

Children, Families, Communities, and Professionals: Preparation for Competence and Collaboration in ECD Programs

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Abstract: Under the broad banner of education, training, and collaboration across systems, this paper examines, through analysis of seven individual projects, issues and insights associated with three central themes: (1) the link between ECD programs and children's school readiness; (2) the promotion of parenting enrichment programs as a childcare quality enhance-

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ment strategy and the fostering of parent-school collaborations; and (3) curricular design for personnel training and strategies for (a) increasing societal awareness of ECD issues and (b) nurturing professional networking and partnership building across key stakeholder groups. The primary works discussed in the paper include one empirical study testing specific hypotheses with a large data set, one international comparative case study of school-community collaboration, and several program development projects employing multiple methodologies to gather various forms of data as input into the program development process. The paper emphasizes the discussion of intriguing and critical issues connected to the main thematic sections, in the hope that the issues raised would inform future research, policy formulation, program development, and program-level practice.

The African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” has been popularized in North America during the course of the past decade through former United States First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton’s book *It Takes a Village and Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (Clinton, 1996). An important book published recently in the United States by some of the leading contributors to scholarship on early childhood development and education in Africa today (Swadener, Kabiru, & Njenga, 2000) appropriately employs this same proverb in its analytic and incisive examination of the changing nature of child-rearing and early childhood education in Kenya. There is more than symbolic importance to opening this article with these words of wisdom which can, in some ways, be said to have become an African philosophical contribution to the near-elusive search for greater collective social responsibility in child development policy, even in a nation as resource-rich as the United States of America. These eight powerful words capture some of the core developmental, educational, moral-ethical, and economic arguments frequently made in the scholarly literature worldwide in support of increased societal investments in the early childhood years (see McCain & Mustard, 1999; Mustard, 2002; Myers, 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; and Young, 2002 for examples of specific arguments).

What is not readily apparent from a cursory invocation of this proverb is the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the child and the village that is so pervasive in both African philosophical thought and ordinary day-to-day life. A careful search of African proverbial language will surely yield many wise sayings reflecting the child’s expected contributions to the preservation of the “village.” A moving experiential account from Maya Angelou’s *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes*

(Angelou, 1986) provides a vivid historiographic illustration of this point. Angelou's recounting of her last days in Africa during the 1960s—a period during which the fledgling Pan-African movement held the best hope of reconnecting Black Americans with their roots in Africa—climaxes around a visit to Keta, an Ewe town in the southeastern Volta Region of Ghana. During this visit, her profound physical resemblance to the local women and the surprising discovery by these women that she is an “American Negro” triggers memories, handed down generations of descendants, of the devastation brought to the village of Keta in the era of the slave trade. These memories convince the local women that Angelou is a descendant of the stolen mothers and fathers of Keta, sparking an intense mourning that perplexes Angelou until her subdued friend and linguistic guide provides her the following explanation of the day's events:

During the slavery period, Keta was a good sized village. It was hit very hard by the slave trade. Very hard. In fact, at one point every inhabitant was either killed or taken. The only escapees were children who ran away and hid in the bush. Many of them watched from their hiding places as their parents were beaten and put into chains. . . . *The children were taken in by the nearby villagers and grew to maturity. They married and had children and rebuilt Keta* (our emphasis). They told the tale to their offspring. (p. 206)

Within this episode from a sad chapter in the history of human civilization are at least three powerful messages: (1) the power of a communitarian ethic in building and restoring hope through shared responsibility for the care and well-being of other people's children; (2) the resilient nature of children, especially in the context of supportive and caring communities; and (3) the well-being of children as the foundation for the survival and future vitality of the community itself, as illustrated by the rebuilding and restoration of the village of Keta by its once dislocated and traumatized children.

The health and well-being of ‘the village’ are crucial to its ability to raise a child. Indeed, when Hillary Clinton invoked the African proverb, she did so, in her own words, as “a timeless reminder that children will thrive only if their families thrive and if the whole of society cares enough for them” (Clinton, 2002, p. 12). Through systems and ecological theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Cochran & Brassard, 1979), contemporary developmental psychology affirms and extends these age-old fundamental values and principles about children and their developmental contexts. An observation made by Nicholas Hobbs and his associates at a time when the ecological movement was beginning to manifest itself in applied work in North America captures quite aptly the interdependencies among children's developmental needs, family capacity, and community support:

Human development, properly understood, focuses not only on individuals and their personal developmental potentials but also on the *contexts* in which individual development occurs. The most influential of these is the family, and the family, of course, is set within its own developmental context, the community. If we fail to take account of these pervasive influences on the course of human development, we fail to understand human development itself. We believe the strengthening of families within supportive and caring communities is a desirable goal in itself . . . (Hobbs, Dokecki, Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 1984, p. 2)

One clear implication of this ecological perspective is that at the macro levels of national development planning and social policy formulation, the approach to ECD must be an integrated systems-oriented process that places as much emphasis on strengthening communities and improving the quality of life within them as it does on child-centered curricula activities designed to promote optimal development in young children directly. All over the Majority World there has been a noticeable and assuring shift toward recognition of how critically important the 'community base' is to the successful implementation of all kinds of human services programs. After years of presenting the Majority World with 'transport models' of service delivery grounded in the institution-based paradigm that had been the hallmark of service delivery in the industrialized world (Marfo, 1998), international governmental and non-governmental aid agencies began, in the 1980s, to emphasize community-based approaches (see Helander, Mendis, & Nelson, 1980; Marfo, 1983, 1986). From the primary health care (PHC) and disability rehabilitation 'revolutions' of the 1980s to the early childhood care and development revolution of contemporary times (see Kirpal, 2002; Pence, 1999), the *community-based* approach has become the dominant paradigm for thinking about transformational programs and services.

For many Majority World nations, the community-based approach is both culturally compatible and sociopolitically realistic. Paradoxically, many of the 'community development' initiatives that were a signature feature of national development efforts in the immediate post-independence eras in many parts of the Majority World gave way, a long time ago, to models of nation building that jettisoned the community development emphasis out of national development planning. Because the viability of community-based programs depends as much on the vitality and resourcefulness of communities as it does on the nature and quality of the programs themselves, it is absolutely important that ECD policies and programs be accompanied by concerted efforts to build strong and resourceful communities.

