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A Critical Peek at Early Childhood Care and Education in Africa

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Abstract

In this article, the state of early childhood care and education (ECCE) within Africa is critiqued in light of assumptions and issues discussed in the 2007 Global Monitoring Report of Education for All: *Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education*. Further, several factors that potentially mediate the efficacy of ECCE strategies in Africa are highlighted including: Africa's resource base, capacity building and Africentric literacy. The article concludes that for ECCE to benefit African children and their families, Western conceptions of the construct must not simply be adjusted for use in Africa. Rather, the very people that ECCE is meant to benefit—Africans themselves—must initiate a form of ECCE that is unique to Africa and African needs but that should be consistent with the complexity of the blend of ECCE realities within Africa today.

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This article exemplifies “a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable” (Rose, 1999, p. 20) and absolute. It casts a critical glance at the spirit and wisdom of our time, which primes Africa to import more Western knowledge systems and techniques than to generate and enhance its own. I feel an urge to raise a lone voice in favor of culturally sensitive and generative approaches to the knowledge and practice of early childhood care and education (ECCE) and to muse over why Africa, among other developing regions, remains farthest from reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in general and faces difficulty with ECCE in particular. I consider my voice ill-fated in the light of Wallerstein’s (1988) hint that there is “no reaction that could remove the pressure and the oppression” (p. 332) from a pervasive impact of Westernization, which sees no worth in Africa’s knowledge systems and practices. I therefore intend this paper to initiate a discourse that could lead to the removal of the fetters that prevent Africa’s generative capacity and that highlights a need for unique views of development in Africa that differ from those currently ‘transplanted’ from other nations. While I admit to the many positive contributions of Western civilization to Africa, I have elected to highlight mainly the aftermath of colonization that now masks Africa’s realities.

The critique is not undertaken from a position of doubt regarding the promissory value of Western civilization and forms of ECCE, and the locus standi of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to lay down an ECCE ‘position’ is not in question. However, my position is one of concern about how and why UNESCO, a world body that ought to endorse and protect the world’s heritages in their flourishing diversity, would support and launch a formula that may jeopardize ECCE pluralism. The critique is grounded on Foucault’s (1980) assertion that everything is not always bad but everything could potentially be dangerous. Thus, even the best intentions of nations, institutions and interest blocks associated with the United Nations (UN), the Breton Woods Institutions, the donor community, other contributing nations, communities and stakeholders are open to scrutiny.

The background to the critique is the contested terrain of ECCE. Central to the critique is the missing ideological and theoretical positioning, the relevant conceptual systems and appropriate procedural modalities that are sensitively tuned to the wide variety of ECCE efforts in a global context, but that also serve Africa’s multiple and non-Western ways of satisfying basic needs. Whether knowledge of ECCE practices is best accomplished by quantitative or qualitative research methods is also an unsettled issue. The state of ECCE around the world is unfairly captured by current approaches to research; moreover, the so-called state-of-the-art lingo is largely adversarial to meaningful discourse. I reject any effort to stigmatize my ‘critique’ as rogue scholarship, and counter these claims with a genuine wish to identify and initiate a direly needed discourse on apparently taboo topics and issues. In one sense, I take the position that the discourse on ECCE needs to be turned on its head. Further, I argue that a paradigm shift is needed to allow for consideration of genuine rights and to provide a fresh, objective scrutiny of the ECCE field. This includes a valorization of the fate of most peoples around the world within its precincts.

A critical concern is the feasibility of addressing the core issues taking shape worldwide in the image of *Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education*, the 2007 Global Monitoring Report of Education for All (*Global Monitoring Report*;

UNESCO, 2006). For example, does it matter whether the form of ECCE in Africa is indigenous or imported? (Nsamenang, in press) To what extent do efforts to dignify ECCE services for Africa or for other developing world peoples engage indigenous voices or incorporate their daily realities? Does this matter at all? Can we enhance people's lives from knowledge about their differences? Can we pause to examine the cost and harm from attempts to homogenize the world or to force-fit Africa from its outlying position into a Darwinian box? The development community has obstinately refused to learn from centuries of unrequited development in Africa. Interest blocks within the development community that frequently "invent" new ECCE policies and 'rush' into advocacy fail to acknowledge those who control the resources for their policy programs and who have yet to decide how their largesse would spread.

