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Early Childhood Education is indexed in the Canadian Education Index.

On the Cover: Balwin School is an elementary-junior high public school in Edmonton. It hosts a bilingual Ukrainian-English program and an early learning program for preschool children. The early learning program evolved as a pilot, the result of a unique partnership between the Edmonton Public School Board, the Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative, the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, the University of Alberta and ABC Head Start, along with key community partners from three ethnocultural communities. Teachers and children speak four languages in the intercultural early learning classroom—

Somali, Sudanese Arabic, Kurdish and English. Under the guidance of their teachers Mulki Ali, Cathy Prud'Homme, Josephien Aroub and Sabah Tahir, the children explore the topic of harvest.

The cover artwork is Najma Hilowle's representation of harvest.

Anna Kirova is a professor in the Department of Elementary Education, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta. She teaches courses in early childhood education in both the bachelor of education program and the master of elementary education (with specialization in early childhood) program. Her research interests include peer relationships and social inclusion of young children, particularly immigrant and refugee children; issues related to global migration and education; and collaborative arts-based research with children.

Beginning with an examination of the first, foundational principle in Alberta Education's guiding principles for primary programs—that childhoods differ depending on social and cultural circumstances—this issue is a collection of interesting and informative articles concerning the teaching and learning of both young children and teachers. Christine Massing's article, "Multiple Worlds: Images of Childhood and Alberta Education's Guiding Principles for Primary Programs," provides a brief historical walk through images of the child and of childhood, and discusses the current understanding of children's multiple worlds as being essential in shifting paradigm for teacher practice. Massing also provides examples of how her own ways of understanding young children's interactions changed as she increased her knowledge and appreciation of the depth of the meaning embedded in this guiding principle. The different worlds that shape the children in our classrooms are exemplified in the article by Mehrunnisa Ali and Muna Jama, "Second-Generation Somali Children's Perceptions of Their Identities." The study described in the article involved 5- to 10- year-old Canadian-born children of Somali immigrants living in Toronto. The finding of the study, suggesting that religious and ethnic identity were more salient for the children than their racial and national identity, has important implications for early childhood educators who have not only Somali children in their classrooms but also children from other racial and religious minority groups. The article provides insights into the possible reasons for the children to identify more strongly with a particular identity than others and suggests strategies for teachers to address issues of multiple identities at an early age.

The notion of teacher as researcher is explored by Angela Salmon in her article "Making Thinking Visible Through Action Research." The research-based approach to understanding young children's thinking processes through engaging the children in thinking routines will be very helpful to teachers of young children. Hopefully, the article will also inspire many to learn more about how to implement Harvard University's Project Zero's Visible Thinking ideas. The example of the "See/Think/Wonder" routine provided in the article demonstrates how this particular routine has a potential to extend and deepen students' thinking and can eventually become part of the structure of everyday classroom life.

Returning teacher-research author Sukhdeep Kaur Chohan describes her "Smarties-Read-with-Me" home-reading program, in which she explores the relationships between active parent involvement in a home-reading program and student reading levels. The study results indicated that parents welcomed guidance from teachers in supporting their children with reading at home and that students' reading levels were positively influenced through their parents' active involvement. Results also supported the importance of parent involvement at home in children's early reading.

In "Educating Hearts: Planning for Citizenship Education in the Primary Years," Alberta-based researchers Maureen Stratton Lemieux and Joanne Neal offer illustrative examples, from kindergarten through year three, of the organization of specific learner outcomes of citizenship education around big ideas and essential questions. Especially valuable for teachers is the alignment of the essential values from Alberta's Commission on Learning with selections of children's picture books. The authors also suggest examples of teaching approaches that are social in nature and feature positive interdependence among children to make citizenship education come alive in early childhood classrooms.

As usual, the issue also includes a review of a book, this time *Emergent Curriculum in the Primary Classroom: Interpreting the Reggio Emilia Approach in Schools*, by Carol Anne Wien. Given the increased interest in the work done by teachers in Alberta who are inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, the book presents the example of teachers in Toronto in nine multicultural schools,

with children ranging from kindergarten to Grade 3. As stated by the reviewer, Shahnaaz Alidina, the book provides hope for teachers who feel trapped and restricted in a standardized curriculum and offers teachers room for new ways and a shift in pedagogy.

