

Childhood Studies and the Impact of Globalization: Policies and Practices at Global and Local Levels.

M. Fleer, M. Hedegaard, & J. Tudge (Eds.).
New York: Routledge, 2009.

Reviewed by: Sherry Woitte
University of Alberta

Childhood Studies and the Impact of Globalization: Policies and Practices at Global and Local Levels is a recent annual by the *World Yearbook of Education* (2009). The *Yearbook* has three primary aims: to identify and interrogate an aspect of education that is significant in terms of global education developments; to document these global developments by drawing together contributions relevant to the theme from researchers in various countries; and to conceptualize the theme such that it builds on existing knowledge in the field and also frames a cutting-edge research agenda for the future (Monash University, 2010). This publication on childhood meets these aims well by exploring childhood studies and education in a manner that questions past assumptions and brings to light global ways of viewing children and education. Fleer, Hedegaard, and Tudge have gathered a vast array of writers who have addressed childhood and education from perspectives that differ significantly from the more traditional developmental psychological viewpoint that has tended to permeate research. This writing takes its lead from the cross-cultural psychological work of the 1970s and 1980s and has firmly established itself in the realm of the sociocultural historical model (Rogoff, 2003) as informed by Vygotskian theory. In outlining the purpose of the book, Fleer and colleagues discuss the “increasing discontent with how children have been named, reified, and measured. Prevailing Eurocentric and North American notions of ‘childhood’ and ‘development’ hold sway in how ‘childhood’ is constructed and how ‘development’ is theorized” (p. 1). In order to provide childhood studies from a range of perspectives, the editors include research from education, sociology, and psychology. Fleer and colleagues have organized this book into three sections: constructions of childhood development and learning, global-local childhood studies, and global politics shaping childhoods.

The first section examines perceived notions and definitions of childhood and development specifically with regard to studies in Brazil, Turkey, Australia, and Denmark, as well as a more general examination of the Majority World (a term that originated with a Bangladeshi photographer, Shahidul Alam, it is used in preference to the largely inaccurate and out-of-date terms *developing countries* or *third world countries*). It is believed that these terms / labels hinder appreciation of the cultural and social wealth of these communities, and that the term *Majority World* more accurately reflects the fact that these countries are indeed the majority of humankind, *Appropedia*, n.d.). Nsamenang (Chapter 2) points out that interventions based on Western thinking usually

Sherry Woitte is an instructor in the Department of Elementary Education. Her areas of interest and research include language arts education and early childhood education, as well as alternative early childhood models.

assume that Majority World livelihoods are developmentally inappropriate; that the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) for children of Majority World is not based in their realities; that there are no universal child outcomes to which all cultural communities aspire or would agree; ECCE guiding principles end up being “prescriptions” for education and care; and policy and program development often diverge from what is experienced in the field. In the same section, Branco (Chapter 3) looks at the differences between the human values that are learned in Brazilian schools versus what is expected in the community, especially around competition and cooperation. Branco sees cooperation as not only important for Brazilian culture and society, but also as a way that the Brazilian people can tackle issues with poverty, social exclusion, intolerance, prejudice, and military and violent confrontations. In Chapter 4, Göncü, Özer, and Ahioglu stress the importance of examining children’s development only in the context in which it occurs. They focus specifically on schooling in Turkey (with issues of exclusion from elementary education, sex discrimination, physical punishment, and examinations for access to high school); child labor; and children’s play. Fler and Quiñones (Chapter 5) examine a researcher’s ability to hear children’s voices in research. In order to do this, they felt that it was important to focus on the cultural-historical perspective because it offered “other possibilities for positioning children in the research, without compromising the ‘voice of the child’ (especially) the ‘many voices of the culturally diverse child’” (p. 89). With this focus on voice, Fler and Quiñones examined the sport, recreation, and leisure needs of children and their families in Melville, Australia and found that digital mapping/photographs were particularly helpful in ensuring that children’s voices were heard. In the last chapter of this section, Botcher looked at Danish children with a neurobiologically based developmental disorder (cerebral palsy) and found that both the definition of the disorder and the constraints around it were socioculturally determined. The strengths in this section are the authors’ abilities to look at childhood in new ways. More specifically, Branco, Nsamenang, and Fler and Quiñones are able to point us in new directions for future research.

