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Was the Professional Development I Conducted in South Africa Evident in Teachers' Practices Many Years Later?

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Cover Page Footnote

I am grateful for the Fulbright Scholar Award, which made this work possible.

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Abstract

I conducted professional development by working alongside the teachers I hired at a child development center in South Africa. I spent one year and 9 months there while as a Fulbright CORE Scholar from 2007 to 2009. After 8 years with only two short visits back, the digital tools (photographs and videos) I used and reviewed with teachers at the time of the professional development also helped me to assess the impact of that professional development. I saw how it influenced the teachers' practice and noted what was similar and what had changed over the years.

From 1998 to 2014, before I became the University of South Florida's (USF) Fulbright Faculty Advisor, I taught undergraduate classes such as "child growth and learning" and "learning and the developing child" at USF. My students majored in early childhood, elementary education, or special education, and they completed most of their classes with faculty members in those departments. Although I had previous teaching experience within public schools, at USF, I was a faculty member of a separate program area (educational psychology) that was part of a different department. While completing my course, my students also completed internships at local schools in the Tampa Bay Region, and these internships also were supervised by faculty from the other departments.

In hopes of bridging knowledge and practice gaps, during several semesters, faculty from these departments and I integrated our course assignments and sometimes taught our classes at the site of students' internships. We learned that this practice helped our students to create greater linkages among our classes (e.g., Allsopp, DeMarie, McHatton, & Doone, 2006; Alvarez-McHatton, Allsopp, Doone, DeMarie, Colucci, & Cranston-Gingras, 2008). We assumed this would translate into better practice in their future classrooms. Yet, I rarely had opportunities to see former students' classroom practices after they graduated.

While I was a Fulbright Scholar in South Africa, I had a rare opportunity to work alongside teachers and to provide ongoing professional development for them inside their own classrooms with their own students for nearly one year. Then years later, I had a rare opportunity to witness what they learned from me that was still being implemented in their current classrooms.

This paper provides an overview of the experiences I had before my Fulbright that influenced my teaching and research; what I did during my Fulbright in South Africa when I co-created a child development center and provided professional development for the teachers; and which practices the teachers maintained, changed, or eliminated nearly 10 years later. Photographs and videos helped me to see the impact of those practices and how the outcomes changed when those practices were modified or were absent in later years. This provided a new look at myself as a teacher of teachers.

Positioning Myself as a Researcher

The Beginning of My Teaching Career. Before I returned to graduate school to earn M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in developmental psychology from the University of Florida, I was a classroom teacher. I taught 1st grade, 2nd grade, and children with learning disabilities/behavior disorders in 1st to 3rd and 7th and 8th grades for 7 years in rural, Southeastern Ohio.

I attended a small, liberal arts college and majored in psychology but I also was certified to teach elementary school. At that time, the psychology department was overrepresented by faculty who interpreted the world through B. F. Skinner's Behaviorism (e.g., Skinner, 1976). I rebelled against that view, and when a non-Skinnerian joined the department, I convinced him to allow me to take two independent studies that helped me to develop my philosophy of education. For one, I read Maria Montessori's book, *The Secret of Childhood* (Montessori, 1966) and volunteered at a Montessori School. For the other, I read books about Open Education (e.g., Kohl, 1969; Nyquist & Hawes, 1970) and volunteered at a school that had a brand new open classroom for kindergarten. I also read books by Sylvia Ashton-Warner (e.g., Ashton-Warner, 1963).

My First Year of Teaching: Previous Professional Development Experience. During my first year of teaching 1st grade, I participated in a grant-funded study for new teachers. I was videotaped three times while teaching small groups of children during the school year. After I watched each videotape, my principal and I met to discuss his thoughts and my thoughts. I was amazed by how much I learned about myself as a teacher.

I noted that when I was teaching a lesson, my thoughts typically focused on how to sequence the material, which questions I should ask, and how to maintain children's interest and keep order in the classroom. On the other hand, when I watched the videos, I could focus on the children as individuals. I noted: Who was engaged in the lesson? What inappropriate behaviors did children

exhibit that I had missed? Which children received my attention and answered my questions, and which children wanted to answer a question but never had a turn? I noted whether boys and girls were given equal opportunities to participate.