I would like to thank the authors for their invaluable contributions to this issue of *Early Childhood Education*, and the editorial review committee for working with the authors in

expanding and deepening their ideas. As a collective effort of early childhood educators from Canada and the USA, this issue contributes to ongoing dialogue in the field about what it means to be a teacher of young children. It is through professional journals like *Early Childhood Education* that we find a home for our ideas and share them with our peers. Please join us in our attempts to expand the pool of ideas that we all learn from! 🐾

—Anna Kirova

Multiple Worlds: Images of Childhood and Alberta Education's Guiding Principles

Christine Massing

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Abstract

Educational theory and practice in early childhood education are commonly grounded in the discourse of universality—children are assumed to progress through universal stages in development and experience childhood in much the same way. However, the foundational principle of the document adopted by Alberta Education, *Primary Programs Framework for Teaching and Learning (Kindergarten to Grade 3): Guiding Principles*, directly challenges the image of a universal childhood. This article examines the implications of the foundational principle: childhoods differ depending on social and cultural circumstances. It examines historical and contemporary images of the child and of childhood, discusses new understandings about children's multiple worlds and considers the implications of this shifting paradigm for teacher practice.

Introduction

Ethan and Justin are in the music centre experimenting with a xylophone and seem to be trying to figure out how it works. They play mostly in silence but occasionally whisper to one another. Then they abruptly stop and bolt off, only to return with pencils and paper in hand. Justin purposefully plays a few notes and Ethan writes on the paper; then they switch roles. I, their teacher, come to understand that they are composing a song and writing the notes on the paper. After fifteen minutes or so, they collaborate to read and play their composition.

Alberta Education adopted the guiding principles for primary programs (kindergarten to Grade 3) in 2007. These principles are the “philosophical and theoretical foundation for teaching and learning” (Alberta Education 2007, 6). The principles assist teachers in understanding young children and inform teacher planning in terms of instructional strategies and learning environments (ibid). They reflect a social constructionist view of teaching and learning whereby knowledge is actively constructed by learners as a result of their lived experiences and their interactions with others.

I remember reading the foundational guiding principle, which states that childhoods differ depending on social and cultural circumstances, and questioning what it meant for me as a teacher. At first glance, it seemed that this principle merely affirmed what we, as teachers, know so well: that every child is unique. However, I have increasingly come to realize the much more profound implication of this guiding principle: that it takes us into a deep questioning of our views about childhood and what is right for children. Our own images of the child and of childhood are shaped by our experiences and learning within a particular social and cultural context, and they influence our ways of being with and interacting with children. This foundational principle challenges our taken-for-granted view of a universal childhood and replaces it with the idea of multiple childhoods. To accept this principle moves us into uncharted territory as we question our long-held “truths” and seek to respond in practice.

This article tracks my own explorations of the foundational guiding principle by looking at the historical and contemporary influences that have brought us to the idea of a universal childhood, the movement to reconceptualize the dominant image

of childhood and the implications for teachers. Reflecting on my own process, I wonder what progress we have made, in the three years since the guiding principles were instituted, toward unseating the dominant images of childhood. What have we learned about our relationship to the curriculum and our work as teachers in view of this foundational principle?

Historical Images of Childhood

Seen from a historical perspective, the idea of childhood is relatively new. When Philippe Ariès (1962) examined portrayals of children in European art and literature, he found few attempts to distinguish children from adults, or to differentiate between children of different ages, prior to the thirteenth century. Children were generally viewed as miniature adults; in fact, some portraits depicted boys as identical to men in appearance but simply reduced in scale (p 33). Ariès theorized that the idea of childhood was fully developed by the seventeenth century, meaning that children were seen to occupy separate social worlds from those of adults and were distinguishable from adults in manner of dress, appearance and the types of activities in which they engaged. John Locke, for example, portrayed the child as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, dependent on adults to teach her all she needs to know. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writing also created the image of the innocent child, dependent on adults to guide, shelter and protect him. School was one mechanism by which children's worlds were separated from those of adults, and it also served to universalize childhood experiences. In 1856, Froebel drew upon religious beliefs and romantic ideals to create the first kindergarten program based on "helping children recognize universal values" (Silin 1995, 85). The idea of the child as a labour supply market factor was initiated during the industrial and agricultural revolutions and then reinvented at various points in history to ensure women's entry into the labour market (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 2007, 47).

