USA took exception to DAP in its failure to address, among others, issues of culture, context, and the limitations of a positivist approach (Kessler 1991; Jipson 1991; Swadener and Kessler 1991; Kessler and Swadener 1992). The result of this reaction was the creation of an initially US-based body in the early 1990s that named itself the Reconceptualising Early Childhood Education group (RECE), and held annual conferences. RECE members in the USA have been very productive in developing diverse critiques of ECE since the early 1990s (Bloch et al. 2004; Cannella 1997; Jipson and Johnson 2000; Soto 2000; Soto and Swadener 2002, to name but a few).

At a similar point in time (late 1980s and early 1990s), related critiques were forming in other parts of the world, but were largely independent of each other and of activities in the US. The 'European-oriented' work referred to here did not have one particular 'spark', like the DAP, to ignite activity. Rather, there was a shared discomfort with ideas such as 'best practice' when one was working across countries or cultures, and a concern that the polyphonic nature of early childhood care and education (ECCE) was not being allowed expression (Balaguer et al. 1992). The idea of 'quality' as an objective reality that existed outside of context and could be measured with 'universal' instru-

ments was also disturbing and elaborations of those ideas led to two related volumes (Moss and Pence 1994; Dahlberg et al. 1999 2nd edn 2007). Work related to early childhood in New Zealand was also opening up possibilities for other ways of understanding – and, significantly, for the opportunity to apply alternative and inclusionary approaches: to policy development (Meade 1988; Smith and Farquhar 1994), to curriculum and programming (Carr and May 1993; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996, 2002), and more recently to assessment (Carr 2001). As in Canada (Pence 1993; Pence and McCallum 1994; Ball and Pence 2006), the serious acceptance of indigenous perspectives in Aotearoa, New Zealand, provided opportunities for other ways of understanding and promoting ECCE (see, for example, www.minedu.govt.nz and www.kohanga.ac.nz).

In the 2000s, ECCE reconceptualist authors began to address issues more directly bearing on ECD and international development (Cannella and Viruru 2004; Bloch and Swadener 2007). In doing so they are joining several other ECD voices, not necessarily writing from a reconceptualist position, but sensitive to culture, context, diversity, and the hegemony of Western perspectives in the Majority World. Some of these individuals are from the Majority World (Nsamenang 1992a, 2001, and 2004; Kagitcibasi 1996, 2007; Viruru 2001), some from the Minority World (Woodhead 1996; Pence 1998, 1999; Penn 1999, 2005), and some from partnerships across both (Pence and Marfo 2008; Swadener et al. 2000). While increasingly aware of each other's work, direct interactions, idea sharing, and joint publishing are at an early stage³.

Various areas of promise for future cooperative work can be identified. For example, Viruru and Cannella's work is particularly strong in promoting a post-colonial approach to research. While the term itself is contentious (for example, is there a post-colonial to study given the continuing dynamics of political and economic domination by the Minority World?), the processes of colonisation, the scientific basis for Social Darwinism and its close connection to child development theory, the colonisation of the early childhood field itself, and its propagation internationally, are all possibilities for collaborative exchange. Another area for fruitful investigation is the role of various international, UN, and donor organisations in the promotion of certain images and understandings of children, the characteristics of services designed to reinforce the 'preferred' image, and the ignoring and erasure of other possibilities. A third is the role of 'research' in the promotion of certain understandings and the suppression of others. This is carried forward not only through Minority World domination of the focus of research (as well as control of funding), but in the methodologies it privileges. Across all three areas of possible collaboration and many others, of paramount concern is the unconscionable imbalance of research activity, topic identification, funding, and publication in favour of the Minority World to the neglect of the Majority. Such inequalities are not addressed, but accentuated, through policies that remove

capable individuals from their own cultures and contexts to be trained in the West – either to remain in the West or to become propagators of Western perspectives, values, and understandings upon return to their home countries and contexts.

Chapter 2 represents an effort to move beyond hegemony and a singular image of the 'global child'. It addresses the need to support and promote local perspectives, questions, and issues. It traces the 'triple heritage' of ECD in Africa – a heritage that one too seldom sees acknowledged in internationally financed early childhood initiatives. African history, traditions, and contemporary social dynamics are too often overlooked in progressive efforts to modernise and globalise the continent. Studies that have their origins in places far removed from Africa – geographically, socially, conceptually, ontologically – are cited as the bases for effective practices, programmes, research, and policy interventions while local realities, experiences, and histories are ignored. Such approaches, as suggested in the recent SRCDC interactions, bring into question the dubious nature of such science and resonate with Maori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith's comments on science's implications in the excesses of colonialism – a colonialism that continues to the present in much of the Majority World, and certainly in Africa.

³ An example of such 'early stage' interactions is a 2006–2008 forum series, *Investigating Quality*, hosted at the University of Victoria focusing on, among others, *Indigenous perspectives on ECCD* (Rodriguez et al. 2008) and *Majority World perspectives* [Pence (Ed.) *Special Issue of Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* (in press)].

The following chapter attempts to bring forward voices out of, and familiar with, Africa and day-to-day realities of African childhood. The voices are not raised primarily as a challenge to dominant international discourses that impact Africa in myriad ways, but as a call for ‘other’ voices – evidence of muted perspectives and understandings that deserve to be, and need to

be, heard as part of the future of Africa and her children. It is hoped that this chapter, and the essay in its totality, will contribute to a much-needed expansion of thoughts and ideas about early childhood – in Africa and the world, and to an appreciation that diversity is a strength to work with, rather than an obstacle to overcome.



Chapter 2: Early childhood development (ECD) in Africa

To provide a useful picture of Africa's early childhood ideas and practices, an understanding of the indigenous patterns of childcare arrangements that existed prior to the intrusion of Islamic–Arabic and Western traditions of childcare and education is required (Fafunwa 1974). Centuries-old traditions of childcare have survived the forces identified above until today; they continue to be useful and have not entirely yielded to colonial efforts and waves of intervention to replace them (Callaghan 1998). The indigenous African pattern of childcare differs from the imported models; “it has its own organisational coherence that is usefully oriented toward purposes different from those of foreign origin” (Nsamenang 2005b, p. 277).

In this chapter, we identify the origin and briefly reconstruct key features of three significant heritages of ECD co-existing in Africa today: indigenous African, Islamic–Arabic, and Western. We follow that background with a depiction, in broad strokes, of various facets of the more recent evolution of ECD services in Africa. Our account reveals indigenous African ECD systems as possessing logical coherence and purposive consistency, which deserve investigative discovery and enhancement rather than neglect and erasure. We endeavour to capture the extent to which Western ECD models and international policy standards “have devalued indigenous cultures and traditions” and projected them as “anti-progressive” (Callaghan 1998, p. 30). We end the chapter with a call for

international support to explore more deeply an Africentric approach to ECD that draws on long-standing traditions and heritages, as well as on ‘modern’ perspectives.

The overarching message in the chapter is schisms – disconnects which alienate Africans from their cultures, particularly their indigenous roots regarding the care and development of children, which are largely muted. Euro–Western childcare and development approaches are promoted in a manner that suggests both an ignorance of the other heritages and also a belief that others are incapable of producing a healthy adulthood. In this portrayal, the ‘plight of Africa’ is often presented as based in local inadequacies, rather than broader historic geo-political activities that have contributed to the impoverishment of the continent. Regrettably, African governments, in their desire to provide children with opportunities for “a good start in life involving nurturing, care and a safe environment” (Ministers and Representatives of Ministers 2005), fail to draw inspiration and “strength from the fountain” of Africa’s rich cultures and enduring traditions of childcare (Callaghan 1998, p. 33).