First Position in Higher Education. After earning my graduate degrees, I taught in the psychology department of Muskingum College (now Muskingum University), a small, liberal arts college in Ohio. There, I co-created the Muskingum College Center for Child Development, which had preschool child care, an alternate day kindergarten program, and after school care. I discovered the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC; see <http://www.naeyc.org>) professional organization and visited the early childhood programs in Reggio Emilia, Italy several times.

During this point of my professional career, my philosophy of education was greatly influenced by many books (e.g., Bredekamp & Coople, 1997; Caldwell, 1997; Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1998). I realized that what I learned that worked best when I was a classroom teacher had corresponding literature that considered those “best practices” (see Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2007) in early childhood. I then completed other coursework in early childhood education and organized a 6-region chapter of NAEYC in Ohio. Though my academic focus had been psychology, and my experiences mainly were inside elementary schools up until that point, early childhood education became my passion. I started a new job as Associate Professor of educational psychology at USF in 1998. The job was appealing because it united my psychology research knowledge and my experiences in educational settings.

My Fulbright Scholar Award: South Africa, 2007 to 2009. From 2007-2009 I was a Fulbright Scholar in South Africa. The original Fulbright was from July 2007 to July 2008, but it was extended by the American Embassy to December 2008 to July 2009. When I wrote my application, I assumed the child development center that was being created in 2002 was already in operation. However, when I arrived, there was an empty house and no money for renovations. I spent most of the first year raising money, deciding which walls to knock down, designing the playground equipment, and hiring the two teachers.

I co-created this child development center with Professor Lily Cherian (see DeMarie & Cherian, 2012). Her expertise and background in biology/ health was complementary with my knowledge and experience in early childhood education; that is, once the center existed. The center opened in early May, but the grand opening celebration occurred on June 8, 2008, which was 3 weeks before I was scheduled to leave the country.

With an extension to my Fulbright from the American Embassy, I returned for 9 additional months. During these extra months, I worked alongside the teachers we hired. Because neither teacher had formal coursework in early childhood education, I was their first university teacher. Thus, their teaching at the center was the equivalent of my U.S. students' first internship.

Being a Fulbright Scholar gave me a rare opportunity to work alongside these teachers for nearly one year. After experiencing the benefits of digital media for professional development early in my own career, it was logical that I decided to use digital media (i.e., photographs and videos) in my own research (DeMarie, 2010) and for teacher professional development in South Africa. At the end of a day or week, the teachers and I would talk about the results of what we did and what we noted about individual children in photos. Both teachers lived in a trailer at the center Monday through Friday, so we had lots of time together.

My Return to South Africa. I returned to the U.S. in August 2009, and I had only two opportunities to return for short times during an 8-year period. After being away for more than one year, in November 2010 I returned to South Africa for the first kindergarten graduation. I spent 6 weeks renewing the professional development of the two teachers. I also worked with the assistant teacher they hired during the months I was gone.

Sadly, in 2013, Lily passed away suddenly. In 2016, the university asked if I would be willing to return to help them to evaluate the child development center and to formulate the next steps. During that time, I wrote a commissioned report. I also had opportunities to see how my teaching of teachers was reflected or changed in their current practices. Due to difficulty with connections to the internet, I had received only 3 emails during this entire period-of-time, so I had very little idea what I would discover when I returned. To be honest, I was scared. It felt as though my professional credibility was on the line.

When I returned to South Africa, I sought to answer questions about how the professional development I did with the teachers in 2009 impacted their practices many years later. I had worked alongside them in a country and culture that were unfamiliar to me initially. Unlike most students I teach in the U.S., these teachers did not have any formal coursework in early childhood education when we began, and they had few professional development opportunities other than what I provided for them. The 2016 research questions were:

- 1) What practices did the teachers use that resembled those we used together in 2008-2009 or 2010, and in what ways were those practices modified? What were the outcomes of those practices?
- 2) What practices had been evident in 2008-2009 or 2010 that were no longer practiced, and did that impact the outcomes for children?