A UNESCO Prescription: Strong Foundations

UNESCO (2006) prescribes remedies within the *Global Monitoring Report* to enhance children's learning and development. The *Global Monitoring Report* also promotes ECCE as a major contributor, albeit a latent one, to national development and world peace. This is perhaps in recognition that children's early experiences generate the base for all their subsequent learning and development. Strong early childhood foundations—including good health, nutrition and a nurturing environment—are good for all future development. Understood thus, ECCE represents "an instrument to guarantee children's rights, opens the way to all the EFA goals and contributes powerfully to reducing poverty, the overarching objective to the Millennium Development Goals" (UNESCO, 2006, p. 25). It is therefore vital for national and international policy agendas to incorporate ECCE in the comprehensive vision of EFA as conceived in the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum.

Matsuura (UNESCO, 2006, p. i) draws critical attention to the dilemma presented in the EFA: GM report: "while regions farthest from the [Millennium] goals are making impressive progress" many countries are missing opportunities for children, youth and adults "by neglecting the connections among early childhood, primary and secondary education and adult literacy" (UNESCO, 2006, p. 15). Matsuura also highlights "the evidence suggests that young children in greatest need, who also stand to gain the most, are unlikely to have access to these programs" (p. i). This lack of access occurs not only because coverage remains very low in most of the developing world and few relevant programs are available for children under 3 years of age, but also because unaddressed disconnections and nuances exist in many countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa. A major source of difficulty is that Western conceptions of ECCE have subtly "devalued indigenous cultures and traditions so much that they are seen as being anti-progressive and somewhat outdated" (Callaghan, 1998, p. 30). For example, Africa, "whose distinctive culture is little appreciated" (Ellis, 1978, p. 1), is targeted for replacement instead of enhancement.

ECCE Diversity: Adjusting Africa's Realities

Is it more important to note the unprecedented support for the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) than to focus on the diversity of ECCE

services in different countries? ECCE diversity begins with its being an actively negotiated set of social relationships worldwide. “All societies have specific approaches to raising and educating young children. What we now have as ‘early childhood education’ is the pattern of crèches, preschools, kindergartens, primary classes, and early intervention programs...that developed between the 16th and 19th centuries in Europe and was imported to most corners of the globe.” (Woodill, 1992, p. 3)

In fact, every culture invests in children, not as an endstate but in recognition that variation among today’s adults is an outcome of diversity of experience in their childhood. All societies, albeit some with difficulty, make contextual provisions to meet children’s basic needs: initial learning from an early age, physical survival and the development of intelligences and competencies that are required to actively participate as citizens within their cultures. Even a cursory overview of the background papers, which informed the EFA Global Monitoring 2007 report, reveals this diversity. Incidentally, the report does not, to my initial reading of it, contain sufficient alerts to that diversity as I expected. The diversity implies divergent ecological and cultural circumstances for childhoods and ECCE services. For example, food is universally required but different food items are acceptable in different cultures, so some tact needs to be shown in determining the form of meals as well as ECCE services made available in different cultures.

The reality of the field in most of the developing world is that, as it is currently conceived and advocated, ECCE has become an actively imported rather than a homegrown set of social relationships evolving from women’s family social service. Like every import into Africa, ECCE has retained a vision vis-à-vis the indigenous ethnocultural reality, therein compelling adjustment at a local level. In this sense, it is another structural adjustment program. The *Global Monitoring Report* does not contain a package or guidelines for handling adjustment difficulties and related matters. Even if such guidelines were provided, this would still be a problematic utopia for countries without appropriate human resources, which have to rely on international consultants, whose training seems to have blinded them to ethnocultural realities and developmental norms other than those of the Euro-American context. The situation becomes more desperate for developing world peoples whose voice in any international forum cannot attain a critical mass to make a needed difference. This problem could be resolved by moving away from a winner-get-all model to a system that permits reports on the fate of the voiceless majority within international discourse.