At the micro levels of program development and implementation, the

foregoing principle translates into a need for close attention to be paid to strategies and mechanisms that enhance the quality of children's early developmental experiences (in home as well as in formal care and education settings) and maximize the participation of families and communities in the pursuit and attainment of this goal. This paper explores a broad range of issues related to the specific mechanisms by which the values and ideals that inform ECD policies are translated into practice in the real world.

Under the broad banner of education, training, and collaboration across systems, the issues examined in this paper are based on reflective analysis and synthesis of topics explored by seven members of the first ECDVU cohort in their required thesis or major project research. The topics include the link between ECD programs and children's school readiness, the promotion of parenting enrichment programs as a childcare quality enhancement strategy, the fostering of parent-school collaborations, the design and delivery of personnel training programs, and the design of communication tools to develop broader societal awareness of ECD issues and nurture professional networking and partnership building across key stakeholder groups.

The individual research projects are summarized in Tables 1 to 7, using an organizational framework that permits a quick gleaning by the reader of the central features of each project (foci and objectives, questions and/or procedures, and key insights or highlights from the findings). The tabular summaries, in turn, provide the backdrop for an integrative discussion of insights and critical questions arising from the projects. The discussion of substantive issues emerging from the projects is organized under the following three sections: (1) school readiness; (2) parenting enrichment and parent-school-community relationships; and (3) personnel training and professional networking/advocacy.

School Readiness

Children's ability to enter the school environment ready to learn the formal academic skills deemed necessary for future success as productive members of society has been a central concern in many societies for ages. Even in transitional societies where formal schooling has a relatively recent history—one that coincides with the era of Western colonization—we can identify varying conceptions of school readiness in the way families, communities, and national governments have responded to both the advent and importance of schooling throughout the years. In the African context we can even find rudimentary measures of school readiness that were tied not just to informal judgments about linguistic

and/or social-cognitive competence, but to a “demonstrable measure” of physical maturation. For example, in the 1950s it was not uncommon, in rural Ghanaian communities, to see children denied or offered admission into Primary Class One based on their ability to reach over the head with one hand to touch the tip of the ear on the opposite side of the body. In communities where this was the norm, families came to rely on this measure in determining if they should attempt to enroll a child at the beginning of a given school year.

The school readiness movement most likely has multiple historical roots. In the industrialized world, particularly North America, the history of ‘interventions’ to promote school readiness can be traced as far back as the infant school movement, which began in Scotland around 1816 and spread to (and fizzled out in) the United States and Canada between 1825 and 1835 (see Pence, 1986). However, the early intervention movement touched off in the United States by the Economic Opportunities Act of 1964, the legislation that led to the launching of Project Head Start in 1965, is seen largely as the foundation for the modern school readiness movement (Marfo, 2002, 2004). The history of Head Start shows clearly that the program’s design was informed by a much more laudably comprehensive perspective on child development than is noticeable through the manner in which the program has been evaluated in the past (see Zigler & Muenchow, 1992; Zigler & Styfco, 1993, 2004). However, notwithstanding its much broader mission and emphasis on the role of early education, health, nutrition, parent education, and community involvement in children’s development, Head Start has in recent years come to be associated predominantly with the preparation of poor children in the academic skills necessary for success in school.

The 1990s marked an unprecedented globalization of the early childhood development (ECD) movement, with a much broader emphasis on the holistic development of the child. As Pence et al. (in this issue) have indicated, the Jomtien Declaration emerging from the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) was a significant catalyst for the ECD movement. Article 5 of the Jomtien Declaration, quoted in part below, directly links holistic ECD to school readiness:

The learning capacity and value orientations of children are largely determined by the time the child reaches the age of formal schooling. . . . Well conceived quality early education programs help meet the diverse needs of young children during the crucial early years of life, enhance their readiness for schooling, have a positive and permanent influence on later schooling achievement, and are a major point of entry for family education programs. (UNESCO, 1995)

Given the close intertwining of ECD programs and school readiness, it is significant that one of the most extensive research studies to be conducted by the first cohort of ECDVU graduates focused on school readiness. Samuel Ngaruiya (2004) used an experimental design to examine the potential differential impact of the following variables on school readiness outcomes: (1) type of preschool (private versus public); (2) community-level socioeconomic status; and (3) the degree of developmental appropriateness within programs. The key findings from this study are summarized in Table 1 and will not be repeated here. Instead, we devote the space to a discussion of the significance and implications of selected issues and several of the key findings.

On the Appropriate Use of a School Readiness Assessment Instrument

Sensitivity to cultural appropriateness and strong regard for the place of indigenous knowledge are major issues of concern in the design, delivery, and monitoring or evaluation of ECD programs in Africa (see Schafer et al., this issue). Ngaruiya's work deals with the critical issue of assessment, in this case the assessment of children's readiness for school at age 6. The School Readiness Assessment Instrument (SRAI) used in this work is an adaptation of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) developed by Canadian researchers Dan Offord and Magdalena Janus and normed recently on 16,000 children by researchers in the province of British Columbia (Hertzman, McLean, Kohen, Dunn, & Evans, 2002). Ngaruiya recognizes and addresses the cultural relevance issue by devoting the first phase of his project to extensive revision of the original tool, followed by piloting of the adapted version in schools with characteristics similar to those sampled for his actual study. Key elements of the adaptation process included simplification of the language to suit the level of the teachers, replacement of information deemed irrelevant to the local context, and inclusion of items to assess the functional level of children's gross motor development and the presence of functional impairments. This level of attention to cultural relevance and appropriateness is absolutely necessary in all efforts to adapt foreign instruments for use in the African ECD context. And it is especially important to monitor the use of such instruments to ensure that they are not used for classification or selection and placement purposes.