Thus, the often-positing extreme poverty evident in many parts of Africa is not the only key constraint to developing appropriate policies and mounting cost-effective programmes. We see another potent obstacle in the exclusion of Africa’s indigenous ideas and practices of

childrearing. The failure to recognise and mesh co-existing ECD heritages in Africa today into culturally meaningful and contextually appropriate service systems is a major impediment to providing African children with a good start in life. As Hoskyn et al. (2007, p. ii) have recently commented, “we must always contextualise our study findings, our policies, our programmes in the socio-historical and cultural contexts from which they arise.” This is particularly so when undertaking a critical look at ECCE in Africa.

Origins and *mélange* of ECD heritages in Africa

The three distinct ECD heritages – indigenous African, Islamic–Arabic, and Western – that co-exist in many African communities are a product of a socio-cultural inheritance that Mazrui refers to as Africa’s Triple Heritage (1986). In the following pages we attempt to capture their main features.

The indigenous African system

An African worldview is holistic, pronatalist, and theocentric. It imputes a sacred value on childbearing and childrearing. The marital pair of mature man and woman in a family of extended kin is the institution for the “gift of children” and, as the hub of sociogenic values and norms it is the foundation for childcare (Nsamenang 1996). Zimba (2002, p. 94) refers to the “indigenous network of support” reserved for newborns and their mothers in southern Africa. Similarly, in both West and East Africa, there is a “deep and comforting sense of tradition and community” that sustains newborns

(Serpell 1992; Nsamenang 1992b, p. 427). Newborns in both West and East Africa are treated as “precious treasure[s] ... nurtured, and enjoyed by the whole family” (Harkness and Super 1992). Although postcolonialism has eroded elements of the landscape portrayed by the above-cited evidence, African attitudes to childcare remain positive. Other lines of research (e.g., Harkness 1987; Kaye 1962; LeVine 2004; Nsamenang 1992a; Ohuche and Otaala 1981; Uka 1966; Wober 1975) portray positive African attitudes to children and shared caregiving, even under conditions of hardship. In the indigenous cultures of SSA, educational ideas and practices are embedded in family traditions, daily routines, and social and community life. Kinship, beginning with the family, is the socio-affective base from which individuals develop a sense of selfhood and personal identity. It is from the caring and generative role of the family that children begin to learn about moral life, participative skills, social values, and ways of the world. The sense of community and spirit of mutuality make childcare a social enterprise in which caregiving functions are shared with others (Harkness and Super 1992), including parents, kin, friends, neighbours and older siblings (Nsamenang 1992b, 2004). For example, Ogbimi and Alao (1998) report that in present-day Nigeria, kin and older siblings provide care to infants and pre-school children when their mothers are busy in food gardens, marketplaces, or at paid work.

Africa, with its distinct regional, cultural, religious, and political traditions, as well as its ethnic variety, has various forms of ‘public

education', or ways in which families and societies transfer beliefs, values, knowledge, and skills between generations. The diverse ethnic politics of Africa developed organised systems of indigenous education, such as the rites of passage in much of SSA (e.g., Uka 1966; Jahoda 1982). The Liberian educational institutions, for example, include the *poro* (for boys) and the *sande* (for girls) (Gormuyor 1992, p. 337). Given the centrality of age in Botswana, "education on sexuality was according to age groups and was administered to young people to mark their transition from childhood to adulthood when they reached puberty in what is known as *bogwera* (for boys) and *bojale* (for girls) rites of passage" (Shumba and Seeco 2007, p. 87). Feldman-Savelsberg (1994) and Tchombe (2007) report on 'maturity' rites in Cameroon; Harkness and Super (1992) discussed initiation rites in Kenya, and Zimba (2002) identified rites of passage in the Southern Africa region. Such practices of seclusion and training can still be found in some SSA ethnic communities as important means for preparing the next generation for meaningful cultural life.

In the African context, children play a critical role in their own development, and have a responsibility for their own 'self-education.' Indigenous pedagogy permits toddlers and youngsters to learn in participatory processes in the home, community, religious service, peer culture, and other activity settings through 'work-play' activities, with little to no explicit didactic support. They are expected to demonstrate competence and learning at key points of life, but often without direct instruction. The

operative approach that facilitates a growth in intellectual and functional abilities is not instruction but participatory pedagogy. Cameroonian children, for example, observe attentively but remain reserved and prudent in what they report (www.everyculture.com/Bo-Co/Cameroon.html). They take part in ongoing activities as well as observing and learning from adults. The aim of this form of education is to socialise responsible intelligence through the learner's active participation in acceptable and valued social and economic activities (e.g., Nsamenang 1992a; Serpell 1993; Serpell and Jere-Folotiya 2008). Through such activities, children are apprenticed not only to imbibe useful economic values but also to acquire prosocial and altruistic attitudes and values from the environment (Nsamenang 2004).

Tacit African theories posit children's innate capacity to be agents of their own developmental learning in multi-age peer groups in which parental values and actions prime responsible intelligence by permitting older children to serve as peer mentors (Nsamenang and Lamb 1995; Nsamenang 1992b, 2004). When direct parental care and intervention is no longer required (Zempleni-Rabain 1973), children are "better together" within the free spirit and self-regulation of the peer culture; they inter-stimulate and mentor each other, disagree and defer to more forceful and competent peers (Nsamenang and Lamb 1995). Children 'graduate' from one role setting and participative sector of the peer culture to another, steadily maturing toward adulthood. The boys and girls who are poised for the responsibility

of adult life are to be evaluated as proficient on the basis of their social, moral, intellectual, and practical prowess within the peer culture (Cameroon 1981).

Peer culture is central to supporting African children's learning and development of norms; however, it has not been well analysed or researched and remains a largely uncharted developmental niche. Its absence is but one example of ways in which Minority World perspectives and values dominate what is deemed appropriate and of interest for child development research and publication. Whereas Euro–Western profiles of workforce and family preparation are based mostly on institutional education and vocational training, those of indigenous African livelihoods are enmeshed in familial and communal spheres (Nsamenang 2005b). We can gain insight into an African approach to learning and 'becoming' by examining African family practices wherein parents sensitise children from an early age to seek out others to extract 'competencies' and to figure out and feel their way into the world away from family and neighbourhood, but with attentive cautions that leave a lasting imprint, such as: 'venture into the world, but be a good child'. On a continent where the majority of children have become more knowledgeable about the broader world than their parents, the child-to-child template is very important. Some African youth have gained advanced academic opportunities abroad and others have entered into global labour markets through the vision and support of peers rather than parents or counsellors (Nsamenang 2008). It is thus clear that African

children are capable social actors and engage in more extensive child-to-child sociability than can be perceived from the dominant literature (Nsamenang 2001).