Keen cultural sensitivity is required to formulate policies and design culturally relevant ECCE services to African and other developing world circumstances. Unfairness and disadvantage are factored into intervention efforts *ab initio* to contextualize advice by experts and specialists whose prolonged education excludes awareness of the circumstances of the peoples their expertise, specialization and professional services are designed and intended to liberate. If we are to truly uplift the suffering of destitute peoples of the world, we must urgently revolutionize education, not solely by developing culturally sensitive education curricula, but also by contextualizing and infusing it in both developed and developing nations with acute sensitivity to multicultural content in pluralistic societies. Central to this issue is whether an international civil servant or donor agent should be permitted the privilege of experiencing culture shock anywhere in the world? If powerful interest groups that gate-keep ECCE research and programs throughout the world permit this practice, then, they could be accused of proselytizing Euro-Americanism and

silencing non-western cultural realities by restricting entry of these voices into the ECCE knowledge base.

But how can we truly acknowledge, initiate and sustain respectful discourse to create state-of-the-art policies and programs that can be translated into ‘best practices’ across the messy variety of early childhood situations around the world? How, for example, do African societies transcend their current albeit bartered ethnocultural contexts, into the structurally different environments most often advocated in Western conceptions of ECCE? More specifically, what measures are available to support the transition of African societies from the ECCE work they have historically provided through the medium of social services to current approaches? Further, should African societies be required to diverge from their investment in children as social capital of their communities to the individualism implicit in much of the Western-orientated ECCE research and policies? One unexamined hunch is that had sub-Saharan Africa relied entirely on donor responses to its crisis with AIDS deaths the impact on the community would have been more devastating than realized. A critical protective factor that fostered resilience in this crisis was sibling caretaking: a role that is positively valued in African culture and that primed children into responsible family service from an early age and facilitated their transition into adult roles with the death of parents and caregivers. By being exclusionary and condemnatory of such vital contributions of cultural practices, current ECCE frameworks disempowered African peoples. The majority of the world’s population are in great difficulty simply because ours has become a world wherein a handful of conceptualists in powerful interest groups collude with the United Nations agencies to theorize and craft into policy and programs in unfamiliar terms, circumstances that diverge widely from the stark realities of people’s life paths and that instantly place their natural trajectories into informality or extinction. Does state-of-the-art linguistic terms and jargon truly reflect experienced realities? It is not so clear why rights activists and the development community do not perceive and react to this destabilizing dimension of ECCE, particularly the fact that many children in the developing world hide parts of their personalities because the Eurocentric ECCE services they receive render them ashamed to expose unique identities that differ from the Eurocentric norm (Vandenbroeck, 1999). Although the UNCRC rightly internationalizes ECCE issues, it resolutely bestows “a legal status on the right of one’s own identity; on respect for the background of every child” (Vandenbroeck, 1999, p. 13). As such, the report of the commission accentuates ECCE diversity. Does the apparent dislodgement of most children in non-Western contexts from their cultural heritages not contravene a provision of the UNCRC which guarantees children’s rights to a heritage? Should cultural heritages represented in foreign ECCE models be imported and imposed upon African children and families? “Those who have worked in international development are keenly aware that research based on a predominantly Western scientific paradigm is part of the story, but not the full story needed to move forward effectively in local development.” (Arnold, 2004, p. 46)