In the second section, Fler and colleagues focus on the dichotomies that appear to exist in global-local childhood studies. This section is most strongly influenced by Vygotskian and ecological theories and looks at childhood studies in Kenya, Denmark, the United States, Russia, and the Netherlands. In Chapter 7, Stetsenko provides a framework of Vygotsky’s theory and how it has evolved and grown to the present day where relations and interactions are “embedded, situated, distributed and co-constructed within contexts” (p. 135). In Chapter 8, Tudge and Odero-Wanga look at typically occurring everyday activities of children from the middle and working classes in the Luo cultural group in Kenya and find that Luo children do not look much different from children in other countries. Between the two groupings, Tudge and Odero-Wanga find differences between the amount of engagement in activities and the influence of childcare. Bang, in her interpretive study of Danish children (Chapter 9), looks at development across activity settings and experiences and how children feel about their participation in these activities. She finds that by paying close attention to common environmental features and properties as

well as well-known practices in the children's lives, she can complete a rich and dynamic developmental analysis. In Chapter 10, Chaiklin and Hedegaard discuss a teaching method called *radical-local teaching and learning*, which integrates general intellectual concepts with local content and conditions of the children's lives. In their study, they discuss a social studies project conducted with Puerto Rican-American children that focused on Puerto Rican history in New York City. They found that the depth of questioning and learning was much more significant because this research was close to the children's own lives. Kravtsov and Kravtsov, in Chapter 11, note a separation of teaching and upbringing in Russian education as well as separations between various levels of schooling and proposed pedagogy focused on Vygotskian ideas where the subject-based learning was combined with a more emotionally oriented program (called *Golden Key*) to provide greater effectiveness. The result was an education program that had quality and content-rich learning activities based on children's lives and was taught through businesslike team-work relationships. In the final chapter in this section, van Oers draws on Vygotskian theory to propose learning called *Developmental Education* that went beyond a transmission-type of education to implement broader identity development in schools. By using this method, he hoped that the students would become critical members of a democratic society and be "committed to excellence and fairness, using and improving cultural heritage(s) for the benefit of all" (p. 228). This section provides the reader with the greatest content. Yet it is sometimes disjointed and varies between the more theoretical chapters such as Stetsenko and Bang's and actual research studies by Tudge and Otero-Wanga. In addition, the radical-local teaching and learning (Chaiklin and Hedegaard) appears to cross into several areas of earlier theory and research that are not cited. Theoretically, their work appears strongly influenced by the theories of Wenger (1998) and Sefa Dei, James, Kurumanchery, James-Wilson, and Zine (2003), who also focused on the need to connect teaching and curriculum to the children's lives. In addition, the method itself appears to reflect strongly the *Project Approach* developed by Katz and Chard (2000) in the 1960s, where the curriculum is determined by the children and strongly connected to their own community, but again is not referenced.

In the final section, Fler and colleagues focus on global politics that shape childhoods with an examination of political policy in Russia, Australia, Denmark, and Brazil, as well as an examination of politics around children's play. In Chapter 13, Elliot looks at the effect of globalization on Soviet Russian education with the fall of Communism. In the past, Soviet education stressed self-improvement, with a focus on the importance of peers and the collective in learning. After the fall of Communism, little appeared to change, but by 2000, motivation and engagement had diminished and education standards had weakened as a result of competitiveness and individualism in imitation of the West. Reacting to these methods, Russian policymakers brought in more progressive Western educational methods. However, these were not successful as teachers had not been trained in these methods. The newest trends in education have been a retreat to older authoritarian teaching methods that have had positive effects, especially on academic success. Hedegaard and Fler, in Chapter 14, look at the interconnectedness between children's devel-