Research evidence (e.g., LeVine et al. 1994; Super and Harkness 2008; Weisner 1997) indicates that African parents cherish and promote social intelligence over paper-and-pencil tests or encyclopedic forms of intelligence. One mode of assessing intelligence is to keep and accumulate a mental tally of the proportion of tasks a child performs successfully as a marker of her or his intelligence (Serpell 1993; Serpell and Jere-Folotiya 2008; Weisner 1987). This mode of tracking development is consistent with a majority of children in rural SSA, who are more familiar with clay or other local materials as a medium of play and self-expression than they are with commercially prepared toys or materials associated with intelligence tests (Segall et al. 1999; McAdam-Crisp 2006). Thus, research evidence in SSA reveals 'intelligent behaviour' as unfolding as social and cognitive components, with a primacy placed on practical rather than instrument-based assessments of intelligence. Such an awareness led Kathuria and Serpell (1999) to develop the *Panga Munthu* or Make-A-Person Test, which presents children with wet clay and asks them to 'make' a person with it. The children's figures are then quantitatively scored for accurate representation of human physical characteristics. Serpell and Jere-Folotiya (2008) note that a language-minimised test is more suitable for children in rural Africa.

About four decades earlier, Cole and his colleagues (e.g., Cole and Scribner 1974; Cole et al. 1971) furnished research evidence on situated intelligences and skills (Nsamenang 2006; Ogbu 1994) in African cultures, with specific reference to Liberian peasants, who were unaware of disciplinary mathematics, but were experts in endogenous calculation and measurement systems. More recently, Oloko's (1994) research on schoolchildren's street trading in Nigeria revealed both its adaptive and maladaptive functions. However, one strand of her findings corroborates Brazilian evidence that, "despite their poor performance in school tasks [the street-trading] children were very competent at solving arithmetical problems in the context of buying and selling items of different prices" (Schliemann 1992, p.1). This evidence highlights the fact that education, like ECD in Africa, is not really taking into consideration context: "the theories and concepts through which the owners of the culture see their cultural world" (Anyawu 1975, p. 149), particularly in child-to-child learning. The fact that such contextually sensitive research has emerged in Africa, and in other parts of the Majority World over the past half-century, but has failed to form a continuing and expanding line of inquiry, speaks to the privileging of Minority World issues and perspectives over those of the Majority World.

Education curricula, beginning with kindergarten and nursery centres, disseminate disparate chunks of Western bodies of knowledge and skill repertoires but "are deficient in local content and traditional skills learning"

(Nsamenang 2005b, p. 279). In spite of the benefits of education, the African school, beginning with ECD services, pushes Africa's children into gaining Western knowledge and skills but disturbingly involves alienation from, and ignorance of, their cultural heritage and life-journeys (Serpell 1993). As Callaghan (1998) notes, a Western educational system can produce dysfunctional African children as it decontextualises cognitive repertoires and life skills from African experience. ECD and education systems in African must recognise and value "patterns of intelligence that exist already in their culture because their culture requires it" (Ogbu 1994, p. 366). Respecting and incorporating such perspectives and realities does not mean Western approaches would cease to exist in Africa – clearly their ingrained power suggests otherwise, but such external practices need not, and should not, be exclusionary. Honouring existing traditions will provide Africans with a more secure base from which to face the world.

The responsibility for the socialisation and education of children is shared within the extended family network through a social capital system that Weisner (1997, p. 23) referred to as: "shared management, caretaking, and socially distributed support" and that Jahoda (1982, p. 131) described as: "the sharing and exchange norms" that bind siblings and the entire social system together. Thus, from an early age, the intertwining of socialisation and education fosters not only an 'interpersonal connectedness' but also forms a holistic relatedness to "the family and the universe" (Callaghan 1998, p. 32). Thus, an African theory visualises

the child not in lonesome individualism, but as connected into the social and emotional ties and obligations of a participant in communities, beginning with the family, kin, and peer group. African social thought does not focus on the autonomous self, but on the individual interpersonal connectedness (Kagitcibasi 2007). “It is in rootedness in an ongoing human community that the individual comes to see himself [sic] as a man [or woman]” (Menkiti 1984, p. 171); African ‘individuality’ is not sovereign but embedded in the psychosocial and emotional matrices of a human community.

Perhaps Lanyasunya and Lesolayia (2001, p. 7) took cognisance of the foregoing to suggest an appropriate ECD approach as one “that would reach the children in their cultural context and in which the community would fully participate.” The multi-pronged strengths of such an ‘embedded’ approach are evident in indigenous work undertaken in Canada (Pence et al. 1993; Ball and Pence 2006) and in Aotearoa, New Zealand (Te Kohanga Reo, www.kohanga.ac.nz). In those experiences the roles of Elders, and other key community leaders, in addressing the developmental needs of children and the cultural requirements of community, are evident. Also evident are the ripple effects such engagements can have for broad community revitalisation and the sustainability of child-related programmes (Jette 1993). The eco-culture contours the features of every developmental environment, as every aspect of development is deeply influenced by the local context (Nsamenang 2008). In fact, “human development always occurs in a specific cultural context”

(Dasen and Jahoda 1986, p. 413), a point echoed more recently by Rogoff, with a reflection that cultures are not static: “People develop as participants in their cultural communities. Their development can [best] be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities – which also change” (Rogoff 2003, pp. 3–4).

Therefore, a culturally appropriate model is essential because African children generate their personhood not solely from their individual traits but more from socio-affective premises, especially those of the family and the peer culture, and not only during the early years of life but throughout the life course. Once we accept and understand the value and role of context and its culture, the next critical step “is to recognise the importance of cultural conceptualisations of childhood, and of the child development theories and practices that follow on from these in a given culture” (Smale 1998, p. 3).

The image of children and young people as ‘agents’ of their own development comes to the fore in the preceding accounts of African pedagogies. However, this viewpoint is rarely found in the academic literature (Hauser and Anderson 1991), given the preponderance and privileging of Euro–Western perspectives and contexts. As a result, we find blindness to mounting ECD visions and programmes on “the soil out of which the existing African society has grown and the human values it has produced” (Kishani 2001, p. 37). This lacuna contributes to the lack of scale, impact, and perpetuation of so-called ‘modern’ and

modernising ECD programmes in Africa that were deemed successful in the Minority World. Furthermore, the 'modern' ECD services not only reach a minority of Africa's huge child population but also fail to confer and consolidate an African cultural identity as provided for in the CRC. The net outcome is too often the erasure of the indigenous, with too little of substance and sustenance to replace it.

The issues discussed above provide an indigenous context that preceded an invasion of Africa's ECD and educational ideas and praxes, notably by the Orient and the West. To varying degrees, indigenous patterns continue, but have been joined by other, later perspectives. In the sub-chapters that follow, we attempt to capture the shape and apparent motives of these imported caregiving and educational heritages.

Islamic faith and literacy in Africa: The madrasa system

Accounts of the spread of Islam refer to its arrival in Africa in AD 647 (Hunter 1977; Olaniyan 1982). By the 10th century, communities of Muslim merchants and scholars had been established in several commercial centres of the Western Sahara and the Sahel. Between the 11th and 12th centuries, the rulers of such kingdoms as Ancient Ghana, Gao, and Takur had converted to Islam and had appointed Muslims who were literate in Arabic as advisers. Trans-Saharan trade and exchanges flourished in the hands of Muslim merchants, who exchanged merchandise between Africa and Europe from the 11th to the 16th centuries, when Europeans arrived on the West African coast to initiate the

trans-Atlantic slave trade and the triangular commercial exchanges among Africa, Europe and the Americas (World Bank 1999).