Darwin's study of evolution, published in 1859, stimulated an interest in the study of children; this was legitimized by scientific and psychological inquiry. A number of theorists, primarily Western developmental psychologists, have hypothesized that children pass through a sequence of stages predetermined by nature—for example, Freud's stages of children's psychosexual development, Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning, Erikson's stages of social development and Piaget's stages of cognitive development. Many of these stage

theories, Dunne (2006) believes, form a *privative* view of childhood whereby children are seen as unformed or incomplete and need to move through stages to become whole (p 10). Freud's research, Dunne argues, also contributes to a *therapeutic* view of childhood in which early experiences are critical to well-being as adults. In view of this research, then, adults are encouraged to validate children's feelings and foster positive self-esteem (p 10). It is important to note that much of the research underlying these theories has been focused on white middle-class children in a European/North American context and obscures the impact of culture and social factors such as income, gender and geography. Children are seen as progressing through universal and sequential stages of development regardless of the unique circumstances of their own lives.

Influences of the Historical Images on Contemporary Images

The field of early childhood education is still predominantly framed by the research of these developmental psychologists and promotes an image of the privative childhood. For example, Bredekamp and Copple's 2009 version of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* portrays curriculum as based on expectations of what children ought to be able to do at each age and stage of their development. Parenting magazines and books, as well as brochures provided to new parents, also reinforce these ideas. Developmental milestones form the basis of standardized assessments, and children who do not meet the expectations are viewed as having deficits that need to be corrected. Parents and teachers are positioned as authorities over the child because they have been through those stages already and are assumed to be able to predict them and to protect and guide children through them. In short, the child tends to be viewed as a passive recipient of knowledge who is dependent on adults, rather than an active agent in his or her own construction of knowledge.

The view of the universal childhood is also reinforced by the images of childhood perpetuated in the media. Adults conceive of and control the public image of children, which reinforces stereotypes and the power of the adult over the child (Woodrow and Brennan 2001, 25; Cannella 2001, 19). For example, we increasingly see children dressed as adults in clothing advertisements and taking on adult roles in television shows. We might also see images of the privative childhood in

advertising for educational toys, DVDs and software, and images of privileged childhood in advertisements for various humanitarian children's organizations. Gender stereotypes in the media can influence the choices that a child makes with respect to play and play materials, clothing, and friendships. While these media images often stereotype and trivialize children and their experiences and knowledge, we cannot ignore them because they also help shape how children see themselves and determine the experiences they might decide to have (Woodrow and Brennan 2001). These images reflect particular ideologies that people are reluctant to relinquish because they provide a measure of comfort and continuity in the face of actual or perceived rapid societal change. Until ideologies change, then, it will be difficult to discard or reconceptualize these images.

Reconceptualizing the Dominant Images of Childhood

Dunne (2008) stresses that we need to discard the view that childhood is determined by biology: "Childhood connotes not a fact of nature but rather a cluster of meanings and values through which young human beings are perceived, responded to and treated" (p 260). The idea that each individual child brings a unique set of experiences and ideas into the classroom based on her cultural and social circumstances challenges the notion of the universal childhood. It stands to reason that if we are each a unique individual, there cannot be a universal childhood (or adulthood, for that matter); rather, childhood is constructed and influenced by a variety of circumstances that contribute to the uniqueness of each child. While we readily acknowledge that childhood is different in other cultural contexts, we do not always recognize that there is no *one* childhood in our society. Deconstructing our conceptions of the foundational guiding principle that childhoods differ depending on social and cultural circumstances brings us closer to an understanding of how this principle translates to childhood as lived.

