RECONCEPTUALIZING ECCD IN THE MAJORITY WORLD:
ONE MINORITY WORLD PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

In October and November of 1997 I had the opportunity to share some recent “reconceptualizations” of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) ideas that I have been developing with Peter Moss (Coordinator of the European Child Care Commission, 1986-1996) and Dr. Gunilla Dahlberg (University of Stockholm) with experienced ECCD professionals from two different areas of the Majority World: Africa and S.E. Asia. In both cases the opportunity was provided via Regional ECCD Institutes, which I assisted in developing and which were supported largely through UNICEF with hosting by Regional groups. Both Institutes were fully subscribed (26 in Africa, 30 in S.E. Asia). The Africa Institute was held for a 3 week period and the S.E. Asia Institute for 2 weeks. For both Institutes, in addition to organizational activities, I had responsibility for approximately 1 1/2 days of presentation and discussion.
The focus of my 1 1/2 days was the promotion of community-sensitive and community-supportive approaches to ECCD. The topic was selected, in part, in reaction to the growing influence of Western based or Minority World models of early childhood care, education and development throughout the non-western or Majority World. While there is much in the minority World approaches that should be studied and considered, these approaches should not be understood as the way, or the “best” way, but rather as an approach to ECCD with particular roots and contexts in the west. Part of the professional tradition of ECCD in the west is a reliance on an “exclusionary” planning model based on a select number of “expert voices”. This tradition, by no means exclusive to ECCD professionals, is based on a modernist understanding of knowledge as largely immutable and universal in nature. My purpose was to critique these perspectives and consider alternatives. While the critique at a practice level centred on the issue of exclusion vs. inclusion, at a philosophical level the critique was couched in modernist vs. post-modernist perspectives.

The workshop topic was chosen, in part, in an effort to determine the degree to which exclusionary practices and modernist philosophy have been adopted in the Majority World countries attending the workshops. I also sought to determine the degree of participant receptivity to a more inclusionary and post-modernist approach when this option was presented.

In engaging in this critique, I wished to pose a number of questions and dilemmas to the participants, including among others:

1. To what degree do Euro-Western child development and child care theories fit local perspectives regarding development and care?
2. What role should local perspectives play in the education and practice of ECCD practitioners?
3. If local and Euro-western thought are not congruent, which perspective do you believe is “better”?
4. In your country how congruent are parents’ and trained caregivers’ perspectives regarding appropriate child care practices?
5. To what degree are ECCD practices at programme, parent and policy levels actively exclusionary - that is, primarily expert or small-group driven?
6. To what degree are those countries or programs that challenge Euro-western perspectives, prepared to see their own positions as also relative when challenged by groups within their own country?
7. To what degree has Euro-western thought regarding children, child development and childrens’ programming influenced training and related support structures in the Majority World?

The questions were intended to be provocative. No “easy answers” were waiting in the wings. Individuals were expected to examine their own practice and ideology as well as those of other individuals and institutions with which they work.

The motivation for approaching my relatively small part of the overall Institute in this way follows from two major preceding activities: (1) My ECCD work with a number of First Nations or Aboriginal Peoples in Canada over the past