Method

Whenever I was at the child development center, I continuously took photographs or video, and I later used them for the ongoing professional development (see DeMarie, Weber, & Damjanovic, 2013). To illustrate, on a typical day, I probably took an average of 50 photographs and one video of teacher-child interactions and children's play. I photographed circle time, when teachers read books to the children, or when teachers engaged children in conversations about their theme that week. In fact, I completely filled three different 18gb photo chips. I reviewed these photos and videos every evening and looked for opportunities to provoke discussion with the teachers.

When I returned in 2016, I observed the teachers and children inside each of the three classrooms (one for 2-3-year-olds; one for 4-5-year-olds, and one for 5-6-year-olds) and interacted with children during their outdoor play time every day. In addition to reviewing photographs and videos taken from 2009 and 2010, I planned to take many new photographs and videos. I purchased a book about African Animals and demonstrated with the 5-6-year-olds how to build a project around that topic. I looked at the materials that were offered to children each day, how teachers interacted with children, which books teachers chose to read, and which books and which children chose to read books during their free choice time. I read and photographed all documentation that was posted on the walls, asked to review parent newsletters, and looked for books that had been created from the children's experiences at the center or on field trips. I planned to look for similarities and differences in how the teachers wrote in children's journals and interacted with parents each day, and I planned to participate in at least one parent meeting. However, there were no opportunities to do so. Finally, I talked with faculty and administrators at the university who were responsible for oversight of the child development center and recorded their thoughts and observations.

In order to write the commissioned report, I interviewed the three teachers with whom I worked and the one new teacher who had been hired the previous year. Each was interviewed individually on five different occasions. These interviews were recorded. I also interviewed 8 current parents and called 6 alumni parents. The university sent out a survey to all staff to determine their evaluation of the child development center. This particular paper will focus only on the

teachers' practices and the observed and reported outcomes for children. Other aspects of my experiences over the years will be reported in an upcoming book.

Entering the Child Development Center in 2016

When entering the child development center after being away for nearly 7 years, I felt very nervous. With little communication during the interim years, coupled with the fact that I was encouraged to assess the center, I worried that the center had changed dramatically from what we practiced when I was there. The only difference I noted on the outside was that parts of the center had been painted a vibrant purple color. I entered quietly, so I could listen, and so I could read all the documentation that hung by the door before I talked with anyone.

I was thrilled with all that I experienced, and I was grateful that I was afforded this opportunity to learn about myself as a teacher of teachers. The teacher who had become the director of the center heard me arrive, and she came running to greet me. It was an incredible moment, and tears came streaming down my eyes.

I had heard that one of the teachers left the center. It was the teacher whom they hired in 2010. The other teachers then came to greet me, and we had a celebratory moment as we realized how many years it had been since we had worked together. I noticed the teachers seemed a bit anxious when I asked questions. I wondered if they knew I was brought there to write a report. I did everything I possibly could to help them to feel at ease.

I spent quite a bit of time in the classroom for 5-6-year-olds, I hoped by demonstrating lessons inside the Director's classroom that anything I taught her would be shared with the other teachers. She attended both the presentation I gave to the Management Team and the Parent Workshop I presented, and she seemed to be paying very close attention to whatever I said and did in her classroom.

Research Question 1: What practices did teachers use that resembled those we used together in 2008-2009 or 2010, and in what ways were those practices modified? What were the outcomes of those practices?

There were four major areas I experienced that stood out as practices that resembled what we did when I was working alongside the teachers in 2009: 1) documenting children's experiences; 2) taking field trips; 3) having frequent teacher-child interactions with questions and elaborations of what children said; and 4) reading to children every day.

1) Documenting Children's Experiences: 2009.

When I worked alongside the teachers, I helped them to see the importance of using documentation (see Gandini, Hill, Cadwell, & Schwall, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006). Our documentation typically included photographs of children's engagement in learning and quotes from children or statements that were written about what we observed. This helped visitors to get an inside-look at children's experiences. I learned about the practice of using documentation from previous visits to the early learning centers in Reggio Emilia, Italy (see Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012) and from the exhibit, the "100 Languages of Children"/"The Wonder of Learning" (see the website: http://www.thewonderoflearning.com/exhibition/?lang=en_GB).