On the Dangers of Focusing Exclusively on the Child

Ngaruiya appropriately raises concerns about the use of the SRAI. In the North American context, the assessment of school readiness is now a hotly debated issue. Two specific concerns that are central to this debate (e.g., Marfo, 2001) are particularly worth mentioning here. The first is the

Table 1: School Readiness Project Summary (Ngaruiya)

Project Identifiers	Focus & Objectives	Questions and/or Procedures	Selected Highlights, Insights, Lessons
Author: Samuel Ngaruiya	Empirical study of 207 children from 27 centers examining disparities in the nature and quality of preschool programs and assessing school readiness outcomes in relation to program type (public versus private), locality SES, and developmental appropriateness of practices within programs.	Adapted Early Development Instrument from Canada into the School Readiness Assessment Instrument. Developed observation and interview protocols to measure developmental appropriateness of program settings.	Notable disparities: 1. Entry age for children in private preschools tended to be 3; it was 5 for those in public preschools. 2. Children from middle and higher SES communities were more likely to enter preschool at age 3; low SES children tended to enter at 5. 3. Educational backgrounds were strongest for teachers in high SES communities and lowest in low SES communities. 4. Teachers were better paid in private preschool than in public ones.
Country: Kenya			
Title: Assessing the Influence of Different Early Childhood Development Models on Pre-School Children's School Readiness in Kenya	The 4 program models examined in study were Public, Private, Montessori, Madrasa. 3 SES neighborhoods: Low, Middle, and High.	Research issues addressed: 1. The relative differential impact of private and public preschool programs on readiness outcomes. 2. The relative differential impact of SES on readiness outcomes. 3. The link between developmental appropriateness of program setting and readiness outcomes (observations/interviews to measure developmental appropriateness of settings were conducted by DIECE trainers over a one-week period)	Notable child outcomes: 1. About one-fifth of the children studied scored below the 25 th percentile and were considered <i>not ready</i> for school (18% for socio-emotional; 21% for language and cognition; 22% for physical development and well-being). 2. Children considered least ready for school on measures of language/cognition and physical development were more likely to live in low SES communities. 3. On socio-emotional development, children from low SES areas outperformed the other groups of children. 4. Programs in high and middle SES areas were rated higher on developmental appropriateness. 5. Children in private preschools had better school readiness outcomes than those in public preschools.

concern that an emphasis on child assessment has the tendency to reinforce a view of school readiness problems as shortcomings or challenges that are mostly inherent in the child. The second is that assessment tends to emphasize placement at the expense of prevention and intervention. Ngaruiya addresses the first of these concerns by emphasizing in his conceptual review the importance of approaching school readiness from an interactionist perspective. This perspective considers school readiness as entailing both the development of relevant competencies on the part of the child and the readiness or capacity of schools to meet the individual needs of children. In discussing his findings, Ngaruiya addresses the second concern by stressing the intervention function of the SRAI, noting that the assessment should not be used for placement but rather for providing a linkage between preschool and primary school. He views the purpose of assessment as providing information on school readiness to teachers so that they can provide appropriate instruction to help those children who are at a lower school readiness level to catch up with the rest.

It is extremely important for the emerging ECD field in Africa to avoid some of the manifest and potential pitfalls in approaches to school readiness that have occurred in the United States especially. Generally speaking, the developmental principles driving the school readiness movement in the United States acknowledge both the foundational importance of the first three years of life and the centrality of a holistic approach to child development. However, the pervasive preoccupation with academic underachievement and failure in the school years is resulting in a disproportionate investment of policy attention and fiscal resources into the two years immediately preceding formal school entry. The growing rhetoric about the importance of the earliest years of life has not been matched with commensurate investment of resources into promoting optimal, holistic development and general quality of life in the first three years (Marfo, 2001, 2002, 2004). It is significant, therefore, that Ngaruiya also underscores “the need to address the inequalities in school readiness before children start formal schooling” (p. 118).

An Interesting Finding Regarding Socioemotional Outcomes

A countertrend of significant note in Ngaruiya’s data is the finding that while children from low SES neighborhoods had significantly weaker school readiness outcomes in physical development/well-being and in language and cognition, they had better socioemotional outcomes than children from relatively better SES conditions. Ngaruiya offered several speculative explanations for this finding, the most plausible and intriguing of which was the resilience explanation. It is very likely that the conditions under which poor children develop expose them to experi-

ences, roles, and responsibilities that, while potentially burdensome for young children, could be enhancing their socioemotional maturity and functioning. Hopefully neither this nor the author's original explanations will be the final word on this issue. In the context of the practical realities that young children face in their earliest years of development on the continent, a potentially fruitful area of further research is one that thoroughly explores varying types of developmental outcomes in relation to the home and community experiences of children across different socioeconomic and sub-cultural contexts.

Parenting Enrichment and Community-School Collaboration

Ecological and contextualist theories consider the developmental environment of the child as consisting of "a complex system of physical, social, cultural, and historical factors that interact with each other and with the developing individual" (Bolger, Caspi, Downey, & Moorehouse, 1988). Within this complex system of interactive forces, parenting and family processes are seen as crucial proximal factors with direct influences on children's development of competence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In contemporary society, children's immediate caretaking environments transcend the family setting to include institutions and programs providing formal care, developmental enrichment, and education to children. Children's developmental outcomes and overall well-being are seen, therefore, to depend not only on the richness of the individual caretaking settings but also on the quality of the interactions that occur across settings.

This view of the interconnectedness of settings assumes paramount importance in the context of ECD programs. In addition to their direct influences on children's development, parents and families exert indirect influences through their contributions to the quality of ECD programs. Properly conceived ECD programs, in turn, contribute to the parenting capacity of families through their delivery of family and community education programs. It is for this reason that ECD specialists have come to increasingly see family and community involvement as an indispensable ingredient in effective and successful programming (Evans, 1998; Landers, 1992).

Parenting and parent/community-school collaborations are central themes in the projects undertaken by several of the ECDVU graduates. Abeba Habtom's (2004) work focused on programming for parenting enrichment as a national strategy for promoting the holistic development of Eritrean children in the earliest years of life. Using a broad-based participatory approach, she developed a parenting enrichment program,

an accompanying manual, and a facilitators' guide for the training of trainers (see Table 2 for project details).

Wunesh Woldeselassie Bairu (2004) took good advantage of her relocation to the United States to conduct a case study of community-school collaboration within the School District of Bristol County in the state of Rhode Island. Her goal was to identify practices, policies, and general lessons that could be applied meaningfully to the promotion of community-school collaborations in Eritrea and other countries on the Horn of Africa (see Table 3 for project details).