Islamic education was spread to SSA from North Africa by *Ibaadi* clerics (Hunter 1977), but also from the Horn of Africa by the disciples of Mohammed who fled persecution in the early history of Islam. The system of Islamic learning across Africa is multi-tiered. It is less rigidly structured than its Western counterpart (World Bank 1999), but more so than its African host. Its pedagogical methods appear to have been modelled on the Byzantine primary school system, though its curriculum was mostly Islamic and Arabic (Bouzoubaa 1998). Islamic education in its varied forms "constitutes a longstanding system of education" throughout the African continent. However, it is a "submerged system" because, despite its operation for centuries, it "remains relatively unknown to development planners and therefore is seldom taken into explicit account in their policies and strategies" (World Bank 1999, p. 1).

West Africa has a long history of Islamic education. Scholars of Timbuktu and Al-Hajj Salim Suware established the West African Islamic education system, also referred to as the central Sudanic system, which is based on both Arab and West African traditions, and still exists today (Doi 1985; Winters 1987). The Sankore curriculum consisted of faculties of law, medicine, grammar, letters, geography, and industrial arts. The University of Sankore in Timbuktu was highly regarded as a centre of learning by Muslims around the world.

Although Islam has an extended history in West Africa, and Islamic educational systems have operated there for much longer than Western ones (World Bank 1999), the *madrassa*, a system of Koranic learning for Muslim children and young persons, did not exist from the foundation of Islam. The *madrassa* system developed in the Arabian Peninsula during Islam's first centuries. The Jami'at al-Qarawiyyin, established in 859 in the Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque in the Moroccan city of Fez, claims the status of the oldest *madrassa* in the Muslim world; indeed, the Guinness Book of World Records refers to the Jami'at al-Qarawiyyin as the oldest continuously operating institution of higher learning in the world. It was founded by Fatima Al-Fihri the daughter of a wealthy merchant named Mohammed Al-Fihri.

Since basic Islamic education is religious in nature, the *madrassa* was often connected to a mosque. Thus, the origin of *madrassa* can probably be linked to an early Islamic custom of meeting in mosques to discuss religious matters. In the early history of Islam, people seeking religious knowledge tended to gather around more knowledgeable Muslims; these informal teachers later became known as *shaykhs*, and *shaykhs* began to hold regular religious education sessions called *majalis* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/majalis>). The system evolved into two sub-systems, the *ulaama* and the *madrassa* emerged (Winters 1987), perhaps to separate adult-child spaces. Under the *ulaama* system, a man or boy studies under an Islamic cleric at his residence. Males of all ages attended these meetings, and many of them

became *imams*. The certificate of an *alim*, for example, requires approximately 12 years of study.

Within the *madrassa* system, a group of students study in a classroom setting, either at a school or, in poor communities, any available space. The classic *madrassa* curriculum is the learning of the Koran, Islam's holy book. It was taught in Arabic, regardless of the student's mother tongue. Baxter (2003) estimates there are 3,000 neighbourhood Koranic schools in Mali's capital, Bamako. In these schools, groups of youngsters, aged 4–10 years, sit with wooden tablets, reciting Koranic verses, hour after hour, day after day, until they know them by heart. Although Islamic education in West Africa is the result of both African and Arabic educational inspiration, African *madrassas* that focused on literacy and numeracy in African languages were, and still are, uncommon. In addition, *madrassas* may enroll female students; however, women or girls study separately from the men or boys.

With its clearly defined goals and methods, the *madrassa* system offered a general educational frame for the heterogeneous ethnic and racial groups that embody the Muslim civilisation throughout the world, particularly before the penetration of Western models in Islamic societies. "The goal was no less than the shaping of the Muslim personality" (Bouzoubaa 1998, p. 3). Thus, the *madrassa* system was, and remains, an important agent of socialising different Muslim ethnic and racial groups into the Islamic faith and the Muslim way of life. Islamic education

gives meaning to life, enriches it, instils discipline and preserves human values, as well as strengthens and advances human societies (Bugaje 1993).

The *madrassa* system (as identified in Somalia) possesses three essential dimensions of practical application and impact (UNDOS 1995, p. 1):

1. It constitutes an introduction to the technology of writing, and to a lesser extent numeracy, for a sizeable proportion of the population, both men and women, many of whom would otherwise have little or no schooling.
2. It provides literacy training as well as local leadership, since Islamic instruction is generally accepted to be an indicator of morality, honesty, and discipline, and therefore a primary qualification for assuming community responsibilities.
3. It has equally been – and given the growing disaffection with formal schooling has increasingly become – an avenue for social and economic advancement because of the close relationship between Islamic networks and traditional commercial ones in the region.

Madrassa graduates are more likely to find employment or apprenticeship with the traditional merchants and in informal marketing operations than graduates from other types of schooling systems (World Bank 1999, p. 4).

Given that the wealthier classes entrusted their children to private caregivers or tutors, the

earliest *madrassas* were tied to the notion of goodwill, therein pointing to a multi-layered system of class and privilege. Not only was the *madrassa* a symbol of status but it was also an effective means of transmitting status to kin. Another important function of the *madrassa* was to provide education and training to orphans and poor children. *Madrassas* often targeted the powerless and poor segments of the population.

Under increasing demands to contextualise the curriculum and pressure from globalising imperatives, the *madrassa* structures and programmes could not remain unchanged (Bouzoubaa 1998). Today, increasing numbers of more affluent Muslim children are attending full-fledged private Islamic schools, which combine secular/western and Arabic–Islamic education. Some *madrassas* now offer additional advanced courses in Arabic literature, English, and other foreign languages, as well as classic arts and science subjects.

The Euro–Western education system

Euro–Western systems of education arrived in Africa from Europe with colonisation. The systems were imposed, as colonised Africans did not invite the colonial power, nor did they have sufficient power to resist over time. While colonialism is now viewed as morally reprehensible, there are differing views on the social, economic, and political impacts of colonialism. Since colonialism was practiced differently throughout Africa, the consequences of colonial rule differ from colony to colony, and these differences can be noticed today across the vari-

ous countries of Africa. In this chapter, we will look briefly at some of the general outcomes of colonialism in Africa.

Three major factors influenced European attitudes about Africa and the type and quality of education the colonialists provided to and for Africans. Firstly, soon after Europeans became aware of Africa's rich natural resources and labour force potentials, the number of European voyages of 'discovery' and exploitation into Africa increased. This led to the acquisition of colonies, culminating in the 1884 Berlin partition of Africa amongst Europe's imperial powers (Asiwaju 1984; Davidson 1969; Mazrui 1986; Ungar 1986). Secondly, because European colonial powers did not want to spend their own money to establish, maintain and administer their African colonies, they insisted that each colony (if at all possible) supply the requisite revenues to govern it. The revenue was derived mainly from taxation and proceeds from resources extraction (<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu>). Colonial regimes concentrated on finding and exploiting the most profitable natural resources in each colony. The mining of minerals and the production of crops for export necessitated a ready supply of inexpensive labour. Consequently, colonial governments exerted considerable effort 'recruiting' labour for these endeavours. In many colonies, governments resorted to policies of forced labour in order to provide adequate labour for mines and plantations. Thirdly, not only did significant changes in religious beliefs and practices take place as a result of colonisation, but colonial rule provided an environment in which Christianity, in many forms, spread throughout

much of Africa, and with it came new orientations to education. While Islam was widespread in Africa prior to the coming of European colonialism, it also benefited from that colonialism. In some cases, British and French colonial officials actively discouraged Christian mission work in Muslim areas, and the peace and order established by colonial rule provided an environment in which Islam could consolidate its hold in certain African colonies (Fafunwa 1974).