2016. I was thrilled when I entered the center to see many examples of documentation by the doorway. I was not present during the time when children had those experiences. Thus, I learned what people could learn when they read this type of documentation, and how reading it could help them to have conversations with children. For example, several pieces of documentation told the stories about field trips the center had taken (see #2 that follows). Later, I was able to engage children in conversations about those field trips (see # 3).

I imagined myself as a parent reviewing that documentation. I not only could engage my child in conversation about the field trips, I could see with whom my child played and what values were captured by what was written. For example, in one story, the statement captured was, "We are learning to be responsible." There was a photograph of children cleaning up after center time. Parents who rarely saw the child development center during the day could see the day's activities reflected in the narratives and photos.

Indeed, I do believe parent involvement is much broader than once thought. Providing linkages for parents to their child's learning inside the school day can broaden conversations about what children are learning at school when they are at home. This is what I believe is the essence of parent involvement. Parents can be involved mentally, even if they cannot be involved physically. Thus, my experiences confirmed my idea that parents or others would get a glimpse inside children's experiences, and that documentation potentially could help to bridge children's homes and their school.

In this region of South Africa, it is not unusual for a child's parents to work in a city that is distant from their homes. These parents only returned home on the weekends, or in some cases, once per month. These parents usually were unavailable for parent meetings or an open house. Thus, having a way to bring

parents inside of children's lives was challenging but was still important for children's well-being. I was happy to see that the teachers continued this practice.

Changes in Documentation. What differed in 2016 was there were not any examples of documentation in a book-like format. My photographs from 2009 showed children reading books that we co-created about their field trips or explorations outdoors. One book was about a girl's birthday celebration, and I had a photograph from 2009 of her mother reading that book and talking with her daughter about it. This mother was at home only once every other month, so this provided a way for her to see her child's life at school on a special day that she missed. I will never forget the tears she fought to conceal as she read that book.

I realized that I had not discussed why the documentation in books was important for some children. Although teachers saw the practice of documentation on the walls as important, they probably did not see the relevance of having any of this documentation in books. In fact, when I revisited the photographs I had taken of the classrooms before I left in 2009, I realized that the teachers had kept these "home-made" books at the bottom of the book display. Perhaps the home-made nature of these books made them appear to have less value from the teachers' perspectives. Yet, I firmly believe that books for early reading that are meaningful and relevant to children's lives and experiences are the ones with the most value for them to want to read.

If I am able to return to South Africa, I want to strengthen the practice of teachers and children creating books that can be sent home to parents. I noted that many children's parents no longer transport them to or from the child development center. Instead, they hire a driver, who signs the children in and out of the center. That makes other methods of communication even more important.

When I taught undergraduate classes at USF, some of the sections did service learning projects. One of my students created books of children's experiences and learning in kindergarten that later were sent home for the weekend on a rotating basis with the children. The books had blank pages at the end of them, and parents were invited to write a note back to the class. The teacher read these notes to the class members every day. This practice seemed to bridge home and school quite well, and with many homes still without electricity in northern South Africa, having ways to communicate with parents beyond those that require internet or in person visits probably is even more important.

2) Taking Field Trips: 2010.

When I returned to South Africa in 2010, I provided some professional development for the teachers about how field trips and first-hand experiences were important learning opportunities for children. I learned this from Lilian Katz and Sylvia Chard's professional development seminar on the project approach at Robert Allerton Conference Center at The University of Illinois in 1994 (see Katz, Chard, & Kogan, 2014), and I was convinced that project-based learning even was effective with adults. In fact, I was so engaged in the project learning that my group did about the plants at Allerton that I held poison ivy in my hand for one hour before realizing what it was. I spent a few hours at the emergency room later that evening. Could any learning possibly be more engaging than that?

While I was in South Africa, one teacher and I took the six 5-6-year-old children (Grade R, or kindergarten-age in the U.S) on a field trip to the new grocery store close to campus. Before leaving, I asked children what they wanted to know. They said, "Where do they keep the chickens?" "Where do they keep the cows?" "Where is the vegetable garden?" I then drove two groups of children and teachers to the grocery store.