The social component encompasses a range of conditions that affect the child's world: income level, class, gender, geography, family and interactions with others (family, peer group and others involved in the life of the child). Interactions with others, in particular, shape how we learn. For example, two children in the same class with the same teacher and classmates will have unique interactions with others and with one another and will learn in that

environment in different ways. They will make meaning of a shared interaction in individual ways and take different learnings from the experience. Vygotsky (1978) explained how these social interactions lead to cognitive development. Each interaction allows a child to appropriate new knowledge and skills into their prior learning and experiences, just as our interactions as adults do.

Recent research into the influence of culture on development also informs the foundational principle. Rogoff (2003) argued that "... people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities—which also change" (p 3). Culture is all that we are—our beliefs, values, languages, religions and ideologies are all derived from it. Like childhood, culture is not universal because every family, and even every member of a family, will interpret their culture in a unique way and will participate in creating and transforming that culture (Rogoff 2003, 51). This means that even when we teach a group of children from a seemingly homogeneous cultural context, we cannot assume that they hold similar beliefs or have had similar experiences.

The Reggio Emilia approach, named for the city in Italy where it originated, embodies the idea of multiple childhoods. In Reggio Emilia schools, children are viewed as "rich, strong and powerful. The emphasis is placed on seeing children as unique subjects with rights rather than simply needs" (Rinaldi 1993, 102). The focus is on children learning to feel comfortable in their multiple social worlds (New 2001). In this approach, curriculum emerges from observations of and conversations with the children, revolves around their interests, and is expressed and represented in multiple symbolic forms. Learning in Reggio Emilia schools is socially constructed—parents, teachers and children collaborate in learning and listen to one another. It is a place "of shared lives and relationships among many adults and very many children" (Malaguzzi 1993, 56). Parental involvement is central to helping the teacher gain an understanding of "what counts as knowledge in their homes" (New 2001, 250). This social constructionist view respects the child's ways of constructing knowledge and situates the teacher as a collaborator in the creation of meaning (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence 2007, 56).

Challenges to Change

A commitment to involving children as coconstructors of knowledge poses a number of challenges. We are forced to question our core

beliefs about children and even the most basic of our teaching practices. Acknowledging the uniqueness of each child means that we need to learn about the lived realities of the child. This implies a different relationship with both children and families. Change is always difficult, but particularly so when it strikes at the core of our knowing and being. The growth of programs that emphasize traditional teacher-directed learning demonstrates how difficult it is for both teachers and parents to move toward a new understanding of children. We all tend to gravitate to what is familiar and reassuring to us.

The structure of our educational system presents an additional barrier to operationalizing our beliefs in multiple childhoods. Various stakeholders in the educational process influence not only what is to be taught, but how it is to be taught. The written curriculum clearly outlines the experiences and learning that all children are to have and the outcomes that are to be attained. Standardized testing reinforces the need to achieve these universal outcomes. In the classroom, teachers feel pressured to focus on preparing children for the next stage and the next grade. These structures are all firmly rooted in the idea of a universal childhood and developmentally appropriate practices.

Assessment practices tend to determine what is taught and how it is taught. They also affect children's views of learning and of themselves as learners. As children move into Grade 1 and subsequent grades, the representation of learning becomes linear and narrow as knowledge is increasingly to be demonstrated in writing. Preparation for standardized tests influences, on a conscious or subconscious level, the forms of assessment that are used in the class. Children eventually learn that how they see their work matters less than how others see it.

Our role as teachers is mandated: we are responsible for ensuring that children meet the learning outcomes. This creates a power relationship in the classroom, where the teacher holds the knowledge and transmits it to the children. It is difficult, under these circumstances, to give up control—to shift from a relationship of adult authority over children to an equitable negotiation of learning. As much as we might desire a democratic classroom, we are concerned that others might feel that we do not have strong classroom management skills or that we are disorganized.