One expectation is that early childhood development experts and practitioners understand and endeavor to move children and their families forward from initial acceptance of their current status and circumstances, but the contrary seems to be the practice with present patterns of ECCE provisions (Nsamenang, 2006). In South Africa, Callaghan (1998) keenly recorded “a blindness and inability to see and value Africans in the African context” (p. 31). This is perhaps because ECCE work stands to lose the status

and control currently held by frontline groups, although a good deal of the work is at the expense of those the groups or these organizations are expected to serve. Many of these groups would strain to imagine the school as a restrictive institution whose pedagogy is inappropriate for the culture of life shared by many children around the world. Schoolwork that is rigid and mechanical deviates from children's natural fondness for laughter and play (Tzay, 1998). Pedagogy in African schools often requires children to learn in silence by listening attentively to teachers who speak to them in foreign languages. Children are often forbidden to speak to others in their native languages, which devalues their individual and cultural identities. It is not difficult to perceive the prevailing attitude and orientation in the ECCE field as one inconsistent with and intolerant of cultural diversity. This stands in the face of the evidence "that alternative patterns of care based on different moral and practical considerations can constitute normal patterns of development that had not been imagined in developmental theories" (LeVine, 2004, p. 163). This is consistent with the finding that experienced sub-Saharan African mothers understand infant care and development in ways that contrast "sharply with expert knowledge in the child development field" (LeVine, 2004, p. 149), a point that underscores the value of culturally appropriate approaches. But such strategies are scarce in Africa, where curricular models and best practice frameworks largely lose "sight of the soil out of which the existing African society has grown and the human values it has produced" (D. Westermann, as cited in Kishani, 2001, p. 37). Thus, the gap between African children's conditions and the theories and services that interveners apply to them persists because the field has adopted scripted conceptualizations in state-of-the-art lingo rather than relying on the embedded, contextual narratives of childhood routines. That culture potently determines the nature of many dimensions of children's developmental niches, including daily routines and settings, and parenting and childcare provisions, has yet to be incorporated into policy development and service programs in Africa or other parts of the globe (Nsamenang, in press).

EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007: Assumptions and Issues

Program Access I perceive many assumptions underlying the conception, drafting and publication of the Global Monitoring Report but I will identify only a few here. First, I wish to draw attention to the reliance on the dominant narrative and discourse. Why has the Global Monitoring Report, in the face of background papers portraying global diversity, adopted a universalistic narrative instead of a pluralistic account that could more appropriately elucidate how diverse childhood conditions generate novel solutions to support children in participatory communities (Lanyasunya & Lesolayia, 2001)? One could rebuff this comment by citing case studies in the Global Monitoring Report, but objective scrutiny reveals these examples as expensive ventures in privileged circumstances where there is limited evidence that services have been scaled up. First, "while many countries have made considerable progress in introducing policies that focus on the educational needs of marginalized children and youth, serious barriers to enrolment, retention, and attainment persist" (UNESCO, p. 69). Second, "as more countries approach universal primary education (UPE), the pressure to expand secondary education is rising dramatically, bringing new equity issues to the fore" (p. 81). Third, the "evidence for the impact of large scale cash incentive programs is limited mainly to Latin America" (p. 85) and would pose serious difficulties in Africa's low-income nations. Finally, one

interpretation is that the understanding of privileged circumstances is erroneously assumed to exist everywhere. But the authors of the Global Monitoring Report admit that “to monitor EFA goal 3 and the latter part of goal 4 remains a challenge. Both call for ‘equitable access’ to learning programs that meet the needs of youth and adults. Yet there is no common understanding of the types of structured learning activities that come under the umbrella of learning and life skills programs.” (p. 56)

