Integrating Cultural and Developmental Agendas for Socially Inclusive Early Childhood Education

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Children learn how to be successful members of their communities through their culturally structured “developmental niches”

Kokwet – a Kipsigis community of Kenya, 1970s
Challenge for ECD: Integrate Developmental and Cultural Agendas

Settings of daily life reflect cultural agendas: The Netherlands & rural Kenya
Cultural practices of care help children to learn different kinds of skills

Bloemenheim: a bedtime storybook with daddy

Kokwet: father and son watch the cows together
Parents in different cultures describe their children with reference to different qualities

**Bloemenheim**
- Independent – the child “knows exactly what he wants”

**Kokwet**
- Responsible and obedient – the child knows how to carry out a task without being asked
The Developmental Niche

Settings

Caretaker Psychology Customs

CHILD

C. M. Super and S. Harkness

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Children learn most effectively when their developmental niches are internally consistent, creating redundancy in the “messages” they receive through settings, customs of care, and the psychology of their caretakers.
Integration of the niches of home and school: How similar or different are they?

Home

School

Home-school connections

Parental Beliefs

Customs:

Settings:

Teacher Beliefs

Customs:
Home-school connections

Bloemenheim – mothers are in and out of the kindergarten classroom 4 times a day to drop off and pick up their children
Integration of developmental niches
– Home is like school

Bloemenheim “play table”
In family livingroom

Bloemenheim 2nd grade art project
Integration of developmental niches –
School is like home

Stockholm, Sweden – a room in a kindergarten class “house”
When the developmental niches of home and school are *not* integrated...

Kokwet – sibling caretakers and their charges

Kokwet – elementary school classroom
Percentage of children attending school in Kokwet, 1974
Programs to promote integration of home and school in order to improve educational outcomes: What to do?

Home

**Parental Beliefs**
Urge parents to value school

**Settings:**
Encourage “print-rich” environment

**Customs:**
Teach parents how to “talk to children”

Change the niche at home?

School

**Teacher Beliefs**

**Settings:**

**Customs:**
Programs to promote integration of home and school in order to improve educational outcomes: What to do?

Home

Parental Beliefs

Settings:

Customs:

Teacher Beliefs:
Teach new pedagogy and expectations

School

Settings:
Provide books, increase “time on task”

Customs:
Eliminate “unnecessary” activities

Change educational practices?
Interventions to improve children’s academic outcomes: Change everything?

Home

Settings:
Create time and space for homework

Parental Beliefs:
Value education

Customs:
Read with the child

School

Settings:
New equipment, better classrooms

Teacher Beliefs:
New Academic expectations

Customs:
New teaching practices

Community-based literacy events (reading festivals, competitions)
Challenges to implementing new approaches to ECD

• Beliefs and practices are linked to each other as part of a system; change in one is difficult without change in the other.  
• Change in the developmental niche of the home OR the school is difficult to implement or sustain without support from the wider cultural community.  
• New programs requiring changes in behavior (e.g. new practices at home, community volunteers) will not succeed without necessary motivation at all levels.  
• Changes in educational practices require changes in culturally shared beliefs (ethnotheories) about children and their development
Successful Integration: Building school readiness curriculum in rural region of Louga, Senegal

With thanks to

Oumar Barry, PhD
Marion Zeitlin, Phd

CRESP, in collaboration with Plan International
Testing rural children in Louga using an adaptation of the Baley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development.

At age 3 years, these children scored nearly one standard deviation below the international norm.
Integrating Traditional and School-readiness Agendas in Louga

**Traditional**
- Teaching motor development & social understanding (respect)
- Teaching vocabulary for doing errands

**School Readiness**
- Picture cards for teaching: included traditional “curriculum”
- Added teaching literacy skills for success in school – mothers used “errand” format to teach new vocabulary
Successful Integration:  
An early grade reading intervention in Gambia

With thanks to  
Aglaia Zafeirakou, PhD  
Global Partnership for Education Secretariat  
The World Bank
Improving Capacity, Ownership and Planning for Early Reading Interventions

Government of Gambia, with support from Global Good Practices, Global Partnership for Education Secretariat, the World Bank
Collaboration within the country and regionally

- The Peace Corps
- Future in our Hands and other NGOs,
- Gambian Association of Teachers in English
- The Gambian College
- Community organizations
- Regional exchange: Liberia (EGRA Plus), Burkina Faso, Guinee/UNESCO, Kigali workshop

- **Type of collaboration:**
  - Organizational, technical, managerial and budget support, measure, convincing and spread the innovation, sustain and build community support, build accountability
Key issues in current reading instruction in Gambia

- Teachers often prioritize oral repetition over connecting sounds and symbols.
- So the children don’t “get” that there is a connection between print and sound, and don’t practice making that connection automatic.
- Observations of children in the classroom showed that they were only glancing briefly at the printed letters; so new pedagogy included teaching children to look longer.
Training of trainers: scripted lessons, observational learning and video

Safi, a teacher who becomes a trainer… she learns how to teach blending syllables; Introductory workshop Oct. 2011

Project with introduction of new approaches in stages combining technical knowledge with local experience
“Best Practices” or Best Principles?
Common elements in successful programs

• Strong community support
• Research-based measures of children’s academic learning
• Careful ethnographic observation of local ethnotheories, practices, and behavior
• Used local practices as a base for added innovation
• Implementation proceeded iteratively, with corrections based on frequent observations