When we arrived at the grocery store, we met the manager, and the children asked him their questions. Next, we had a tour of the grocery store, and the children enjoyed reading the prices of all the items on the shelves. I gave each child 10 South Africa Rand (approximately \$1.25 at that time) to spend on the item of his or her choice. Most purchased a piece of fruit, which they watched being weighed in the produce department. When we returned to our classroom, children told what they learned, and we posted that learning. I was convinced the teachers had witnessed the richness of children's learning from this experience.

2016. When I read the documentation that was posted by the door in 2016, I learned about the field trips the children had taken the past year. For example, they had gone to a preserve where they saw many different animals. Later, when I finally entered the child development center and asked the children what they had been learning, many told me (and showed me by snapping their hands together) about the crocodile that ate a chicken. Had I not read the documentation before I talked with them, I would not have understood their conversations.

Changes in Field Trip Practice. What seemed to be different in the practices I saw in 2016 was that the field trips were not connected with experiences in the classroom or the children's reading or writing. I did not see questions children had or postings from them about their learning. In fact, I later learned from a teacher about a field trip they took to Pretoria. Going to Pretoria involved

approximately 3 hours of driving each way, so I asked the teacher where they had stayed overnight. (I wondered about the affordability of such a trip.) She said they did not stay overnight. That meant they only had approximately 2-3 hours to see Pretoria, and she admitted they spent most of the day in the bus.

I was not surprised that no child said a word about this field trip to Pretoria. In fact, when asked about it, children did not even seem to remember that field trip. Thus, I realized how important it was to help teachers to understand why field trips need to be connected to what the children are doing in the classroom.

A field trip experience on its own is not the point. Field trips can be a way to deepen children's first-hand experiences. Children can be part of the dialogue for planning. They should be active participants in the experience, and the learning should somehow connect to what they do before and after the field trip. Traveling to far off places is not the point! By including meaningful experiences and allowing children to ask their own questions, and then to collectively writing about their learning makes that learning more meaningful and more memorable.

3) Having Frequent Teacher-Child Interactions with Questions and Elaborations of What Children Said.

In 2009, 2010, and 2016 I noted that every teacher engaged with children as they played with materials. Teachers asked questions that resulted in children being more thoughtfully engaged with materials. In fact, when I later tried to find photographs of each teacher for a power point I created for a presentation to the Management Team, it was difficult to find one that had any teachers standing up and facing the camera. Typically, they were bent over with their backs toward the camera and talking to children.

This example from 2009 is one I have used for many years in my child development classes at USF. First, I will explain the meaning of scaffolding. When teachers' questions are geared toward children's current level of performance but then change and become more challenging as children become more skilled, we say that teachers are scaffolding children's learning. A simple question causes children to work differently. Over time children need less teacher support and achieve greater accomplishments (see Berk & Winsler, 1995).

The children at the center in South Africa enjoyed playing with blocks, and they usually created squares of blocks every day. One day, a teacher was watching a child as he built a square with blocks. The child told the teacher, "I'm making a house." The teacher then asked, "Does your house have any other rooms?" At this point, the teacher had to go to assist another child, and she may

not have heard the boy's answer. He said, "My house has a garage." Another boy who was standing nearby started to get trucks to put into the garage, while the first boy built another square that he added to the first square. I kept taking photographs as they constructed the garage together.

The next day, a child who had observed the boys play on the previous day immediately told another child she was building a house with a garage. That child added yet another room, and dramatic play ensued inside the structure they had built. Children's block building became more and more complex over time.

Later that week, I asked the teacher if she noticed how much more complex the block play was after she asked the boy the question, "Does your house have any other rooms?" She did not remember asking the original question, so I shared the photographs I had taken over time. The photographs illustrated how the complexity of block building had changed over time. I shared this episode with the parents at the parent meeting in which I presented to show them the value of children's engagement with materials and how teachers' questions could make an important difference in children's learning.

2016. I was pleased to see abundant teacher-child interactions and scaffolding of children's learning. For example, as children did number puzzles, I heard a teacher say to one child, "Can you count how many wagons there are?" She then helped him to say the numbers, and then asked "Can you find the card with the number 5?" With another child, she only said, "What are you going to do first?" No child seemed to have more teacher attention than any other child, and all interactions were positive and were inclusive. I had difficulty finding any photographs of teachers standing or talking to one another on the playground. All of them were talking to children throughout the day.