Donor Aid This leads to the assumption regarding donor preferences and priorities. It is clear that “donor presence remains uneven across the world’s poorest countries and the relative importance donors give to education in total aid is not the same for all regions” (UNESCO, p. 21). Moreover, the assumption that donor charity, including that available through United Nations agencies, will permeate the entire needy world equitably underlies a grand hypothesis, which, in the long-term, may turn into shattered hopes. Low-resource Africa will need massive aid to make ECCE happen as currently advocated and to meet the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Further, Africa will attempt to accomplish this feat as a low priority region in the scope of world affairs and from the reality that “not enough of the aid reaches the low-income countries, nor is it sufficiently predictable....basic education remains at less than half the amount needed annually” (p. 85). An unexamined factor is that Africa’s development in general, and ECCE in particular, is being developed almost entirely on foreign aid. In this direction, the African Union (2006) recently lamented how Africa’s development partners dissipated energies and resources by implementing disparate programs in disregard of the agenda set by the African Union. Equity and the dire need of despondent peoples are not reflected in the geopolitical distribution of the much vaunted donor benevolence and priorities. In spite of rhetoric to the contrary, even the best intentions of donor charities unbelievably do not set priorities to match the magnitude of impact of disasters, like the Holocaust-like Darfur and the 1994 Rwandan carnage on African peoples. In fact, even a casual examination of the field might reveal unacceptable discrimination in the deployment of UN system resources to the detriment of Africa. The third issue, deriving from all this, pertains to the difficulties faced by the majority of developing world nations with conditions that vary from those inspired by traditional ECCE models. With scarce funds and/or an incapacity to effectively translate culturally foreign ideas into local ECCE services, ECCE in Africa falls well short of expectations. This state of the field prompts policy makers to unreservedly resort to advice from foreign experts and consultants. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this has not enhanced the circumstances of most African nations.

Expertise What constitutes expertise? Elsewhere, I have mused over whether expertise is best viewed as a form of procedural knowledge that can be applied universally across contexts or whether expertise consists of relevant knowledge about a place or condition that is applicable to unique situations (Nsamenang, 2005). Although these dimensions of expertise are not mutually incompatible, African governments rely more on expatriates than on their own experts. Can an expert without adequate awareness of the stark realities of Africa’s children effectively ground policy and intervention principles without consideration of these circumstances? Is the critical factor in expertise or consultancy that of a knowledgeable outsider expertly handling a local problem or that of an insider with keen sensitivity to the local conditions of, say, ECCE services in backward

Africa? To what extent are contemporary experts and consultants truly adaptive to the prevailing realities of non-Western peoples? Scott (1998) holds the view that experts lack the knowledge that can come only from practical experience. Do ECCE or other experts sent to redeem or consult for Africa possess such knowledge and sensitivity?

Ideology Another key issue is the framing of ECCE policy and programs on a tacitly invasive Euro-American theory of the universe. ECCE is “an instrumental, frontline strategy for achieving poverty reduction goals” (Arnold, 2004, p. 2). However, we have not imagined the difficulties that these goals pose to the peoples whose worldviews and ethnocultural realities deviate from those of the Euro-American world. In fact, an intrusive ideology sprouted from Europe’s Enlightenment and was cultivated into a progressive positivism and instrumental theory of the universe that engulfed all others. Disciplinary psychology, like institutional ECCE, is erected and edified on the narrative conventions of Western cultures, which are saturated with Euro-American ideologies, cultural values and epistemologies (Gergen, 1992); though in themselves they are and have never been homogeneous.

The social Darwinian project to universalize the Enlightenment disregards the idea that ECCE is “an article of export from one part of the world to another” (Danziger, 2006, p. 271). Since the Enlightenment, Europe has actively exported a Western conception of civilization and modernism in education and other life domains to the rest of the world. Essentially, this process is a by-product of what is referred to as cultural modernism (Gergen, 1992)—Europe’s civilizing mission for backward peoples. The modernization motif in Africa is founded on the conjecture that development and progress will continue to elude the Dark Continent until it is infused with at least a threshold dose of Western civilization (Nsamenang, 2005). This deficit model fails to draw strength from the uncharted fountain of Africa’s rich practices and the wisdom of her timeless traditions (Callaghan, 1998). That postmodernism is receptive to alternative ways of knowing about the non-Western mind and *modus vivendi* is evident more in rhetoric than reality. Decades of cross-cultural research, for instance, was not framed within the culture within which Africans “have already successfully practiced childrearing” for centuries (Callaghan, 1998, p. 31). Worse yet, the findings were not reported as integral to the knowledge base of ECCE but as African realities failing to measure up to Western norms. In fact, many questions about ECCE in Africa are unanswered or worse still, unasked. This is because the grids of Western ECCE were designed primarily on the Western child to the regrettable derogation of all others, particularly those of Africa’s “*les gens de la bouche*” (Diawara, 1998, p. 104) or the peoples of oral traditions, such as the West African griots.