Starting with a multi-method case study of two Nigerian communities, in which parental involvement in local schools was analyzed, Celestina A. Ibetoh (2004) developed a guide aimed at promoting effective parent-school partnerships. Like Habtom's project, Ibetoh's is an excellent example of the participatory approach to program development. The insights leading to the development of the guide were based not only on her own expertise but on extensive input received from key stakeholder groups who were assembled to discuss the outcomes of a needs assessment study (see Table 4 for details). While the thematic issues identified for discussion in the following sections are based on analytic discussions of these three projects, additional insights are drawn from a fourth project that was designed primarily to promote information dissemination and professional networking through the creation of a national ECD newsletter (Muheirwe, 2004, see Table 7 for project details).

Sensitivity to Local Contexts in Programming for Parenting Enhancement in ECD

Across all cultures, families are acknowledged as the child's first and foremost developmental environment and parents are seen as the very first teachers children encounter on their developmental journey. Habtom's work underscores this universally held view of the family as the first prime social ecology for development. Drawing on scholarship from around the world, she shows how the conception of the family as the foundation for children's growth and development has been translated into parent education programs. The Chinese experience is particularly instructive here. The China National Institute of Educational Research and Family Education, according to Baolan and Xiaoping (1995, in Habtom, 2004), underscores the pivotal power of families to both enhance the good effects of schooling and offset the negative socialization influences within school and society at large. Consequently, "China perceives family education as a public matter affecting both the attainment of the global target of basic education for all and the improvement of the cultural quality of the Chinese nation" (Habtom, 2004, p. 8). Parents' schools, as

Table 2: Parenting Enrichment and Parent-School Collaboration Project Summaries (*Habtom*)

Project Identifiers	Focus & Objectives	Questions and/or Procedures	Selected Highlights, Insights, Lessons
Author: Abeba Habtom	Development of a parenting enrichment program, an accompanying manual, and a facilitators' guide for a "train the trainers" implementation strategy.	Used a participatory process (involving, especially, parents and other grassroots stakeholders in communities) to develop program content.	Making the enrichment of parenting a priority requires clear recognition and acknowledgment of parents' wishes and values regarding childcare and development.
Country: Eritrea			
Title: Improving the Quality of Childcare Through Parenting Enrichment and Training of Trainers: The Eritrea Model	Training of regional trainers to provide training at the local level in Parenting Enrichment Intervention.	Used consensus-building workshops to obtain guidance and affirmation of both program content and training methodology. Presented workshops to prepare 35 Zoba Trainers of Trainers with varying roles and backgrounds: 6 ECD Coordinators, 6 ECCE Supervisors, 6 ECD Communicators; 6 Health Promoters, 6 Agricultural or Food/Nutrition Promoters, and 6 Kindergarten Directors and Teachers.	Participatory planning and implementation should involve parents, communities, and grassroots partners. Building family and community capacity should be a top priority in planning and training efforts. Pre-packaged models of parenting support/education may create more self-doubt than improve parenting abilities. The best interventions are those that allow for local creativity, respond to realities within the local context, and are given time to develop gradually before large-scale mass implementation. New initiatives should, as much as possible, build on existing efforts and systems. It is important for existing cadres of trainers to be seen as legitimate stakeholders, even while new and creative directions are pursued in ways that produce better results than traditional systems.

Table 3: Parenting Enrichment and Parent-School Collaboration Project Summaries (*Ibetoh*)

Project Identifiers	Focus & Objectives	Questions and/or Procedures	Selected Highlights, Insights, Lessons
<p>Author: Celestina Ibetoh</p> <p>Country: Nigeria</p> <p>Title: A Guide for Effective Collaboration Between Schools and Parents: A Cooperative Development and Delivery Approach</p>	<p>Sought input from key stakeholders in order to develop a manual to facilitate effective parent-school collaboration.</p> <p>Research focused on assessing understandings about effective collaboration between schools and parents.</p>	<p>Used extensive interviews, observations, focus group discussions, and record review.</p> <p>A purposive sample of 30 participants of school personnel, parents, community leaders from <i>two communities</i> were involved in the interviews and focus group discussions.</p> <p>Held a three-day seminar to discuss outcomes of needs assessment and to obtain input and recommendations to guide the development of the manual on effective parent-school collaboration.</p>	<p>Some Key Findings/Observations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In one community, the PTA minutes book revealed regular meetings, with a minimum of 20 parents and 15 teachers attending each monthly meeting. Detailed records were kept of decisions taken and the implementation of projects/activities approved at meetings. There was evidence of parity between teachers and parents at meetings, and visits by parents to tell stories to children were a common occurrence. 2. In the other community, only 4 meetings were held over a 2-year period, with attendance never exceeding 8 parents and 4 teachers. There was little documentation of proceedings and actions taken at meetings, and parents hardly visited the school to tell stories to children. <p>Some General Recommendations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaborations can be more effective when opportunities are created for parents and teachers to collectively articulate, discuss, and reflect on their beliefs and practices. 2. To facilitate effective collaboration, strategies for freeing up parents' time must be adopted, including the provision of micro credit facilities and parent education. 3. Effective collaboration thrives on mutual respect for all parties involved in the collaborative process.

Table 4: Parenting Enrichment and Parent-School Collaboration Project Summaries (Bairu)

Project Identifiers	Focus & Objectives	Questions and/or Procedures	Selected Highlights, Insights, Lessons
<p>Author: Wunesh Woldeslassie Bairu</p> <p>Country: Eritrea/USA</p> <p>Title: Curriculum Development Using Community Resources</p>	<p>Used a case study of an American school district—Bristol County in the State of Rhode Island—to identify lessons on school community relations for Eritrea.</p>	<p>Questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How do community-school partnerships work to enhance children's learning? How are community resources used to support the curriculum of pre-primary and elementary schools? What can countries on the horn of Africa, particularly Eritrea, learn from this case study? <p>Methods:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Textual analysis of documents on school-community relations in the East Bay area of Rhode Island. Collected interview and questionnaire data from 10 informants who were actively involved in school management and Parent-Teacher Organizations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Schools regard the communities as essential partners in their efforts to achieve excellence and parents regard community involvement in schools as important. Every school has an autonomous Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) through which parents and school staff work together to support the school. In addition to promoting the involvement of parents in their children's education, PTOs support curricular and extra-curricular activities through fund-raising, volunteering in classrooms and field trips, and organizing social events. PTOs have an active representation on School Improvement Teams (SITs) charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing plans for improving all spheres of a school's functioning. Parent-teacher contact data in the State of Rhode Island for the years 1997 to 2000 showed greatest contact at the K-3, followed by the Grades 4 to 5, middle school, and high school, respectively. Parental attendance of parent-teacher conferences for the same period showed attendance to be highest at the elementary level and lowest at the high school level. There is broad support for finding ways to use community resources more efficiently to provide learning experiences for children, but there is also agreement that this ideal is yet to be achieved.