Currently I am serving as co-chair of the early childhood sub-committee of the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, which is part of the American Psychological Association. We recently completed a parent brochure, *High 5; Must-Ask Questions for Parents in Search of the Best Early Childhood Program* (see <http://www.apa.org/education/k12/high-five.aspx>) and an annotated bibliography that describes the research support for the brochure (see <http://www.apa.org/education/k12/high-five-bibliography.pdf>). Although people typically look at structural characteristics (materials, square feet per child, etc.) when evaluating whether a program offers high quality early childhood experiences to children, research suggests that relationships play a key role as well. What might be a quality program for one child may not be for another child if the teacher-child interaction differs for those two children.

The relationships I observed among the teachers and children in South Africa in 2016 were of very high quality. The teachers were sensitive and responsive to children's needs, positive and affirming rather than punitive, and warm and nurturing. That's the essence of quality in a nutshell!

4) Reading to Children Every Day. 2009.

Reading to children every day was a practice I encouraged. When I was in South Africa, the teachers read books during the whole group times every day. The assistant teacher also read books by individual children's request during children's free choice time. I took many photos of the teachers as they read these books, and I later took photos when children were choosing to read books on their own. I noted the titles of the books that each child chose to read.

I found at least one photograph of every child in the child development center trying to read books or asking a teacher to read a book to them during free choice activity times. The children all engaged with books in a personal way at some time. For example, one child whose father brought her to the child development center each day chose the book, "I Love You Daddy" as her first independent reading experience. I believe it is important to provide children with meaningful early reading experiences and books that support their interests.

2010. The teachers still read books to the whole group every day. However, when many of the children read a book, they held the book as if they were reading to a large group. They did not engage with books in a more personal way. I searched for the differences in teacher practices that might have caused that difference. What I discovered in the photos from 2009 was that the assistant teacher spent most of her time engaged in reading books to individuals or small groups of children during free activity times of the day. However, in 2010 that same teacher was not in the classroom during those times. Instead, she was helping the person who cleaned to wash dishes and tables after breakfast.

I asked the teacher why she was helping with dishes instead of engaging in reading with children. She explained that because there were more children at the center, it was not fair for the person who cleaned to have to do far more work.

I realized that this teacher was thinking about fairness in terms of the adults rather than fairness to the children. I explained that when the number of children increased, it was even more important that she spent time helping the children to have optimal experiences. I also realized that I needed to explain the budget process to her more fully. The university paid for the cleaning services. Therefore, if the center needed more assistance with cleaning due to higher

enrollment, it was up to the cleaning firm to increase the number of adults responsible for cleaning. The center paid for her time, so it was important that she worked as an assistant teacher rather than an assistant person who cleaned the center. I then showed her the differences in how the children engaged with books in 2009 when she read to them during free choice time, versus their less personal 2010 book reading, and I explained the importance of personal engagements with books as well as more formal, whole group engagements.

2016. When I returned in 2016, book reading had changed even further. Instead of reading books related to children's project work, the teachers were reading the Bible to them every day. I think the lower diversity (see #1 in the section that follows) might have partially be attributable to this change, and I observed a lower percentage of children who chose to engage with books during their free choice activity times.

The teachers and I discussed having the Bible reading later in the day and using the whole group instruction time for books related to the theme and the children's project work. Without hearing books directly related to their own experiences, children were not making as many connections with print.

Another change in 2016 was that the person who cleaned the center sometimes helped the Assistant Teacher in the classroom. Again, cultural differences were evident in our definitions of fairness. Whereas my American brain looked at budgets as the separation of jobs, my teachers in South Africa defined fairness more collectively. My point about fairness to children meant that the Assistant Teacher and person who was hired to clean the center needed to do both do both jobs, so there would be fairness to all. This seemed to work well. Later, when the children were in whole group learning or napping, both adults cleaned up the kitchen.

In addition to these practices that changed somewhat or which had a slightly different application, there were several practices that had been evident in 2009 or 2010 that no longer were evident at all. In the section that follows, I describe two of these: 1) embracing diversity; 2) parent communication/meetings.

Research Question 2: What practices had been evident in 2009 or 2010 that were no longer practiced, and did that impact the outcomes for children?