This paper does not, *per se*, advocate turning away from Western civilization and its multiple benefits, nor does it subscribe to wholesale replacement of Africa’s systems with whatever other superior systems are available. My call for a more Africentric orientation does not constitute a Pol Potian argument. In concerned awareness, “the interventionist skin grafts onto Africa’s festering sores have failed to take or are shriveling off rapidly, due to a refusal to attend” to the afore-mentioned incompatibility between imported ECCE programs and indigenous African ECCE services (Nsamenang, 2005, p. 276). “The failure to ‘modernize’ Africa as rapidly as the ‘civilizing mission’ anticipated stems largely from the neglect, if not refusal, to blend Africa’s indigenous systems with those imported to ‘civilize’ the continent” (Nsamenang, *in press*).

Current ECCE efforts in Africa fail to work from two key premises. First, an African theory of the universe “constitutes a very different psychological frame of reference” from that which drives contemporary Western ECCE (Serpell, 1994, p. 18). Holism is intrinsic to Africa’s theory. It fuses together apparently disparate facets of the universe into a coherent frame of reference that highlights the fate of the human being (Nsamenang, 1992), not in his or her sovereignty but in personal integration into a community of other humans. It is a worldview that primes meaning of life, individuation and self-understanding primarily from socio-affective premises. Second, contemporary Africa is heir to a triple heritage (Mazrui, 1986), which is “a restive intermingling, like strands in a braid, of Eastern and Western [ECCE] legacies, superimposed on a deeply resilient Africanity” (Nsamenang, 2005, p. 276). Values of individual achievement, personal ambition and competition, which the school promotes, contradict those of family, cooperation, and sharing which indigenous education engenders. Today, the communitarism that characterizes all spheres of African life is ever present, but interventions ignore it.

ECCE Development Strategies: Faltering Attempts

Resource Exploitation Africa’s Dependency Index will increase greatly in the face of the financial and human resources required for the ECCE, which the Global Monitoring Report inspires. Although richly endowed with natural resources, Africa is a poor continent that will not effectively finance its ECCE services without importing funding from the foreign donor community. Furthermore, in spite of the enormous human potential in Africa, which it exports in brain drain and youth exodus, the current capacity level of human resources in Africa will not be able to bring to fruition the ECCE programs envisaged in the Global Monitoring Report.

Africa’s chronic scarcity of financial resources and limited human capacity are a result of the scramble for Africa. The historical scramble was not solely a search for spheres of influence but more importantly to gain access to Africa’s enormous resources. The rush has not declined but only transformed into neocolonial intrigues. In brief, Africa’s huge natural resources and tremendous human capital are, as they have always been, open to exploitation from outside forces. They underlie Africa’s difficult, if not impossible, transition into its own generative spirit and developmental trajectory. Simply stated, Africa’s resources historically have been depleted for the benefit of other-than-African communities. Rather than benefiting from the worth of these natural resources, destitute African populations have set into internecine wars in different regions. Why should our rights-driven world acquiesce to external demands for resources from a potentially rich continent like Africa, leaving the generous continent unable to garner the means to lay a strong foundation for her children?

Capacity Building Discourse on solutions to Africa’s appalling condition tends not to focus on the centrality of the afore-cited issues, but it instead posits and blames African culture as inimical to progress and development. The permanent solution to a people’s starvation problem is foreshadowed in the wisdom of a Chinese proverb that speaks of teaching people how to fish instead of donating fish to relieve their hunger crisis. Thus far, building capacity in African populations through education and technology transfer from

the development community have existed more in lip service than in actuality. Discourse on the reasons why Africa is unable to fund its ECCE programs while its natural resources feed Western industries and her human capital sustain Western capitalism is remarkably muted. This unfairness is stated most profoundly by Frederick Masinde: “If Africa could be granted an additional 1% share in global trade, she would earn for herself much more than she is currently being given in foreign aid” (cited in Barsby, 2006, p. 52).

