

Chapter 1

Looking at Early Childhood Programs from a Global Perspective

Sue C. Wortham

Introduction

This book tells many stories about early childhood education in many countries. It started with an idea that evolved and expanded into more ideas about understanding early childhood education in a global setting. Another story is about how a set of basic guidelines for early childhood education became an assessment tool for self-evaluation of early childhood programs that have been used in various countries in different languages. A parallel story is how the guidelines were used to introduce quality early childhood programs in other countries. And, finally, the book tells stories about early childhood educators and very young children in diverse locations, speaking many languages, representing unique programs, and reflecting local cultures. This is the most important feature of the book—the children, the teachers, the families, and the different cultures. Nevertheless, the first step is to describe how an idea became an international early childhood collaboration among early childhood specialists representing individual countries.

Origins of Interest in a Global Understanding of Early Childhood Programs

Early childhood educators in the twentieth century were most interested in the nature of early childhood programs within their own state, region or nation. Toward the end of the century when perceptions became more globalized, there was a growing awareness of preschool programs in other countries. More importantly, interest was growing about the nature of these programs and developing countries trying to begin programs were seeking guidance on how to evaluate the quality of their programs. This chapter describes an international effort to begin the process of addressing these

S. C. Wortham (✉)
The University of Texas, San Antonio, TX, USA
e-mail: sue.wortham612@gmail.com

interests and needs by developing global minimum standards that could be useful for early childhood educators and caregivers in various regions of the world.

The names of early childhood professionals who have worked on this effort from 1997 to 2010 are too numerous to mention. The accomplishments of many appear in the chapters that follow. However, the original idea came from Dr. Leah Adams, then President of the United States Committee of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education also known as OMEP. Dr. Adams approached Sue Wortham, then president of the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI) with her ideas for developing guidelines for early childhood education from a global perspective. Her thoughts were that although many developed countries had national standards, many other countries were just beginning the process of establishing preschools and would welcome having some basic guidelines for program quality. After the initial meeting in 1997, both OMEP and ACEI agreed to support the effort and planning for developing global guidelines began.

Planning an International Symposium to Develop Global Guidelines

Between 1997 and 1999, the ACEI and OMEP organizations began discussing and planning for a symposium to develop global guidelines. Both organizations had planning committees to accomplish the following steps: (1) Ruschlikon, Switzerland was selected for the meeting; (2) both groups contributed ideas for the organization of the symposium; and (3) processes for inviting delegate applications, determining keynote speakers, and procedures for processing and housing delegates in hotels in the Ruschlikon area. Leah Adams and Ulla Grob-Mendes co-chaired the OMEP efforts, while Sue Wortham headed the planning at ACEI. The International Symposium for Early Childhood Education and Care in the twenty first Century was held on July 5–8, 1999 at the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute at Ruschlikon, Switzerland. From 29 countries 83 participants attended and participated in the development of the *Global Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care in the 21st Century*.

The Organization and Work of the Symposium

The symposium was conducted over a period of four days to investigate the possibilities of global agreement on basic guidelines for quality in preschool programs. Working groups of 9 to 12 delegates were assigned one of the following document categories:

- Overall Philosophy, Goals, and Policies
- Environment and Physical Space
- Curriculum Content and Pedagogy
- Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers

- Partnership with Families and Communities
- Young Children with Special Needs
- Accountability, Supervision, and Management

As the groups worked together and spent periods of reporting their progress to the participants as a whole, they were able to come to agreement on the most basic components of early childhood education. The groups gave each other feedback and suggestions for improving their work. During the course of the symposium, several insights emerged. The delegates, regardless of nationality, were strong advocates for children and their families. Their shared visions for the world's children included the involvement of families and communities in the care and education of the children, coordination of resources, and recognition of family and cultural diversity. They also believed in equitable services for all children.

Outcomes of the Symposium

The documents produced by the Working Groups were extensive. The contents of the seven papers overlapped in many areas of content. Common concerns of all delegates emerged, regardless of which topic the group had been asked to address. After the end of the symposium a working team of editors reviewed the documents and worked to eliminate duplication and to provide a more concise summary of the work produced by the working groups. By the end of 1999, a document was produced by ACEI and OMEP titled *Early Childhood Education and Care in the 21st Century: Global Guidelines and Papers From an International Symposium Hosted by the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) and the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)* (Association for Childhood Education International and World Organization for Early Childhood Education (ACEI/OMEP) 1999).

The global guidelines were originally designed to: (1) provide the bases for developing a concise list of statement to be distributed to national government leaders; (2) serve as a catalyst for policy discussions and curriculum development; and (3) to guide early childhood educators in self assessing their own child care and preschool programs (Barbour et al. 2004). In reality, much of the first work was conducted at grassroot levels and later was recognized at national levels.