Chinese parent education programs are called, are therefore organized in a great variety of forms with sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of all parents regardless of place of residence or professional and sub-cultural backgrounds.

The parenting enrichment program developed by Habtom is informed by insights and principles drawn from global examples like the Chinese experience. While the ultimate goal is to implement a program that is accessible to Eritrean families nationally, Habtom is careful to eschew a “one size fits all” approach to program delivery. Flexibility and local adaptation are key guiding concepts for the program. The program allows each community to prioritize its needs according to local conditions and realities, including sociocultural and socioeconomic differences. The underlying principle is clearly articulated in the following position statement: “Insofar as it is not possible for any ‘centralized’ program to know all such differences, it is important that any program devised [for a diverse population] provide what Pence and McCallum (1994) refer to as an ‘open architecture’—a structure that allows for the words, priorities, values and beliefs of local contexts to enter into the curriculum of a training program” (Habtom, 2004, pp. 37-38).

The attainment of this desirable ideal in ECD work in Africa will require not just the preparation of more ECD personnel to work directly with children and families but also the training of a cadre of mid-level professional support staff who bring this context-sensitive orientation to in-service training and technical assistance. The roles of this cadre of professionals will need to be defined in ways that place them in a position to provide hands-on support to front-line caregivers in the development and adaptation of materials and methods in response to local circumstances. Features of Habtom’s parenting enrichment program that illustrate the importance of these roles include the *parenting enrichment flip charts and posters*, the *parenting enrichment readers*, and the *parenting enrichment interactive radio program*. These mid-level professionals must, in turn, be supported through regional and national infrastructures for information exchange and networking that facilitate easy accessibility to, and sharing of, creative and innovative practices emerging from any part of the ECD world. Monica Muheirwe’s effort to establish a national ECD newsletter in Uganda is a timely example of one aspect of this needed infrastructural support (see Table 7 for project details).

Combining Innovation and Creativity with Wise Use of Existing Structures and Resources

An important theme worth highlighting that receives attention, particularly in Habtom’s work, is the issue of aligning new and old systems

or structures in an era of program proliferation. As the new era of ECD programming unfolds and our infatuation with exciting new ideas and service delivery models is heightened, sight must not be lost of the potential for (1) ill-conceived superimposition of new structures over existing ones or (2) the sidelining and marginalization of existing expertise.

The reality of resource limitations and the indirect personnel costs associated with demoralization of the workforce both require prudence in the way we transition to the ECD programs and services of tomorrow. In developing and implementing the parenting enrichment program, Habtom found herself needing, at times, to develop a completely new team to lead the innovative training efforts, bypassing existing structures for training that were found to be rigid and slow in effecting change. Nevertheless, even as she encourages us to dare to be innovative and creative, she reminds us that it is more cost-efficient to build new programs and related training regimes on existing efforts and systems:

Those currently offering training opportunities and institutions that have always offered training should continue to be seen as legitimate stakeholders and be included in program planning. This approach can help to minimize the negative attitudes that are often associated with fear of change within systems. (p. 56-57)

One of the benefits of heeding this advice is that the recommended approach offers opportunities to transform key stakeholders in directions that increase the viability and effectiveness of new program initiatives. There are promising indications that Habtom's approach will be instrumental both in attaining broad support across communities and in shaping existing approaches to training in desirable directions nationally.

Ownership and Power in School-Community Collaborations

In discussing how her case study of an American school district can inform schools in the Horn of Africa, Woldeselassie Bairu underscores the importance of according community members "a substantial say" in the operation of schools. She implores education authorities to convey the message that educating children is a major responsibility that should be shared by educators, families, and communities. Bairu sees a need for policy makers, private financiers, and educational practitioners to work together to strengthen and sustain school-community partnerships.

In comparing Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTOs) in the case study district with Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in Eritrea, Bairu notes the highly restrictive nature of Eritrean PTAs. Whereas membership in PTOs in Bristol County is open widely to entire communities, not just the families of enrolled students, PTAs in Eritrea are restricted to a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 22 persons. It is not uncommon for PTAs

to be dominated by teachers, especially because parents have limited capacity and time to participate substantially. Bairu sees exceptions in privately owned schools in the capital city where parents are relatively more active, a reality that underscores the universal interconnectedness of poverty, education, and power. Consequently, while she recommends the formation of more inclusive PTAs with a greater sense of parental ownership (perhaps through the introduction of nominal membership fees), Bairu recognizes that broader participation and true ownership come with improved parental education and enhanced economic development within communities. Policies aimed at improving parental and community involvement in schools must, therefore, be pursued hand in hand with community development and family education programs.

These themes are reinforced in Celestina Ibetoh's work in Nigeria, which has been informed by the "recognition that ECD programs in Nigeria, particularly in Imo State, tend to ignore parents' roles and responsibilities in providing instruction and activities aimed at the holistic development of the child" (p. 4). Citing Arnold (1998), Ibetoh underscores the reality that all around the world, parent education programs have tended to disregard the knowledge and achievements of parents and caregivers. The deficit orientation that underpins parent education programs often precludes serious consideration of the many substantive contributions parents can make to the education of their children. In a study preceding her ECDVU project, Ibetoh (2002) examined community-school partnership by analyzing participation in PTA activities in 200 schools in Imo State, Nigeria. She found that only one in every 20 schools had a functional PTA.