Europe's civilising project was promoted and rationalised by Darwinian-based, 'scientifically supported' theories of evolution, survival, and domination by the 'fittest'. Since the earliest points of European contact (points preceding Darwin, but offering their own rationales for domination), SSA had been perceived as not 'fit' on its own and in need of intervention by superior peoples (Nsamenang 2005a). For example, Captain Richard Burton, the British explorer of the 19th century, wrote of the failure of Africans to develop from the primitive to the civilised. Sir Samuel Baker perceived the African mind to be "as stagnant as the morass which forms its puny world" (cited in Davidson 1969, p. 24). Accordingly, a theory was developed that the African was "an incompetent farmer" (Ford 1971, p. 6) without the "initiative, the knowledge and wealth" (Masfield 1972, p. 75) to tackle the 'self-inflicted' problems of poverty, disease, and ignorance. Such accounts reflect the basis for Western imputations and reading of absurdities and perversions into African cultures and lifestyles and 'prescriptions' for their replacement, instead of seeking ways to understand and enhance them (Nsamenang 2004).

Proponents of colonialism self-identified the ‘burden’ of enlightening and civilising Africans and their societies. Given this responsibility, one might assume that colonial governments would have made major efforts to introduce schools throughout the African colonies. However, most colonial governments did little to support schools and develop education. Individual colonial regimes developed economic policies and strategies on the basis of the three factors identified above: natural resource extraction, access to labour, and the spread of Christianity. While there were also colony-specific interests, these typically did not give priority to education. Universal basic education for Africans was not a colonial priority as colonisers needed only a few clerks and sub-administrators but massive unskilled labour for resource extraction and plantation work (Dore 1976; Hort 2007; Kashoki 1982). The colonisers’ need was for subordinates who would do ‘back work’ not ‘head work’. Indeed, in Angola the Portuguese authorities took fright at the surge of ambition in education and in 1901, a law was passed stipulating that anyone wanting to be a telegraph operator had to pass exams in Latin and geography, which (not surprisingly) were not offered in Angola (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/specials/1624_story_of_africa/page9.shtml).

Colonial educational services were unevenly developed and produced mixed results. There were remarkable disparities across countries. Even Ghana, which next to Ethiopia had the highest level of primary education in SSA at the point of independence (1957), had a glaring contrast between the number of schools in the

north and in the south of the country (Appiah 1992; Asante and Asante 1990).

The low education levels required by most colonial governments to sustain the basics of governance, law, and order, contributed to later challenges to expand even basic education. Colonial strategies and efforts to achieve the twin goals of generating wealth for the coloniser and achieving a stable administration of the colony left a lasting legacy felt by both African governments and the development community. At the end of colonial rule, no African colony could boast that more than half of its children had finished elementary school, and far fewer attended secondary school (Fafunwa 1974). Thus, at independence, African governments were torn between creating more higher education spaces for leadership needs, or addressing the equally challenging need for more basic education.

In spite of limited support for public education, those who were able to receive educational services, often became their countries’ pre- and post-independence leaders. For instance, South Africa’s outstanding freedom fighters: Nelson Mandela, Bishop Desmond Tutu, and the Reverend Alan Boesak, and African nationalist leaders like Um Nyobe (Cameroon), Kenyatta (Kenya), Nkrumah (Ghana), Kaunda (Zambia), Nyerere (Tanzania), and others were products of missionary education (Nsamenang 1992a, p. 116). The iconic Nelson Mandela – with his unparalleled international profile, sterling qualities, and moral stature – grew from an indigenous African education in his early years, matured with a Euro–Western education, and

fortified himself with a lifetime commitment to his rich traditional roots.

Three forces affected developments in Africa's education structures at independence. Firstly, as noted above, colonial governments lacked not only the resources but also the goodwill and motivation to initiate universal basic education for Africans. Secondly, Islamic education encountered and acquiesced to self-governing indigenous African kingdoms and ethnic states, such as Ancient Ghana, Bamoun, Mali, Nso, and Yoruba, while Western education, when established, was part of the disruptive process of colonisation and the creation of African outposts for European states (Davidson 1969; Kashoki 1982; Mazrui 1986; Mudimbe 1994). A third influence on the face of education in Africa was Western Christian missionaries' establishment of formal schools in the African colonies (Mazrui 1986; Serpell 1993).

Christian missionaries (unlike Islamic clerics) believed that the ability of African peoples to read the Bible in their own language was important to the conversion process. Christian schools also often broadened their curricula to take in more than the Bible and their own denominational liturgy. However, most mission societies were poor; they could not support the number of schools that they wanted, and they were not able to extend their reach as far as some missionaries desired.

Three main features characterised this turbulent colonial history. Firstly, the Euro–Western models of education and early childhood lear-

ning were forced into Africa several centuries after the intrusion of Islamic–Arabic education. Secondly, both educational heritages used and promoted literacy as a vehicle for religious 'Mission' wherein Africans were 'educated' – not to become knowledgeable and aware of their own history and traditions, but to read and imbibe the holy scriptures of Islam and Christianity. Thirdly, resource extraction was allied to, or followed closely on, the heels of both religious penetrations.

This *mélange*, the triple heritage, is key to understanding SSA as it entered the period of independence, led by Ghana on March 6, 1957 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/6/newsid_2515000/2515459.stm), and progressed throughout the continent, with the majority of countries emerging as independent in the 1960s and 1970s. Each newly independent state has its own particular history and dynamics, but each also had a foundation of indigenous values and perspectives overlaid by various external and colonising ventures. Early childhood programmes, based on European models from the 19th and 20th centuries, for example infant schools, nurseries, crèches, pre-schools, and child development centres, were based on a variety of Euro–Western pedagogies from Froebel through Montessori, crèches to nursery schools, and could be found in virtually all pre-independent African countries. However, they were extremely limited in number and typically served primarily non-Africans, a small African elite, and faith-based populations only. Such programmes are often cited as the first ECD programmes in the country

(see ECDVU, Initial Country Reports 2002, at www.ecdvu.org), but they were invariably limited in scope and distribution, available to only a small number of Africans.

Having depicted the essential features of a rather long and traumatic history of cultural and educational capture by alien forces, we will next look at Africa during the period from the late 1950s through the 1970s, the period of independence for most SSA countries. Whereas the colonial project was presented as a ‘civilising mission’, but was more correctly one of resource extraction, the new states of Africa encountered a world geo-political dynamic predicated on competing ‘best’ forms of governance with Marxist socialist blocs in competition with capitalist neo-liberal blocs. The next sub-chapter to a large extent recaps the values and motives that framed the introduction and formalisation of institutional public schooling in general (Serpell and Hatano 1997), and pre-school programmes and services in particular.

ECD in the post-independence era

The period of independence represented a transition for most African states from a coloniser-centric focus to a broader international focus and immersion in the geo-political dynamics of the Cold War. Newly established heads of government were courted by international powers in ways not conceivable as a colony. International immersion brought with it an introduction to the Breton Woods Institutions, in particular the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as a multitude

of United Nations organisations and INGOS. The post-independence era represented a very different social, economic, political, and development dynamic from what had come before; however, the basic dynamic of a disregard for local practices in children’s care and development persisted throughout the new era.