1) **Embracing Diversity: 2009.** Although I was an outsider to the culture in

South Africa, I quickly learned about differences within the groups at the university. There were two dominant languages spoken by the people at the university: Sepedi and Xixonga. There also were several immigrants who spoke different languages. We hired teachers who each spoke one of the dominant languages, and the original plan was to help children to become bilingual. Instead, at the first parent meeting, the parents made it clear that they wanted their children to learn only English at the child development center. Although I wondered if that made sense, we went with the parents' wishes and spoke only English. It was truly amazing to see how quickly the children picked up the language and conversed with each other in English.

In retrospect, having all children learn English brought them together in many other ways. It did not matter what language was spoken at home, or if they were native to that region or immigrants from another country. They all learned English at the same time, and they helped one another to communicate in English.

When I visited a school in Johannesburg, I told teachers what I perceived to be a major challenge: bringing people together in this region of South Africa. I noticed that in the university restaurant, faculty, administrators, and staff sat only with people who spoke the same home language in the cafeteria. There rarely were tables accommodating both Blacks and Whites.

One teacher in Johannesburg gave me a poster, and I hung it on the wall where parents signed their children into the center every day. The poster said, "We are more powerful together than we ever could be apart." It had a child holding a South African flag.

Another practice that seemed to bring children together in 2009 and 2010 was posting their biographies on a wall in the classroom. During their first week at the child development center, children's individual photographs were taken. The teacher wrote what the child said when completing the following statements: "My name is ____." "I like ____." "I like ____." "I like ____."

All the biographies hung on a wall together in the classroom. These biographies represented our child development center community, and children often visited them and tried to read each other's biographies. During large group time, when the teacher asked, "Is anyone absent today?" the children compared which children's biographies were on the wall and which children were sitting in their circle. The biographies seemed to become a symbol of our community.

I noted in 2009 that while parents sat by tribe and language at the beginning of the school year, there was more intermingling among parents by the end of the school year. Parents spoke to other parents of children with whom their children played, and this cut across color, language, and culture.

2016. When I returned, biographies no longer were posted. The sign the teacher in Johannesburg had given me no longer was posted by the door. When I did a survey of all staff at the university, one perception that several people shared was that the teachers spoke only Sepedi, and the center was now more for Sepedis. These parents wanted their children to learn English. The new teacher did speak Sepedi, but she explained that she was helping the 2-year-old children to transition to learn English. Although this made perfect sense to me, I wondered why the parents had that perception, or why the teachers had not explained what they were doing to parents. I think the next section explains that further.

2) Parent Communication/Meetings: 2009. When the child care center opened, teachers wrote daily notes in an individual notebook for each child's parents. They usually did this while the children were taking their afternoon naps. Every morning, they took that notebook out of each child's backpack and checked whether any parents wrote notes back to them. This practice seemed to help parents who worked out of town to be a part of their child's daily experiences. When they were at home, they usually wrote back to the teacher, so this helped the teacher keep abreast of children's home lives.

During that time, the center also had quarterly parent meetings. Typically, 75% of the parents attended those meetings.

2016. When I asked if I could attend a parent meeting, I was told they had not had any parent meetings that year. Because the school year began in January, and it was October, I guessed this was a deliberate choice. Later, the teachers admitted they were nervous that parents expected them to do more academic skill tasks and worksheets. Although I explained the positive outcomes of the practices they used, none of the teachers seemed comfortable sharing that with others.

The teachers also had abandoned the daily notes to parents. Thus, parents who were out of town did not have the opportunity to be a part of their child's daily experiences. The reason was that they had more children at the center. They now had 59 children, and there had been 52 children when I visited in 2010. I do not think the outcomes of this practice was evident to the teachers.

The Director came to my presentation for the Management Team, and she heard me talk about the benefits of play. She said she would call a parent meeting and would have me present a workshop sharing this information with the parents. However, she did not have an idea how many would attend since they had not had one that year. We agreed that I should share the incredible success alumni children were having in their current schools. I reported what I had learned from calling the alumni children's parents. I also shared why the practices at the child development center facilitated those children's learning and success in the future.