Development of the Global Guidelines Assessment and Applications of the Global Guidelines

A first draft of an assessment tool was piloted in two early childhood centers in San Antonio, Texas and in California. Subsequently, Professor Maria Olivia Herrera piloted a Spanish translation at two sites in Concepcion, Chile. In 2001 the assessment was further piloted in Los Angeles, North Carolina, Nigeria, South Texas, Beijing,

and Botswana. The first pilot studies revealed that there were variations in interpretations of guidelines statements. In addition, some of the indicators were found to be unclear, and most importantly, there were many areas of overlap still remaining between the categories of the assessment.

At the 2002 ACEI International Conference, a working group reviewed proposed revisions and contributed additional suggestions to improve the assessment. The refined instrument was formatted to incorporate space for participants to insert information relevant to site self assessments. In October 2002 the ACEI Executive Board approved the appointment of a Task Force for Global Guidelines in Early Childhood Education. This group has continued the work of publicizing, disseminating, and implementing the assessment now titled the *ACEI Global Guidelines Assessment* (GGA). A more formal pilot study was conducted in 2007 and 2008 in four countries to begin the process of developing validity and reliability (Sandell et al. 2010). Evaluation of the results of that study continue. Meantime, a multitude of additional studies have been conducted and reported at ACEI conferences. (See also Chap. 2.) The GGA has been translated into eight languages in addition to English. Translations in Spanish, French, Chinese, Greek, Korean, Russian, Italian, and Swahili can be found on the ACEI website at acei.org.

Using the Global Guidelines to Initiate Early Childhood Programs

Although the major body of work stemming from the Global Guidelines has evolved through the use of the GGA, some important initiatives have begun to assist in starting preschool programs in developing countries. A first step in introducing preschool programs is to conduct training for future preschool teachers. Workshops for teacher training in developing countries based on the Global Guidelines have been conducted in Haiti, Guatemala, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Sierra Leone (Fig. 1.1).

As a result of all of the accumulated work on using the GGA and the Global Guidelines for 10 years, there is abundant information about the countries that have participated. The preschool programs in these countries have many common qualities found in the GGA, but they also have unique characteristics and qualities that help us to understand the effects of location, geography, weather, and family conditions on how young children develop and learn. The stories to be told about countries in this book include some of the common qualities they share but also the unique qualities of each individual country's preschool program.

Overview of the Book

Common Characteristics and Unique Qualities in Preschool Programs: Global Perspectives in Early Childhood Education is divided into five parts:

Fig. 1.1 Three young boys in rural Guatemala. (Photo courtesy of Marshal Wortham)



- Part I: Background
- Part II: School Environments
- Part III: Curriculum Content and Pedagogy
- Part IV: Children with Special Needs
- Part V: The Early Childhood Educator
- Part VI: Family, School, and Community Partnerships

Part II to Part VI parallel the categories of the global guidelines and the Global Guidelines Assessment (GGA). The chapters reflect the challenges and opportunities that impact how early childhood programs have been organized. Many of the chapters also reflect the use of the GGA in an individual country.

Part I Background

As has been described throughout this chapter, the book reflects the work of many early childhood educators across the globe to establish basic standards for quality early childhood education programs. Over a period of ten years since the GGA was developed, it has been used in nine languages.

Chapter 2, “Cross-Cultural Collaboration Research to Improve Early Childhood Education” written by Bergen and Hardin reports on the results of a continuing effort to examine the psychometric properties of the GGA, including its reliability and validity for assessing program quality within and across different countries. The chapter also provides an overview of other international research that has been done previously, as well as country-initiated efforts to enhance the quality of early childhood programs.

Part II: School Environments

This section addresses the preschool environment to include indoor and outdoor spaces. The need for a physically and psychologically safe environment is stressed. The arrangement of the space, resources needed for the space, and opportunities should be culturally relevant and provide opportunities for exploration, play, and practice of life skills. The three chapters in this section address school environments from the poorest poverty areas to well-designed centers in both Africa and Italy.

Chapter 3, “From Montessori to Culturally Relevant Schools Under the Trees in Kenya” authored by Mbugua describes how Kenya distinguishes itself from other sub-Saharan African countries with a well-established system of early childhood development and education (ECDE). This chapter discusses how different environmental, economic, and socio-cultural circumstances in Kenya affect how programs are designed and preschools are conducted. The author provides a brief historical overview of early childhood educational contexts in Kenya and how preschool teachers meet minimum standards of a quality program using *Guidelines for Early Childhood Development in Kenya* with an African approach. Specific focus is given to the diverse and contrasting programs settings for early childhood care and education from the affluent city suburbs to the rural agrarian farms and the arid and semiarid areas (ASAL) of Kenya.