As an example of this disregard for indigenous traditions and practices, we identify certain issues and questions that we feel obliged to contemplate. Why are Africa’s theories of the universe and traditions of childrearing disregarded? Within which ‘cultural identity’ do we expect to uplift Africa if we continue to intervene to dislodge the continent and its peoples from its heritage? Why can’t Africa garner the means to provide for its next generations in spite of its rich material and human resources, which have thus far been drained by and for foreign interests? Why does the development community stigmatise African children’s participative learning and deeply felt efforts to contribute to the family’s survival as inappropriate child labour, while less actively criticising international economic systems that relegate Africans to being price-takers instead of fair-price-fixers – a very significant contributor to poverty in Africa. Too often such donor organisations present demeaning pictures of bloated and dying African children while their own countries practice the discriminatory trade policies that lie at the root of such misery.

When Europe set out on a mission to ‘civilise’ Black Africa, it envisioned religion and education as the most propitious means by which to ‘save’

the continent and its peoples. The stance of this mission led the colonialists to read ‘backwardness’ into African social thought, behavioural patterns and educational practices. More specifically, it blinded the imperialists from noticing Africa’s “rich cultures and wisdom...” which focused on “a more integrated and inter-relational vision of development” (Callaghan 1998, p. 33). Such an orientation would have better addressed the realities of the communities they sought to save. Thus, while there have been some benefits, the origins of much of Africa’s difficulty with Western models are embedded in colonial failures to take into account the cultures and knowledge of the African people, including those related to early care and development learning that Africans have preserved for centuries, and which longstanding ‘interventions’ have not entirely erased. They, as do some interveners of the African condition today, failed to think “African enough” to reach, understand, and attempt to enhance Africans in the realities of their circumstances (Creekmore 1986, p. 40).

Recognising that every culture has a right to culturally preferred practices for the care of its offspring, we underscore the point that independent African countries merely experienced a shape-shift from European colonialism to that of the United Nations, the Breton Woods Institutions and INGOs, which began to systematically challenge the ways and means of the newly independent states and the citizens within them. The new authorities began to introduce various ‘structural adjustments’ to permanently modify Africa’s systems.

ECD is a part of a fairly recent adjustment – one that largely pays only rhetorical attention to the local context and, absorbed in its own ‘scientific truth’, stays uninformed, not only about indigenous perspectives, but also about the history of Islamic and Christian institutions in Africa as well. The World Bank, for example, identified ‘Islamic learning’ as “widespread throughout West Africa” and in 1990 recorded over 40,000 Koranic schools in Niger alone, yet such schools “have not been considered as schools at all” (World Bank 1999, p. 2).

Prior to charting the current state of the ECD field in Africa, we identify five specific challenges, arising from various quarters of academia that challenge currently prevalent ‘scientific truths’ that impact Africa.

1. In “the face of ever-accelerating global change, the developmental scenarios proposed by the founders of the field of developmental psychology... now appear too static, too homogenous, too Euro–American, too middle-class, too male, and too monocultural” (Gielen and Roopnarine 2004, p. xv).
2. Most of the scientific evidence on the impact of early childhood interventions on children’s growth and development has been based on developed countries (Barnett 1995; Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). Africa’s child care patterns have rarely received research attention – its ECD programming is being mounted mainly on questionably extrapolated evidence (Penn 2005).
3. “The child development field’s dual identity as an ideological advocacy movement for

- the humane treatment of children and a scientific research endeavour seeking knowledge and understanding of child development” narrows and distorts global scientific exploration in the interest of promoting a moral cause (LeVine 2004, p. 151).
4. The so-called developmentally appropriate practices of childcare “present an appearance of science-based knowledge in a formula based heavily on [Euro–Western] cultural ideology” (LeVine 2004, p. 153).
 5. “A comprehensive understanding of human development [and ECD services] requires a contextual approach in which cultural factors play a prominent role” (Gielen and Roopnarine 2004, p. xiii).

At a conference convened by UNESCO and held in Addis Ababa in May 1961, African leaders expressed the sentiment that “African educational authorities should revise and reform the content of education in the areas of the curriculum, textbooks, and methods, so as to take account of the African environment, child development, cultural heritage, and the demands of technological progress and economic development, especially industrialisation” (UNESCO 1961, p. 23). Nearly 50 years later, Africa is being urged to adapt, modify, and align its patterns of early development and learning to those crafted on an image of a Western-derived ‘global child’ (Pence and Hix-Small 2007). It is important to note that the type of homogenised institutional care being promoted 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”

(Susman-Stillman 2005, p. 241). The assumptions of the dominant ECD narratives introduces a destructive factor of naïve acquiescence to the institutionalisation of certain approaches to ECD as a ‘right’ of all children and their families regardless of their circumstances (Dahlberg et al. 1999, 2nd edn 2007). Such a universalistic mindset not only marginalises other forms of ECD, but also fails to recognise a child’s right to his or her own culture and identity.

The possibility of an African ECD landscape has been little contemplated or theorised. We discern little published evidence that the complexity has been diligently explored for incorporation into ECD policy and programmes. As we call for exploratory ‘discovery’ of this rich and dynamic intermingling, we note: “No existing theory fittingly explains it and no antecedent evolutionary template corresponds to its triple-strand braid” (Nsamenang 2005a, p. 276). The confrontations and dilemmas the *mélange* engenders constitute, in our thinking, the foremost, albeit largely unnoticed, constraint to the development of culturally appropriate and cost-effective ECD services in Africa. Without adequate understanding of this triple inheritance, as a baseline, we will continue to incorrectly fit Africa into a Western-defined evolutionary history – misperceiving Africa and misdirecting interventions. As Bram (1998) perceptively notes, 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).

Our effort here is to instigate a generative process by which Africa can gain by not pitting its three ECD heritages against one another but by engaging in a bridging project (see Serpell 2007) to extract and articulate more viable ECD services from useful features of the three systems. Ours is a call for Africa to review and renew its long-established systems of education in the cause of promoting ECD services that are respectful of families and societies and their ability to transfer knowledge, values, and skills across generations. In so doing, not only will Africa gain through a re-familiarisation with its own traditions, other societies around the world will also gain through those same discoveries and invention.

The way forward is filled with challenges – with or without an appreciation of what has come before. Such challenges are better addressed through an appreciation of contexts, rather than through the import of a-contextualised understandings alone. How the acceptance of the importance of ECD would actualise into culturally relevant policies and programmes has yet to be adequately addressed. Even more daunting is the huge challenge of how to move and contextualise ECD services into rural communities with agrarian livelihoods and deep-rooted childrearing patterns, which accept children’s active involvement in family survival and sustenance (Super and Harkness 1992; Weisner 1987, 1997).

Hort (2007, p. 1) expresses dissatisfaction with Eurocentric institutional preparation of Africa’s young with the allegation that during the last

500 years, Africans have been systematically miseducated into Western molds. Kashoki (1982, p. 37) extends this viewpoint by posting “the single most significant accomplishment by Western man [sic] on a global scale has been the creation (or more accurately the re-creation) of non-Western man in the image of Western man.” Whereas indigenous African pedagogies create spaces for children’s self-education and exploratory learning on child-to-child terms, the Euro–Western ECD programmes taking shape in Africa proceed from a position of far less flexibility or openness. Dahlberg and Moss explain the Western approach as follows:

“We know the adult we want the child to become; we know the world in which the adult must live and work. The challenge is to produce the adult to fit into that world, in the most cost-effective way – and with the help of scientific knowledge-as-regulation the challenge can be met”. (Dahlberg and Moss 2005, p. 6)

Possibilities and experiences in post-independence Africa

Published research accounts of indigenous African ECD systems, particularly by Africans, are remarkable for their scarcity. Our analysis, taken from diverse sources, reveals a general pattern of African education and child guidance in the early years as a participative process wherein children are active learners of their culture’s curriculum and that their developmental learning happens with little specific

adult instruction. We juxtapose that approach to a much more adult-centric, adult-led and planned approach (often with specific outcome measures identified in advance) found in Western models. Such Western approaches are typically presented as ‘best practice’, with either explicit or implicit assumptions about their cross-cultural and inter-national applicability – this despite substantial historical and cross-cultural evidence that children live and grow into resourceful and useful members of their cultural communities in an amazingly wide variety of circumstances and under very divergent childcare regimes.