Ibetoh's use of focus group discussions, interviews, and observations in her ECDVU project revealed intriguing contrasting as well as converging perspectives from teachers and parents. Teachers were generally of the view that parents could do more to contribute to the effectiveness of collaboration by attending meetings and having more time for their children's education and welfare. They saw a critical role for parents in the development of materials and provision of in-kind contributions other than cash—for example, providing labour for school and community projects, farmers contributing food from their farms to support school meal programs, community members visiting schools to tell stories to children, and parents with professional backgrounds providing services based on their expertise.

Parents, on the other hand, asked for more opportunities to participate in decision-making and wanted to see greater transparency and accountability within the parent-school collaboration. They essentially demanded better treatment, respect, and understanding from teachers.

They identified time and money as the biggest constraints to their participation. Parents saw one avenue for improving community involvement as taking better advantage of the respect and power that traditional rulers and leaders command in the community to build collaboration around these leaders.

The minimal levels of parent-school collaboration and the divergent perspectives held by parents and teachers both underscore the importance of deliberate efforts at building and supporting partnerships. Now that Ibetoh has developed a practical guide to forge this important collaboration between parents and schools, the obvious next step for her research will be a follow-up examination of the level of collaboration and the changes in perspectives that potential improvements in parent-school collaboration may be forging in parents and teachers alike.

The Parental Power Paradox

In the context of both Ibetoh's findings and the general inclination on the part of educators to complain about lack of parental involvement, an intriguing but not unusual paradox regarding power relations within the context of parent-school collaborations is worth discussing in the closing portion of this section. In examining teachers' reports of the challenges they faced in their efforts to promote ECD programs, Muheirwe (2004, see Table 7) found that the three top challenges, among a list of seven, were all associated with the role of parents. That is, the teachers considered it a challenge that parents exerted pressures and influences on (1) the content of instruction; (2) the methods of instruction; and (3) the assessment of progress. These parent-related issues were seen as representing greater challenges than inadequate information sharing with teachers from other schools, inadequacy of teaching materials, difficulties in individualizing instruction due to enrollment numbers, and inadequate storage facilities for the few available teaching and learning materials.

The challenges associated with the role of parents were deemed particularly problematic because of the fear that failure on the part of teachers to adhere to the wishes of parents would result in parents withdrawing their children and enrolling them in competing schools. These are profoundly insightful findings that tell us a great deal about the uphill task of promoting functional and effective parent-school collaborations. They are illustrative of the observation by Arnold (1998, in Ibetoh, 2004) that parental knowledge and expertise tend to be disregarded by education professionals. To the extent that teachers perceive these "parental pressures" as getting in the way of developmentally appropriate curricular and instructional practices, parents become a threat to the professional role and knowledge authority of teachers.

Viewed differently, however, these teacher perceptions suggest that there is an appreciable level of parental interest and involvement in what goes on in their children's classrooms. If these perceived "pressures" were seen not as challenges to be overcome by getting parents to back off but as evidence or affirmation of the untapped knowledge and resourcefulness that parents bring to the school-parent collaborative process, they could form the basis for forging win-win partnerships. Ultimately, however, what seems to be at stake is whether education professionals who lament that parents are not sufficiently involved in their children's programs would be able to rise beyond their traditional stereotypic conceptions of the role of parents as fund-raisers, classroom volunteers, and field trip chaperones. Certainly parents differ markedly in their backgrounds, competencies, and credentials, but if teachers could welcome them as partners capable, collectively, of making substantive contributions to a program's curriculum and management, the parity and mutuality of respect reflected in such a shift should go a long way to foster effective parent-professional collaborations.

Personnel Training Curricula and Professional Networking/Advocacy

Professional development issues will continue to be an area of significant challenge for the emerging ECD field for a variety of reasons. As an evolving field, there is not yet clear consensus on the exact parameters of its focus. This is in part because ECD programs embrace services relating to multiple dimensions of children's care and development that, bureaucratically, tend to be administered under the fiscal and policy aegis of multiple governmental agencies: health, social services/welfare, education, children and families, etc. In a recent policy brief, UNESCO's Section Chief for Early Childhood and Inclusive Education (Choi, 2002) tackled this issue through examination of the variety of labels that exists to reflect the different emphases in early childhood programs and services—for example, Early Childhood Care (ECC), Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), Early Childhood Care and Education (ECED), Early Childhood Development (ECD), and Educare.

This state of affairs has implications for determining what kinds of professional training are appropriate, at what level they should be provided, and by which governmental departments or ministries they should be funded. Determining the content of program curricula is made equally complicated by the different conceptions of ECD inherent in the multiple disciplines and fields that inform policies and practices.

The growing emphasis on an integrated and holistic perspective on ECD offers hope for a truly interdisciplinary approach to program conceptualization and development. Paradoxically, many existing programs for training early childhood personnel developed out of a history of disciplinary insulation and fragmentation and, as a result, are ill-prepared to provide the expertise and orientations necessary to offer comprehensive professional preparation for future ECD professionals that draws on knowledge bases from multiple disciplines and attends equally to priorities associated with different service delivery domains.

Beyond these broader conceptual and professional issues, there is also the practical challenge of attracting a stable base of ECD personnel who will find ECD work inherently attractive enough to make a career out of it. In many societies, including even the most resource-rich nations, people who work with young children are the least valued and the most poorly paid. In African countries and other majority nations, funding for ECD programs that are not officially part of the education sector may be left completely in the hands of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community non-profit agencies, or international donor organizations. Continuity of operations, in such circumstances, becomes necessarily tied to the fiscal health and/or continued dedication of the leadership of these organizations.

This final section of the paper explores some of the challenging issues in personnel preparation, with particular emphasis on curriculum development, the role of existing training institutions, the missing advocacy voice from professional organizations, and the challenges of recruiting and training community volunteers for ECD work. Edith Sebatane's (2004) work was motivated by the concern that the preparation of ECD staff in Lesotho has predominantly tended to take the form of non-standardized in-service workshops of questionable quality offered by multiple organizations. Her goal, then, was to collaborate with the Lesotho College of Education (LCE) to institute a distance education program for preparing teachers with ECD competencies (see Table 5 for project details).

Felix Agorsah (2004) focused on the training of informal child minders and community volunteers for an extremely high-risk area of the Ghanaian capital city of Accra (see Table 6 for project details). Taking advantage of existing baseline data collected by the UNICEF office in the country, Agorsah conducted a needs assessment and used input from interviews and observations in childcare settings to identify appropriate content for a model training program that was then piloted in two 3-day sessions.

