POLICY, PRACTICE, AND CULTURE INTERSECT IN ECE: Examples from Alexis First Nation (Canada), India, and South Africa

Ailie Cleghorn
Concordia University, Montreal

EECERA, Prague
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Larry Prochnner
Department of Elementary Education,
University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

Prerana Mohite
Dean, Human Development and Family
Studies, M.S. University of Baroda,
Vadodara, India

Nkidi Phatudi
Head, Department of Early Childhood
Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa
The Three Settings

Aboriginal Head Start On Reserve at Alexis First Nation, **Alberta (Canada)**

A semi-rural pre-school near Vadodara, in the state of Gujarat, **India**

A former township pre-school near Pretoria, **South Africa**
Overview of Findings

1. In each setting one finds cultural and linguistic identities being nurtured, laying a local foundation for emergent literacy.

2. This sometimes occurs within the context of children’s games and songs (translated into local languages) that have somehow found their way around the world. How?

3. Global discourse about the value of cultural diversity is played out very differently from one setting to another, pointing to multiple meanings of diversity.
Alexis First Nation
Vision Statement/Policy

Children of the Alexis Reserve will seek a better standard and quality of life, using all their gifts granted by the Creator and their love for life-long Learning, hence will rise as a proud and healthy Nakota speaking Sioux Nation.
Alexis First Nation Program: Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve (AHSOR)

• Established in 1995 on the model of Indian Head Start in the USA
• Managed by Health Canada
• Stated objective of AHSOR is the preparation of children for school
Six Program Components

1. Aboriginal culture and language
2. education and school readiness
3. parental involvement
4. health promotion
5. nutrition
6. social support
Perspective on Child Development and learning

- Children are a gift from the creator
- Life develops in stages
- The first seven years is a time for the mother to pour out her heart to the child
- “You can take a rock and you can take a knife and scrape and try to carve but you will never reshape what you have taught them the first 7 years”.
- **Children learn via modeling, observation, trial and error (preparation for formal schooling?)**
India
A semi-rural pre-school in the state of Gujarat
It shall be policy of state to provide adequate services to children, both before and after birth and through the period of growth, to ensure their full physical, mental and social development.
• **Holistic Nature of ECCE**
• **Age 0-6 years**
• Emphasis on child centered approach, play way and activity based learning.
• Community involvement in resource mobilization, planning and implementation
• Assure every child access to the fulfillment of all basic needs.
• **Universalization of elementary education.**
• **Special Attention:** Girls, scheduled castes, and tribes
Perspective on Teaching and Learning

– Learning is through observation and imitation
– Play not seen by parents as educational but is valued as the natural activity of young children
– Growing up means giving up play
– Play in school artificially extends childhood
‘Playway’ is found as a teaching-learning philosophy among pre-school educators, and does appear in progressive, private pre-schools.

Play-based approaches are rarely actually used.

Cultural values influence practice especially preparing children for the expected behaviours of formal schooling.
South Africa
A former township pre-school
near Pretoria
South Africa – national education policies

1996 Constitution

- To correct the inequalities of the past
- To build an egalitarian society
- To redefine Human Rights for All, including children -- section 29 (a) of the Bill of Rights:
  - “everyone has the right to basic education”
THE CHURCH HAS AIDS

HIV/AIDS

"When one part of the body is affected, the whole body suffers."
1 Corinthians 12:25

WE CARE
LET’S STOP CRIME IN OUR SCHOOLS

Say No To Crime
Be Cool, Attend School
Love Our School, Don’t Vandalize
Carry Brains, Not Weapons
Way With Rape, Child Abuse and Bullying
Acism & Gangsterism is a Crime

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NORTH WEST PROVINCE
COLTS
For discussion:

(1) There may be increasing uniformity of discourse about how best to work with children in the early years (see policy statements, India & S. Africa).

(2) In each of this study’s three settings we see persistence in nurturing local identities (diversity).
From the Yucatan, Mexico:

...90+% of the children in one large pre-school are bilingual (Mayan & Spanish) ...but nary a word of Mayan from the teachers. Mayan children cannot arrive in typical dress. Walt Disney covers the walls instead of Mayan figures. ...unless something drastic is done, in another two or three generations, the Mayan language and much of the Mayan culture will be relegated to the status of folklore and cultural tourism.
Reflections

1. There are some troubling contradictions in our observations. Clearly, the two trends persist -- towards increasing diversity and increasing homogeneity of policy, if not practice.

2. History has shown what happens when children’s early schooling experience is disconnected from the culture and language of the home community.

3. History has also shown how ‘the school’ is rarely ready for the child whose home language and culture is other than that of the school.

4. This forces us to re-examine the notion of school readiness -- whose readiness (?), and to think more about the nature of transitions in different cultural settings.
WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?

HOW CAN LOCAL ADAPTATIONS OF ‘THE UNIVERSAL’ BE ENCOURAGED?

WHO IS GOING TO SEE TO THIS?