While the general press for the expansion of ECD services in contemporary Africa is predicated largely on Western models, perhaps more so since the child’s elevation to significant attention on African agendas commencing in the 1990s than before, there has been sensitivity to context at various points in time and with particular programmes. The Bernard van Leer Foundation flagged that sensitivity at a 1991 workshop held in Lesotho, which led to the subsequent 1994 publication, *Building on People’s Strengths: Early Childhood in Africa* (Cohen 1994). Although the publication emphasised the importance of a ‘blended’ approach, incorporating both traditional and modern ideas, it indicated that “many ECD programmes appear to dismiss or denigrate customary practice. This can result in parents and communities feeling disempowered, confused, and neglected” (Cohen 1994, p. 2). While the publication called for increased attention to ‘blending’, available evidence suggests that that objective continues to be too rarely achieved.

The bulk of initiatives by INGOs, for example, the Bernard van Leer Foundation and the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), have been in the East and Southern Africa regions. Since 1982 in Kenya, with subsequent extension to Uganda and Tanzania, the AKF funded a *madrassa* system under the auspices of the Mombasa *Madrassa* Resource Centre (MRC), to mobilise communities to support early childhood education (Oluoch 2007). This initiative went beyond traditional Koranic learning to integrate early childhood development, teacher-empowerment, and community participation. The emphasis was on self-sufficiency and community management. Local management committees appointed women from the community as ECD workers, who were trained by the MRC (www.worldbank.org/afr/findings/english/find101.htm). Though originally intended for Muslim children only, the programme has since expanded to include non-Muslim students in 78 schools in Kenya, 63 in Uganda, and 88 in Zanzibar. It has served over 50,000 children and trained over 4,500 teachers and 2,000 school committee members (Oluoch 2007). About 49 percent of school management committees of the MRC project are women, an unprecedented achievement for “a paternal institution once exclusively managed by men” (Bouzoubaa 1998, p. 7).

In Somalia, as in Muslims communities throughout Africa, Muslim parents and communities support: “Koranic schools [as] part of the basic moral education of the child” (UNDOS 1995, p.1). But in Somalia, Islamic education, as is the case for indigenous education in the majority of African countries, is not integrated into the formal school system. The Euro–Western model

is the formal system, despite its incompatibility with, “the children’s sociological, psychological, and cognitive development” (UNDOS 1995, p. 1). On the other hand, to cope with the challenge of educating Muslim children in a non-Islamic country, *madrassas* in South Africa are giving after-school religious instruction to Muslim children who attend government, secular private, or confessional schools (Mohamed 2006). Furthermore, in South Africa, Dawes et al. (2007) report on the evidence of a rights-based approach to monitoring the well-being of children and adolescents in South Africa. Their efforts were informed by international precedents and contextual realities, extensive peer review processes, and cross-disciplinary expert inputs into developing what they present as a holistic set of indicators to enhance the monitoring of the status of children. These indicators are designed to measure both the service environment and the children’s development.

With the *Mwana Mwendu* project in Kenya, the entire community, including children, youth, teenage parents, elders, pre-school and primary teachers, village health workers, and local officials, have joined in supporting the welfare of the youngest children (Colletta and Reinhold 1997; Swadener et al. 2000). When community members understand the benefits of a project, they share their time and resources willingly and work well among themselves. This project underscores the old proverb that it ‘takes a village to raise a child’. It shows that family support programmes can initiate sustainable improvements in community life, and provide a positive environment for everyone, including

young children. Community involvement in training programmes ensures that benefits, including economic benefits, are long-term and contextually embedded (Brooker 2008). Prior to the *Mwana Mwendu* project, the Bernard van Leer Foundation compiled a record of context-sensitive ECD interventions stretching over two decades in the eastern and southern African regions. These efforts culminated in Bernard van Leer Foundation’s landmark ‘Following Footsteps’ tracer studies (e.g., Cohen 2001; Njenga and Kabiru 2001). The Foundation has also intervened to enhance Koranic early childhood services in Morocco (Bouzoubaa 1998).

In West Africa, childcare in daycare centres and pre-schools has become popular, not so much because they truly promote early childhood development, but more so because they play custodial roles for busy mothers (Ogbimi and Alao 1998). “The Nigerian urban working mother,” for example, “is able to play the dual roles of being a mother and an employee successfully due to the availability of childcare services such as housemaids, nannies, daycare centres, nursery schools, and kindergartens” (Ogbimi and Alao 1998, p. 48). The Nigerian example holds true for most SSA countries, where some, such as Kenya, Mali, and Niger to name only three, make costly efforts to reach ambulant communities with ECD services. While some Euro–Western ECD initiatives in Africa have been effective (with several noted above) overall the record is one of substantial concern. Urban (2006, p. 1) provides one explanation in his critique of pursuing agendas of “certainties and predetermined outcomes” in

contexts whose characteristic feature is pervasive uncertainty. In the face of the huge human and financial resources required, and the doubtful sustainability of externally advocated forms of ECD, we feel the need to heed Sharp's (1970) quarter-century warning "against destroying too abruptly the traditional background of the African" that is still "the best guarantee of the child's welfare and education" (p. 20).

Toward contextually responsive ECD services in Africa's triple inheritance

The full extent of Africa's difficulties with the Eurocentric models of ECD vis-à-vis the hybrid fluidity of the African condition (e.g., Nsamenang 2005a; Serpell 1993, 2007) is yet to be systematically assessed. A more overarching constraint to efforts in Africa, however, is the dominance of a discourse that perpetuates the "construction of a knowledge which is exclusive of many other knowledges" (Urban 2006, p.1); they silence 'other' narratives that inspire "research that interrogates policy (instead of informing it)" (Urban 2006, p.1).

Generations of Africans have been alienated from their cultural identity, as Africa's foreign-derived education has rendered most Africans starkly ignorant of their own backgrounds and histories (Kishani 2001). Hort (2007) sees a brighter future for Africa's children and nations through not continuing to adhere closely to Eurocentric education models, but in developing an Africentric education. This Africentric education would consolidate African cultural identities, imbue African knowledge bases, and

infuse techno-cognitive skills and responsible values. With these Africa can participate and make progress with confidence in a competitive, knowledge-driven global marketplace – and doing so from an inherently African position. One useful approach is to rethink how to fit and tailor into institutional ECD programmes and services children's daily routines in their developmental niches. Theoretical notions, that can contribute to policy and programme development include:

- African social ontogeny (Nsamenang 1992a);
- individuation and the evolution of self-identity not through sovereignty but through interconnection and embedding in a sociogenic unit (Nsamenang 2004);
- the developmental-niche framework (Super and Harkness 1986);
- specific aspects of contextualist theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner 1979);
- constructivist understandings from sociology (James and Prout 1990; James et al. 1998);
- hybridisation processes (Pence and Marfo 2008);
- post-structural and post-modern critiques (Cannella and Viruru 2004; Dahlberg et al. 1999 2nd edn. 2007; Bloch and Swadener 2007);
- cultural psychology (Shweder 1990; Cole 1996).