Finally, Monica Muheirwe (2004) focused on a slightly different problem – that of finding a way to mobilize ECD professionals nationwide,

Table 5: Personnel Training & Professional Networking Project Summaries (*Sebatane*)

Project Identifiers	Focus & Objectives	Questions and/or Procedures	Selected Highlights, Insights, Lessons
<p>Author: Edith M. Sebatane</p> <p>Country: Lesotho</p> <p>Title: Developing ECCD Teacher Training Curriculum in Lesotho as Part of a College of Education Program</p>	<p>Curriculum development for a college-level Distance Teacher Training Program.</p> <p>Goal was to move the preparation of ECD teachers and caregivers beyond the tradition of non-standardized in-service workshops with questionable quality by multiple organizations.</p>	<p>Analyzed country-specific consultancy reports about existing ECCED training activities.</p> <p>Generated input from 26 critical stakeholders (ECCD teachers, Area Resource Teachers, District Teacher Trainers, and National Teacher Trainers) through interviews and discussions.</p> <p>Worked with Lesotho College of Education (LCE) to develop content and explore how best to integrate ECCE training into the existing program in the Early Primary Education Specialization area.</p> <p>Held discussions with officials of international organizations and the Lesotho Coalition of NGOs to obtain input into program content.</p>	<p>Teachers and in-service trainers at all levels considered skills in identifying and working with children with special needs as a major gap competency gap.</p> <p>Trainers also identified a need for further professional development in such areas as psychosocial care/support, health and nutrition, childhood illnesses and diseases and HIV-AIDS.</p> <p>The program planning process with LCE lecturers revealed a significant challenge: offering a certification program in ECCD in a context where ECD programs could not afford to hire the program's graduates.</p>

Table 6: Personnel Training & Professional Networking Project Summaries (*Agorsah*)

Project Identifiers	Focus & Objectives	Questions and/or Procedures	Selected Highlights, Insights, Lessons
Author: Felix Agorsah	Developed and piloted a training model for preparing informal child minders and community volunteers to work with children receiving care in a unique urban setting – the Konkomba Market Area of the capital city of Accra.	Conducted a needs assessment (using existing UNICEF base-line data), interviewed 10 ECD supervisors and workers, and made direct observations of childcare settings.	Project underscores significant threats to the impact of training on the quality of care: poor environmental hygiene a the community level; loss of equipment and supplies due to pilfering by staff; uncertainties regarding continuity of support and supervision by key agencies; the illusive nature of “community” because of the communter nature of the beneficiaries of childcare services.
Country: Ghana			
Title: An Integrated Early Childhood Development Model Training Program for Informal Child Minders and Community Volunteers in a Ghanaian Urban Setting		Used insights and input from the above activities to formulate the content for a model training program. Implemented two pilot training sessions, each lasting 3 days.	

Table 7: Personnel Training & Professional Networking Project Summaries (Muheirwe)

Project Identifiers	Focus & Objectives	Questions and/or Procedures	Selected Highlights, Insights, Lessons
<p>Author: Monica R. Muheirwe</p> <p>Country: Uganda</p> <p>Title: Professional Associations in Support of Child Well-Being in Uganda: Establishment of ECD Newsletter Series</p>	<p>Focused on the design of a newsletter, Uganda Early Childhood Development Link, to accomplish the following objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To promote exchange and dissemination of information; 2. To enhance professional linkages and networking; 3. To facilitate the coordination of ECD activities and lessons from different parts of the country. 	<p>Conducted workshops in all five regions of the country to sensitize citizens to ECD issues. Participants included children (ages 3 to 18 years), caregivers in programs for children birth to age 8 years, parents, and teachers.</p> <p>Used the workshop forum to recruit 310 participants with interest in contributing articles to the newsletter: 80 teachers, 80 parents, 120 children, 20 college tutors, 5 ECD trainers, 4 policy makers from Education Ministry, & 1 ECD specialist from National Curriculum Development Center.</p> <p>Among other things, interviews, focus groups discussions, and interviews were used to obtain (1) teachers' perceptions of challenges in promoting ECD and (2) teacher trainers' perceptions of the challenges facing ECD.</p>	<p>The Status of Professional Associations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Study revealed that of the 3 professional associations in Uganda, one was no longer functional. A second one has its operations largely concentrated in and around the Kampala City area. 2. The absence of strong professional associations capable of giving able advice on ECD policies to the government appeared to account, at least in part, for the lack of integrated ECD policies in the nation. 3. The newsletter emerging from this project could serve to provide the linkages needed to mobilize professionals to build a national umbrella organization to raise the profile of ECD. <p>Teachers and Teacher Trainer Perceptions of ECD Challenges</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fifty-two percent of 136 teacher statements on the challenges of promoting ECD focused on perceived pressures from parents regarding (1) what teachers should teach, (2) what teaching methods should be used, and (3) how children's progress should be assessed. 2. Teacher trainers saw the inadequate involvement of the government in the training of ECD personnel and the criteria for selecting trainees as major challenges.

through a national ECD newsletter, to promote networking, facilitate information dissemination, and create a potentially forceful base for ECD professionals to play a major advocacy role in the promotion of ECD programs in Uganda (see Table 7 for project details). While this emphasis was certainly different from the direct focus on staff training curricula by Sebatane and Agorsah, there was a little bit of a cross-current between the two sets of foci in the sense that Muheirwe's surveys of teachers and teacher trainers produced insights with implications for professional training. In the remaining sections that follow, we identify for discussion several critical issues with important insights and lessons for the future of ECD personnel training and professional networking.

Governmental Commitment to Personnel Development and Challenges in Candidate Selection

It was noted at the beginning of this section that personnel training could constitute a challenge for many years to come. Muheirwe's analysis of statements made by trainers clearly reveals concerns about the inadequacy of governmental involvement in the training of ECD personnel in Uganda. A second major challenge identified by trainers pertained to the selection of trainees. The criteria for selecting trainees were seen as leaving out significant numbers of interested and capable individuals who just cannot afford the high costs of becoming trained. Ironically, significant numbers of those who are selected, because they can afford the cost of training, are not necessarily committed to ECD work.