opment and institutions and their practices in Australia and Denmark. Based on Vygotskian theory, they focused on three perspectives in relation to home and schooling: formal societal, general institutional, and individual. They found that both the formal societal conditions and material conditions influenced practice in the two families in the study, but most obvious were the school demands and the material restrictions in the Australian family and the parents' work demands in the Danish family. In Chapter 15, Freitas, Shelton, and Sperb examine early childhood programs in Brazil. Historically, these programs were developed similarly to those in other countries including Canada, where one system has care programs for the poor and the other has educational programs for the rich. Although there was some change in Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s when women demanded childcare programs so that they could work, the greatest change has been the implementation of federal legislation in 1996 that stated that all children had the right to be educated. Although this ensured an increase in preschool programs, this has not filtered into rural areas, which do not have adequate early childhood programs. In the final chapter, Fler, Tonyan, Mantilla, and Rivalland analyze play in early childhood programs. In their research, they had early childhood teachers examine their work with children by analyzing the play. They concluded by suggesting that the categories of play are insufficient in describing children's play and that these play theories describe "only one of the many possible cultural models of children's play" (p. 307). The strength of this section is the array of methods that policymakers used to address issues in childhood and then how the educators tried to work with policies at the local level.

In reviewing this compilation, I recognize that no book could address everything about childhood studies. However, it appears that the lack of anthropologically focused research has left a void in this publication (in fact, only Nsamenang, Chapter 2, references any anthropological studies, e.g., Ogbu, 1994; Harkness & Super, 1995, and a few others). Because anthropology has focused its research in a more holistic manner, including childhoods and children, it has often been able to address the breadth and depth of cultural views and concerns. In addition, anthropology has usually emphasized children's (and culture's) funds of knowledge rather than their deficits, as exemplified by Fler and colleagues in Chapter 1 and others. Besides early anthropologists such as Margaret Mead, Helen B. Schwartzman (1984) seriously questioned the deficit theory in her review of play research. Indeed, anthropology has often questioned Western assumptions about childhood and child development. For these reasons, anthropology would have been a logical and useful inclusion in a publication such as this.

Apart from the omission of anthropological studies, Fler and colleagues included no research that looked at existing educational programs that have a sociocultural perspective. For example, the Te Whāriki educational programs in New Zealand are based on the culture of the Maori people. An overview of this program would have added perspective to this publication. (Surprisingly, Nsamenang, in Chapter 2, references Helen May, one of the driving forces behind the Te Whāriki program, but does not discuss the educational program itself.) In addition, the early education programs of Reggio Emilia, Italy are focused on their responsiveness to needs of the children, families, and com-

munity. Inclusion of research on either of these two programs would have provided insight into current programs that are attempting to respond to the Majority World concerns.

Finally, this publication points out that a curriculum that is solely child-, teacher-, or curriculum-focused does not work for Majority World children. Once again, this has been pointed out by others in the past. Aoki (1993) questioned the validity of educational programs that were centered in any single way. Aoki suggested that having the child, teacher, or subject area as the sole center was unrealistic and unsuccessful. He suggested that a “decentered curriculum landscape” (p. 70) would better serve all children and their teachers. Reference to earlier works that questioned centeredness would also have been valuable.

Even with these criticisms, Fleer and colleagues have covered vast areas in dealing with childhood studies. In so doing, they have developed a book that could be useful for academics in the areas of education, sociology, and perhaps policy studies. This would also be a valuable book for a library collection.

References

- Aoki, T.T. (1993). The child-centred curriculum: Where is the social in pedocentricism? In T.T. Aoki (Ed.), *The call of teaching* (pp. 67-76). Vancouver, BC: British Columbia Teachers' Federation.
- Appropedia. (n.d.) *Majority world*. Available: http://www.appropedia.org/Majority_world
- Katz, L.G., & Chard, S.C. (2000). *Engaging children's minds*. Stamford, CN: Ablex.
- Monash University. (2010, June). *Education home page*. Available: <http://www.education.monash.edu.au/research/groups/adultlearning/currentprojects/world-yearbook.html>
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Schwartzman, H.B. (1984). Imaginative play: Deficit or difference? In T.D. Yawkey & A.D. Pellegrini (Eds.), *Child's play: Developmental and applied* (pp. 49-62). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Sefa Dei, G., James, I.M., Karumanchery, L.L., James-Wilson, S., & Zine, J. (2003). *Removing the margins: The challenges and possibilities of multi-centric schooling*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.