On the basis of challenges to ECD science noted earlier, we interpret the suggestion from the World Bank's Africa Regional ECD Initiative (e.g., Colletta and Reinhold 1997, p. 5) that ECD programmes in some African countries were "built on the strengths of African tradition and

culture” as, at best, a partial truth. As noted elsewhere in this essay, the complexity of Africa’s three ECD heritages has rarely been taken into account in ECD programming. Further indication by these studies that the “multi-sectorial policy frameworks, which certain countries have constructed for the protection and development of young children” could become “choices for other countries to consider ...”, reinforces the point about dangers associated with extrapolating evidence from one context to another (Bram 1998).

According to the World Bank (Colletta and Reinhold 1997), ECD is not only imperative it is also affordable and effective. But questions of sustainability beyond the short-term support of donor agencies continue to plague long-term development. “To the extent that sustainability hinges on financing, the success with ECD to date mainly represents the financial and technical support of foundations, international, and national NGOs, religious groups, bilateral and multi-lateral aid agencies. Government gross domestic product (GDP) specifically earmarked for ECD is nil for 19 of 25 SSA countries for which data exist” (Colletta and Reinhold 1997, p. 5). After 25 years of efforts in Kenya, “the programme covers no more than a third of the relevant age cohorts across the country” (Colletta and Reinhold 1997, p. 8). This state of the field obliges a push for an African ECD agenda.

It is obvious that Africa possesses rich and effective traditions of childcare. African peer cultures not only allow for free-spirited play settings, but also more importantly, permit

self-education, generative learning, and peer mentoring in extensive child-to-child interactions and inter-stimulation (Nsamenang 2004a; Nsamenang and Lamb 1995). Interactions between individual children and the culture they inhabit generate an almost infinite range of divergent practices and experiences, and promote an equivalent range of different ‘desirable’ identities among people living in different times and societies (Shweder 1995). It is a developmental environment whose features, especially children’s creation of toys from local material, rouses and reinforces their cognitive and creative abilities as well as prosocial values and life skills (Segall et al. 1999).

The peer culture extends and brings into children’s discourses familial issues and processes that are basic to identity formation because, for most people, the most enduring lessons in interpersonal connectedness and self-definition occur in the family (Nsamenang 2008). Early learning within the family determines how children view the self, enter into interpersonal encounters, and engage with the world. Children acquire a sense of ‘belonging’ within their own culture, which may nevertheless allow them to accept and co-exist with individuals of other belief systems and cultures (Brooker 2008, p. 22). Children’s diverse experiences in families help to shape and channel their innate biological characteristics into cultural paths (Shweder 1995).

The image of identity development in African cultures is that of ‘polycropping’, not monoculture; in other words, it emphasises the shared and social, rather than the unique and individual,

aspects of identity (Nsamenang 2008). While Vygotsky is embraced in the West for his development of self through social processes (1978), in some way traditional African cultures transcend Vygotsky by sensitising children from an early age to seek out others, to extract “intelligences” (Nsamenang 2006), and to define self, particularly in peer groups, such that they can “gain significance from and through their relationships with others” (Ellis 1978, p. 6). In one specific instance of self-definition, Zimba (2002) describes the South African Zulu as nurturing, “*umuntu umuntu ngabantu*,” which literally means, “a person is only a person with other people”.

The process of developing a sense of self is a process of connecting individual personal identity to a changing social identity, depending on a child’s ontogenetic group affiliations. By fostering children’s close identification with the group, traditional social values in many African cultures can be seen to partially align with Erikson’s (1968) focus on social development. African developmental rites of naming, marriage, death, etc., typically extend and transition the identity of the individual through assimilating her/him into meaningful social roles and relationships.

A developmental theory, human ontogenesis (Nsamenang 1992a, 2004a), that posits significant learning occurring within the peer culture goes

beyond Vygotsky’s theoretical space of adult mediation of children’s learning within zones of proximal development. It fosters children’s development of intelligences and social skills, more through interactive-extractive processes in the mode of Piaget’s (1952) theory, than through the prodding of parents and teachers. This theory fittingly explains why African children are responsible and productive as they learn or teach themselves their curricular content of social roles, domestic duties, and agrarian tasks. It is perhaps in this sense that Hort (2007) and Reagan (1996) defined the purpose of education as improving and enhancing the interests of one’s own group to ensure its survival. If we could see children as social actors who are better together “as participants in cultural communities” (Rogoff 2003, p. 3), we would appreciate and wish to explore the value of fostering “the organisation of childhood such that children can acquire physical, intellectual, and practical education through their own initiatives” (Nsamenang and Lamb 1995, p. 622). An approach to ECD programmes that includes self-regulation, self-education, child-to-child interstimulation, and peer mentoring within a peer culture, in addition to elements of adult direction, would dispense ECD services differently, would have different training and accreditation criteria and, significantly, could provide more services to more children in both urban and rural communities at a lower cost.



Conclusion

We conclude our arguments here, because the next step is for those who are committed to the well-being of Africa's children and to the development of ECD services that draw on contextual and cultural practices and on understandings at local levels, to come together and begin the process of identifying Africentric possibilities in a landscape that has long denigrated such knowledge. These possibilities should not be considered in isolation from other perspectives but should form part of a respectful, generative process that opens new channels for discussion and dialogue. Our role, we believe, has been to introduce a 'stutter' into a powerful international narrative, to create a space for other ideas and perspectives, in this case from Africa, to be heard and considered. The purpose of the stutter is not to exclude, but to include – ours is not an isolationist argu-

ment. The argument, instead, is for recognition and inclusion of diversity.

There is much the Minority World can do to support the Majority World in its quest for child well-being, for funds and influence reside in the West in disproportionate quantities. Those powers should not be used to 'show the way' (the legacy of Social Darwinism, colonisation, and far too much of the development movement), but to support Africa's efforts to hear its own voices, among others, and to seek its own way forward. It will find that way through children who understand and appreciate multiple worlds, through young scholars that frame their own contextually sensitive research questions, and through leaders that appreciate the riches of the past, as much as the possibilities of the future.



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The Bernard van Leer Foundation funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. The foundation was established in 1949 and is based in the Netherlands. Our income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883 to 1958.

Our mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equality of opportunity and rights for all.

We work primarily by supporting programmes implemented by partners in the field. These include public, private, and community-based organisations. Our strategy of working through partnerships is intended to build local capacity, promote innovation and flexibility, and help to ensure that the work we fund is culturally and contextually appropriate.

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We work in three issue areas:

- Through “Strengthening the Care Environment” we aim to build the capacity of vulnerable

parents, families and communities to care for their children.

- Through “Successful Transitions: The Continuum from Home to School” we aim to help young children make the transition from their home environment to daycare, preschool and school.
- Through “Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity” we aim to promote equal opportunities and skills that will help children to live in diverse societies.

Also central to our work is the ongoing effort to document and analyse the projects we support, with the twin aims of learning lessons for our future grantmaking activities and generating knowledge we can share. Through our evidence-based advocacy and publications, we aim to inform and influence policy and practice both in the countries where we operate and beyond.

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Working Papers in Early Childhood Development is a ‘work in progress’ series that presents relevant findings and reflection on issues relating to early childhood care and development. The series acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas, often arising out of field work, evaluations and training experiences. As ‘think pieces’ we hope these papers will evoke responses and lead to further information sharing from among the readership.

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