Chapter 4, “Preschool Environments in Rural West Africa” describes how preschool programs have been initiated in West African countries. A small charity, World Children’s Relief (WCR) encouraged rural school districts to establish preschool programs in government and community schools. Training in early childhood education was provided to prepare teacher and administrators to add preschool programs in their schools. Preschool classrooms have been started in small store-rooms, abandoned classrooms, and temporary shacks constructed of millet stalks until more adequate classrooms can be acquired. WCR built model classrooms in two countries to serve as models. Despite environmental challenges that continue, preschool teachers are implementing learning centers, small and large learning groups, and using a constructivist approach to curriculum and instruction within the spaces that they have (Fig. 1.2).

In Chap. 5, “Kindergarten Environments in Reggio Emilia, Bologna, Modena, and Parma, Italy,” the authors, Stegelin and Cecconi, discuss how kindergarten environments for young children 3 to 5 years of age support the early learning experience. Common and contrasting environmental features of private, state-sponsored and Reggio-inspired kindergarten settings are described. Results of a study of classroom environments using the GGA in these three kindergarten types is presented.

Part III: Curriculum Content and Pedagogy

Curriculum refers to the learning experiences and routines that make up the day in the preschool classroom. It is a plan that reflects the philosophy and culture of the area

Fig. 1.2 Two first grade classrooms meet in a single room in a war damaged school in Sierra Leone. (Photo courtesy of Marshal Wortham)



or country. The curriculum is child-centered and stems from the belief that children are competent. The curriculum focuses on the whole child and includes all categories of development. The chapters in this section reflect the settings and cultures of three countries.

Chapter 6: “Kindergarten in Russia’s Far East: The Effect of Climate” is authored by Sandell and Victorovna Klypa. It presents the nature of quality in early childhood programs within the unique economic, demographic, and cultural influences that infuse early childhood programs in Russia’s Far East. The Global Guidelines Assessment was used as a framework for looking at characteristics of quality in the curriculum and pedagogy among early childhood programs in that region.

Chapter 7, “Preserving Cultural Heritages in Korea” is authored by Lee, Kang, and Hong. They discuss how Koreans have been influenced by western cultures, mostly the American culture. Early childhood educators have become concerned about the prevalence of Disney characters and other elements of American practice in Korea, especially after the emphasis of learning English has become a critical part of Korean education. In response, Korean early childhood education programs have stressed preserving Korean heritage that is being lost in a global environment. Korea’s early childhood education in Korea is focusing on holistic development, including appreciating the traditional cultures.

Part IV: Children With Special Needs

During the past 20 years, numerous international initiatives have promoted services for children with special needs. However, many developing countries do not have the resources to serve children, particularly in rural areas. When studies using the ACEI Global Guidelines Assessment were conducted in various regions of the world during the last 6 years, the section on children with special needs reflected the dire need for

additional services in developing countries compared to industrialized countries. In the chapters that follow, information is provided on current special education services for young children in nine countries.

Chapter 8, “International Perspectives on Services for Young Children with Special Needs,” sets the stage for this part of the book. The authors, Hardin, Hung, and Mereoiu, provide an overview of recent initiatives impacting special education services. They discuss differences in cultural belief and value systems and how they influence policies and services related to children with special needs. Results of two international studies using the ACEI global Guidelines Assessment will be discussed focusing on services for young children with special needs.

Mexico is the first example of a program for children with special needs. In Chap. 9, “New Visions for Inclusive Preschool Education in Mexico,” the authors, Fletcher and Romero-Contreras, trace the history of services for children with special needs to the present inclusion approach. After describing the nature of educational policies in Mexico, the evolution of special education is explained. The identification of children with special needs, the process of referral, and additional health needs are discussed. Steps to an inclusion model included teacher training and ongoing seminars and courses are provided for teachers. Regardless of these efforts, only 50 % of children with special needs are receiving services. Other challenges include variations in teaching quality, and lack of resources to implement inclusion for many children with special needs.

Early childhood education has a prominent place in China’s goals for economic and educational success. With regards to serving children with special learning needs and/or disabilities within early childhood centers, inconsistencies exist in access to programs, service provided for children with exceptionalities, educational environments, and levels of educational attainment and training for teachers. In Chap. 10, “Early Childhood Special Education in China: Advocacy and Practice,” the authors, Trube, Wenge Li, and Yan Ping Chi, present information about advocacy efforts of early childhood educators and researchers, government leaders, and families of children in the Peoples Republic of China. Interviews and observations compiled by university professors and early childhood special education teacher educators are presented. The role of advocates in creating enduring bonds on behalf of young children with special learning needs is highlighted.