Openings for Change

There are challenges to involving children as coconstructors of knowledge, but there are also openings that invite change. The transmission of

knowledge is reflected in the kindergarten program statement in words such as *acquires*, *expands*, *attends*, *identifies* and *demonstrates*. However, words like *explores*, *experiences* and *experiments* are also embedded in the language of the curriculum. I derive hope from this language, because it moves us toward the concept of multiple possibilities and ways of knowing. It brings us closer to Grumet and Pinar's (1995) definition of curriculum as "the process of making sense with a group of people of the systems that shape and organize the world that we can think about together" (p 19). Though teachers are ultimately accountable to the curriculum and have knowledge of the curriculum that children do not have, they are still able to interpret and translate it in diverse ways.

Assessment for learning, in which children assess their work and that of peers to make meaning of their learning, also offers some possibilities for new understanding. The fact that kindergarten children do not need to be graded and tested is closer to the ideas in the guiding principles, because the children can, in theory, represent their knowledge in multiple ways.

Implications for Teachers

Stremmel (2002) found that teachers were more likely to be influenced by their personal images of the child than by instructional theories, which makes it urgent that we reflect upon these images and come to new understandings (Stremmel 2002, 90). As teachers, we view children through a particular cultural and social lens, and selectively view and filter information to fit our own ideas about that particular child and our image of the child in general. We are like photographers in a sense—staging the shot, preparing the backdrop and the setting, deciding what and who should be included in the picture or excluded from it, and choosing the angle. We prepare and gather information in order to capture an image of the child, but in so doing we are making all the decisions and hold the power over what the end product is to be. Consciously working to understand my own beliefs, values and ideologies, and the context in which they have developed, is a necessary first step toward changing how I am with children.

This paper began with an observation of Justin and Ethan's exploration of the xylophone. I could have responded differently in this situation and might have done had I not been immersed at the time in coming to understand the guiding principles. As the boys worked to figure out the xylophone, I might have latched on to their play, seeing it as a teachable moment. I could have become the director or conductor, if you will, teaching and questioning in

order to impart information and advance my own agenda in relation to the curriculum. However, something held me back from inserting myself into their play; instead I observed and listened. As I reflected on what I had seen, I realized that prior to this episode I had unconsciously formed an image of Ethan as someone who struggled with connections between letters and sounds because he could not identify letters, even in his own name. I saw him as the dependent child who often needed my assistance. Yet on that day, I came to see him in a different way—as a complex, vibrant and competent child who formed his own understandings in collaboration with his friend, and who was able to make connections between the letters on the bars and the sounds they emitted. It was not the kind of knowledge that necessarily fit into the little square checkboxes on my kindergarten evaluation checklists, but it was just as important. I was reminded that observing and listening are two of the pedagogical tools utilized in the Reggio Emilia approach to help teachers better understand children. Knowing what they know, how they construct knowledge and what fascinates them propels us past the superficial understanding of a child that is so easily confined within the boundaries of our forms and checklists. Observation permits us to capture a truer image of the child; however, we need to push ourselves even further.

The ability to listen to children rather than tell them what to do also seems to bring me closer to understanding children's multiple childhoods (Davis 1994). Gallop (2000) defines close listening as the ability to hear what is actually being said instead of what we expect to hear (p 256). Bruner (2000) asserts that teachers in the Reggio system cultivate *locutionary respect* by "paying attention, being respectful to what is said" (p 35). The teacher provides time and support so that a child can respond to a question; the child's ideas are then followed up and explored with the class (Bruner 2000, 36). We show that we are listening in how we involve children in shaping their own learning environment, how we choose texts and how we plan according to children's interests. We also show our listening in building relationships with children and their families. These important people in the life of the child are able to act as translators when we do not yet know the child's own language. They can guide us toward a deeper understanding of the child's cultural and social circumstances.

The guiding principles demand that I acknowledge that a child has been learning his whole life and doing so in a variety of contexts. As a teacher, I find this a challenge. How can I decide on my role as a teacher? How do I come to make meaning of a child's prior learning so I know how to

help him build on that knowledge? Knowing is much more than the overt—the observing, listening and recording of the child's words and actions. The overt gives me a snapshot of the child in a particular time and place. However, I want to capture the multidimensional image, and I cannot do this without actively collaborating with the child.