Africentric Literacy Whereas Western expertise and technology loudly dictate the fate of Africa’s vast resources, African expertise snapped and became silent at that historic point in time when the political leadership adopted the allegedly neutral imperial languages for schooling. Through this critical act, the politicians succeeded in stunting indigenous language development and the ability of individuals to articulate and convey indigenous points of view (Nsamenang, 2005). The proficiency levels of most African researchers, policy planners and experts in the adopted languages remain at a level that constrains communication of Africa’s unique cultural content and identity worldwide. Internationally competitive bodies of Africentric knowledge and modus operandi need to be established.

What fails to be exposed in most accounts of African ECCE is the sub-Saharan African experience that highlights the upsetting disjunction that exists between Western-based policies and local realities. Western forms of institutional ECCE services open Africans into an educational process by which they, from one developmental stage to the next, increasingly gain in putative knowledge and skills but disturbingly dip into alienation and ignorance of cultural circumstances and agrarian livelihoods. Service programs and schooling curricula, deficient on local content and oblivious of national skills demands, lead to the subjugation of African identity (Nsamenang, 2005). Education, beginning with ECCE, thus systematically transforms Africans into Eurocentric literate citizens who are quite ignorant of and hence inexpert to understand, analyze and escape their awful conditions.

Concluding Thoughts

“If survival depended on the triumph of the strong, then the species would perish. So the real reason for survival, the principle factor in the ‘struggle for existence,’ is the love of adults for their young” (Maria Montessori, cited in Vargas-Barón, 2005). Love for the young, like ECCE services within which it is actualized, is packaged in a wide variety of cultural and emotional expressions, such that no way of loving children might translate as a universal fact of humanity. Adult-child bonding as discussed in attachment research constitutes only one form of expressing caring affection for children; others deserve attention and mapping out through culture-sensitive research. While “many aspects of human development and functioning are no doubt universal, such universality cannot be postulated on the basis of research in a single cultural group; it must be demonstrated empirically across a variety of human populations” (Dasen & Jahoda, 1986, p. 413). This has not been done for ECCE.

Two critical lacunae deserve mention. First, in one instance, Africa’s ECCE systems are treated as not conducive to progress; at other instances, Africa’s ECCE services sustain population growth rates above many others. Is this attitude designed to disable and confuse Africa or to introduce double standards into African affairs? The

conditions, which the development community in general, and donor countries in particular, insist that Africa must follow to qualify for aid, disable and confuse Africans. For instance, ECCE is in dire need of “greater policy coherence in a period when many national governments, including Washington, are sensibly exhorting African governments to spend more on primary health care and education while international financial institutions, largely controlled by those same Western governments, have been pressing African countries to shrink their government payrolls, including teachers and health care workers.” (Africa and the summit, 2005, p. 3)

Second, ECCE services invest in children 0–8 years of age and adolescent services are intended for children from the onset of puberty; therefore, no formally espoused programmatic structure appears to cover the cohort between the age of 8 years and entry into the pubescent period.

The ECCE field in Africa is far more complex than current interventions and theories allow for. The complexity stems from the ECCE realities imported from Arabic-Islamic legacies and Western-Christian fragments that now live together with the indigenous African versions in the same communities and children. In the face of Africa’s ECCE hybridism, one would like to see the development community begin to respectfully incorporate Africa’s ECCE systems, which possess their own coherence and value, into the field’s knowledge base. The success of ECCE programs in Africa, as apparent in the EFA 2007 *Global Monitoring Report*, will depend on delicately balancing and enhancing the benefits of creating institutions and educational systems that reflect indigenous African and imported ECCE, while attentively addressing the vocal and silent but mixed motives of stakeholders and the apprehensions they engender (Nsamenang, in press).

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