Regarding candidate selection, a slightly different variation of the concern emerges in Sebatane's analysis of the situation in Lesotho, where the use of existing diploma programs to select and prepare ECD staff is generating some practical challenges. LCE's upgrading of its training from the certificate to the diploma level necessitated a change in entry-level qualifications for admission. This seems to have had the threat of excluding individuals with potential interest in ECD careers who now do not have the requisite entry qualifications. This is a challenge worth addressing because, while the diploma level may be consistent with a nation's desire to have the highest level of professional training for its schools and other programs, conditions that are currently unique to the realities of ECD may require that alternative pathways for personnel development, including credentialing at lower levels of certification, be considered.

The New "Brain Drain"

Providing ECD training in the context of upgraded diploma programs has the potential to lead the Africa ECD movement down a path that is currently deemed to be problematic even in the United States. During the

course of the last decade there has been a significant infusion of U.S. federal government funding into university-based baccalaureate preparation of professionals for community-based early childhood education programs when, in fact, the salary structures in these settings serving children under five years of age effectively ensure that the personnel trained through these specialized funding initiatives would end up not in preschool and early care settings but in classroom and/or school-based administrative settings where professionals are relatively better paid.

Consider for a moment the approach that LCE proposes to take as a matter of getting around some practical realities. Realizing that many ECD programs are not attached to schools and do not pay competitive salaries, like the Ministry of Education, LCE is creatively linking ECD training with the Early Primary Education Specialization certification area:

The intention was to provide specialization modules in early childhood care and development so that aspiring ECCD teachers would, over and above the EPES modules they studied, also select the ECCD specialization modules within the EPES unit. At this point, both ECCD Unit and LCE members were in agreement that adopting such practice would enable the qualified ECCD teachers to get employment in the primary schools and teach in the early primary classes, particularly in situations where ECCD centers would not be able to offer paid employment to qualified ECCD teachers. (Sebatane, p. 36)

This appears to be an inadvertently built-in formula for institutional brain drain or migration of expertise. With all the funding and the efforts invested into recruitment of appropriate candidates, the reality is that the graduates of these programs are absolutely less likely to end up in ECCD settings because of the low levels of remuneration in those settings. The intention is pure—equipping ECCD teachers with competencies that would enable them to function in multiple instructional settings. Unfortunately there are no equal opportunities to choose to teach in a regular school or in an ECCD program. The certainty of migration to the school sector is thus very much a foregone conclusion. The situation calls for critical assessment and rethinking. The solution to the personnel training challenge is not simply one of setting up training programs; it is one of creating training programs at the most appropriate levels to fill the personnel needs of ECD programs in a more reliable and sustained way.

On the Critical Advantages of Inter-Sectoral Coordination and Collaboration

Agorsah's project on the training of informal minders and community volunteers illustrates the importance of an integrated, inter-sectoral approach to ECD practice. The training program he has developed and

piloted to prepare infant minders and community volunteers to meet the care and developmental needs of children in this “market community” is essential to the improvement of quality. Yet the success of the training depends, to a large extent, on forces outside the program settings. As an example, trainees may become educated and skilled in environmental hygiene and cleanliness (a major objective of the training program), but unless city authorities provide toilet facilities and clear garbage and drainage systems on a regular basis, such education will make very little difference in the quality of care for children.

From Agorsah’s account, it is not likely that the necessary infrastructure of utilities will ever be provided within the target community. He notes, indeed, that “community members are unwilling to put up permanent structures for the children for fear that the city authorities, who have constantly warned or threatened them with demolition, will destroy such unauthorized structures” (p. 56). It is clear from this account that the provision of ECD services in this area is integrally tied to urban policies on squatter populations and, unless these policies change, there is hope only for temporary and superficial success.

Certainly, no society can wait for these fundamental problems to be resolved before putting in place strategies and programs to meet the developmental and care needs of its most needy children. The lesson from this case study, however, is that ECD policies at the national, regional, or local level must be pursued in consonance with much broader transformative policies that recognize the interrelated nature of problems and programs typically handled through different sectors of governmental bureaucracy.

Attaining Professional Networking, Advocacy, Information Dissemination

Professional organizations play a central role not only in policy advocacy, networking, and information dissemination but also in advancing the linkages between inquiry and practice. The Africa ECD field is certainly still in its infancy and it is thus a bit too early to expect the proliferation of professional organizations. Nevertheless, deliberate planning to forge the emergence of such organizations is one of the surest ways to raise the political profile of ECD programs in Africa and to begin to lay the foundations for the continuous improvement of practice through the networking and information sharing that comes naturally with the growth of these organizations. Muheirwe’s ECD newsletter project presents one mechanism for beginning to mobilize ECD personnel, a mechanism that can also become an important tool for making sure that successful initiatives and innovations occurring in one part of the nation become easily accessible to professionals in other regions. Hope-

fully the success of this one effort will energize others to follow Muheirwe's lead in other African countries. If these beginning efforts, especially in tandem with the African Conference Series that has now become one of the ECDVU's legacies, culminate in the emergence of regional organizations within the continent or, better still, a continental organization, ECD in Africa would have taken a giant step toward vibrancy and longevity.

Conclusion

As ECD programs take root in Africa and begin to gain widespread support from governmental and non-governmental organizations, the need for home-grown research and development programs as well as professionally responsible standards of practice will become an imperative. It is only through contextually relevant and sensitive inquiry that we can hope to expect ECD programs to make a meaningful impact on the lives of young children today and thus assure the vitality of tomorrow's society.

One of the profound contributions that the ECDVU program has made to the African ECD arena is a leadership capacity-building process that has already borne concrete fruit in the range and quality of the research and project activities completed by the first cohort of students. In this paper, we have analyzed seven of these projects under three composite themes. In each of these thematic areas, we have noted positive developments as well as areas requiring further examination and attention. We have sounded cautionary notes regarding issues and areas in which we must avoid duplicating the experiences of the industrialized world, even while we draw useful insights on other issues. Our hope is that the discussions in this and other papers in this special issue will serve to galvanize an ethos of active knowledge creation and professional networking, with African institutions of higher education responding proactively by entering into partnerships with the field to support appropriate documentation, storage, and dissemination of the resulting knowledge bases.

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