Part V: The Early Childhood Educator

This part of the book addresses the qualities preschool educators need to participate and promote an appropriate preschool program. Beyond the differences between child-care settings and preschool programs, levels of education can vary widely within and among countries. Early childhood educators from three countries located in different continents are discussed in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 11, “Administrators, Teachers, and Niñeras: Professional Partnerships for Quality in Guatemala” written by Belinda Hardin and Maria Albertina deCastenada

provides information on diverse preschool programs in that country. Guatemala has three types of early care and education services, including programs operated by the Ministry of Education, The Secretary of Social Well-Being, the Presidency of the Republic, and private programs. Each type of program is discussed to provide a basic understanding of Guatemalan early childhood services. The preschool programs are staffed by administrators and teachers with university degrees and *niñeras* who have less, more informal training. The relationships between the three levels of educators are described in this chapter, including challenges and success that impact the quality of early care and education services.

Early childhood teachers in Slovakia face different kinds of challenges. Slovakia is a relatively new country, formerly part of Czechoslovakia and the “Eastern Bloc”. After the Iron Curtain was torn down in 1989, Slovakia became an independent country and a member of the European Union in 2004. The new country went through important political changes with consequences in the field of education, mainly school reform. In Chap. 12, “Early Childhood Teachers in Slovakia,” the authors, Mbugua, Pupala, and Petrova, who are teacher trainers in Slovakia, discuss the history of the education of early childhood teachers in Slovakia and the process of transforming the system of undergraduate and life-long education of teachers during the last decade. The chapter also describes how pre-primary and primary school teachers are working in their programs today in Slovakia and the new challenges preschools and primary schools have to face as a result of the school reform.

In Chap. 13, “Teachers of Dual Language Children in China,” Trube, Yang, and Zhang discuss English immersion programs in China. These programs for young Chinese dual-language learners are currently offered in over 30 experimental kindergartens servicing children between the ages of 3 and 5 in various regions of China. The Global Guidelines for Early Care and Education in the 21st Century, introduced to educators in Chinese kindergartens in 2001, and later the Global Guidelines Assessment (GGA), presented in 2004 contribute a framework for looking at components of ELL programs sponsored by the China, Canada, and United States English Immersion (CCUEI) research collaborative. This chapter presents interviews with anecdotes and observations by Chinese early childhood educators and caregivers working in CCUEI experimental kindergartens. Attention is given to the GGA with emphasis on environments, curriculum content and pedagogy, teacher preparation, and partnerships with families and communities to create significant interpersonal relationships in support of dual language children in China.

Part VI: Family, School, and Community Partnerships

The care and education of preschool children is a shared responsibility between the family, school, and community. This section of the Global Guidelines Assessment (GGA) promotes positive relationships in the shared responsibility. In the chapters that follow, two very different types of preschool systems are described in terms of the nature of the strengths of their relationships.

In Chap. 14, “Family and village Partnerships in Rural Schools in Senegal and Burkina Faso,” Wortham describes children and families in rural West Africa. Children in rural areas of Senegal and Burkina Faso live very much the same way as they have for centuries in family compounds. Subsistence farming is the way of life for families. Electricity and running water are not available to family homes far out into the Savannah. There are very strong partnerships between the schools, families, and villagers. Schools are both government sponsored, and initiated by communities. Villagers build community schools. Mosques and churches located in the villages are a strong community element, as are the village leaders. Schools have committees that are composed of educators, parents, and village chiefs and elders. This chapter describes the nature of the partnerships in Burkina Faso and Senegal.

In Chap. 15, “Weaving Relationships Between Preschools, Families, and Communities: The Nurturing Connections to the Reggio Emilia Region of Italy,” Stegelin and Cecconi discuss partnerships in a European industrialized country. The Reggio Emilia approach is known for important contributions to early childhood education and to the lives of children, families, and communities. The authors describe the importance of nurturing connections in the development of enduring relationships that develop between children, teachers, parents, and community members in the Reggio-inspired schools of northern Italy. Reflective the family-oriented Italian culture, these nurturing connections provide strength, resilience, hope, and adaptability to families and schools that are responding to cultural and economic changes in this region of Italy.

Conclusion

The final chapter reviews the five sections of the book that reflect the five categories of the ACEI Global Guidelines Assessment. Comparisons and contrasts between programs in each category are discussed as well as information across sections that enrich the information presented by the authors. The unique qualities of programs in different cultures are featured as well as how the heritage of countries is reflected in their educational practices.

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