When the teacher becomes an observer, listener and facilitator of learning, the power relationship shifts. The image of the child changes, but so does the image of the teacher. The teacher is no longer the purveyor of knowledge or the expert. The child is no longer a passive, dependent recipient. Instead, teacher and child are interdependent, intertwined in a complex relationship of coconstruction wherein each contributes equally to the process of learning. When guidance is needed, the teacher facilitates learning by providing opportunities to explore new objects or ideas rather than by directing learning and telling children what they need to know. I am striving for a dynamic process that involves learning to speak the same language, metaphorically speaking, in order to understand one another. Children already do this when interacting with one another—they are always engaged in the coconstruction of knowledge. Inserting myself, the teacher, into the process will transform the nature of what is already taking place, but through observing, listening and reflecting I can help to ensure that my intervention adds value to the children's experiences.

Conclusion

The foundational principle that childhoods differ depending on social and cultural circumstances is deceptively simple. However, closer examination shows that it directly contradicts the view of a universal childhood upon which our knowledge of, and institutions for, educating children are based. To embrace this guiding principle involves a profound paradigm shift. This shift requires self-awareness, reflection and openness to new learning and new approaches to practice. However, this will move us toward an environment in which children are respected for the knowledge they bring to the classroom and we, as teachers, can learn with and from them.

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Second-Generation Somali Children's Perceptions of Their Identities

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identifies some implications for parents and teachers of young children.

Theoretical Framework

Identities are important because they signal group affiliations and guide personal choices. Yon (2000) claims that they anchor individuals' decisions in a sea of possibilities. Identities are ascribed, internalized, contested and claimed. Ajrouch and Kusow (2007) suggest that in North America immigrants are ascribed identities based on their "closeness to and distance from certain cultural, physical, and moral ideals" (p 73) of the dominant white majority population. Children also actively resist and select features of their identities for strategic purposes (see, for example, Ali, in press; Yon 2000).

Some scholars suggest that individuals possess multiple social identities as a result of their membership in multiple social groups and categories (Freeman 2003). One view on multiple identities is that they are rank ordered in a hierarchy of most salient to least salient dimension (Stryker and Serpe 1994). Jones and McEwen (2000) state that salient identity dimensions are often associated with lower social status. Thus race is a salient identity dimension for black people but not for white people. Another view is that multiple identities are experienced simultaneously, not hierarchically, and they are not fixed attributes, but changing, evolving, contextually dependent and continually negotiated features of individuals in interactions with their social environments (eg, Abes, Jones and McEwen 2007; Sorenson 1991). According to Plaza (2006), identity construction is "a fluid, situational, volitional, and dynamic phenomenon, one in which ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures are negotiated, defined, and produced through social interaction inside and outside ethnic communities" (p 214). Immigrants' identities, for example, change rapidly upon migration. In their new location their race may become their primary identification, while they may have not had to consider this at all in their country of origin (Ajrouch and Kusow 2007).

Abstract

In this small-scale study of 5- to 10-year-old Canadian-born children of Somali immigrants living in Toronto, religious and ethnic identity appeared to be more salient for the children than their racial and national identity. This paper speculates on why this may be so, and recommends that issues related to identity be raised and addressed at an early age.

Introduction

Children of Somali descent now living in Canada are often designated as behaviourally challenged and placed in inappropriate grades, and they drop out of school in disproportionate numbers (Reitsma 2001). Some scholars suggest that challenges faced by these children in school may be rooted in the confusion arising from their multiple identities (Collet 2007; Reitsma 2001). Institutions such as schools encourage them to think of themselves as Canadians. They are also viewed as black by many people, and sometimes conflated with Americans or Caribbeans of African descent. Like other immigrant groups, Somali parents and other adults from the same ethnic background also teach their children to identify with their national and religious heritage. Which of these identities do Canadian-born children of Somali origin parents identify as more salient for them, and why? The study reported below explores these questions and