The presentation about the importance of play was well received by the 15 parents who attended. However, there were 44 other parents who did not or could not attend. I wished I had more time to help the teachers to articulate the reasons why they did what they did. Parents should not be perceived as threats. Parents can be partners and mutual advocates for children. However, unless teachers feel confident about the reasons they are doing what they are doing and realize there is research that supports those practices, it is more difficult to articulate the reasons to parents. Thus, I hope to return to the child development center at a future time and to spend more time helping the teachers to articulate the research behind their successful practices.

The benefits of play and creative programs for young children are well supported by research (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009). One example was provided in a blog I wrote recently about the importance of play and music programs (see Bugos & DeMarie, 2017) for children's development of inhibition (sometimes labeled impulse control) for the American Psychological Association. Inhibition has been shown to be a culture fair predictor of children's later academic achievement, and it adds to prediction above and beyond what children's IQ test scores predict. Yet, in the U.S. currently, play opportunities do not appear to be equitable (see Jarrett, Sutterby, DeMarie, & Stenhouse, 2015).

Conclusion

I realized the importance of sharing the outcomes of practices with teachers as well as sharing thoughts about best practices to use with children. When I was with the teachers, they were expending effort to do what they saw me doing. After I left, they did only what had been explained to them that included an understandable rationale. When I was with them, I constantly took photographs to reveal the outcomes of their practices. After I left, without photographs, teachers probably did not see the results emerging with clear patterns and implications. From this experience, I learned how important it was not only to teach teachers how to teach but also to establish practices that empower teachers

to monitor the outcomes of what they were doing and to articulate the reasons why they are doing that instead of doing something else.

In South Africa, I did not have to give the children a standardized test to show that they were learning. The photographs revealed their love of reading when they engaged with books, their ability to create stories when they attempted to make sense of print or to tell stories, their knowledge of numbers when they played number games, their social skills when they cooperated and took turns, and their persistence when they kept trying to find the reason that something did not work as planned. To me, this is the essence of what we want children to learn in preschool. These are important foundational skills for critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and innovation in the future.

Unfortunately, when I returned, I discovered that some of the parents thought the center should be giving children more worksheets to do to prepare them for their later school experiences. It does make sense that those who do not understand early childhood education think that to learn academic skills, children must do academic skills. However, the most direct path is not the best path.

Before I left South Africa, I created a brochure that could be distributed to all faculty and staff at the university. On that brochure, I included the philosophy, values, and successes of the child development center. This brochure was distributed to all staff at the University, and it also will be given to new faculty. Hopefully, this brochure also served as a “booster shot” for my professional development with the teachers. I hoped it would serve as a reminder of what mattered the most for children to have high quality early learning experiences.

While I was in South Africa, I witnessed the profound impact the center was having on children’s and families’ lives. When I spoke with alumni children’s parents, they told me how their child was highly successful in their new school setting. I learned that some alumni children were awarded scholarships to attend private school and that many of the alumni children were reported to be in the top 10 in reading and/or math and/or overall achievement at 5 different elementary schools in the region. These schools included public schools, private schools, and Christian Schools. One parent told me that the principal of her child’s school wanted to call to congratulate the child development center, because the center had 3 children in 3 different grades who performed at the top of their grade. Since the alumni children were currently in 1st to 7th grade, this was not something that faded over time.

Alumni children's parents reported that their children were motivated to learn and were working hard to understand whatever new things they encountered. They also reported that the child development center gave their children a great foundation for their later learning. Their children wanted to read, enjoyed writing, and solved problems creatively. When their children encountered obstacles, they persisted until they succeeded. I predict these children will be the future leaders and innovators in South Africa.

It should be noted that before 2016 the center never used a single worksheet or presented an academic skill in isolation (e.g., reading flashcards with single letters to test whether children could name letters). Thus, I think it would help the current parents to hear from these alumni parents. I recommended having a panel of alumni children's parents at the first parent meeting at the child care center at the beginning of each school year. That would help the new parents to realize that whatever was happening at the child care center would benefit their children in the long term. Early learning may look different than later learning, but that does not mean that it does not contribute to later learning in important ways.

My experiences in schools and with students who have been educated in different types of programs support David Bjorklund's statement that "...children attending developmentally appropriate programs typically show advantages not only in subsequent academic performance, but also with respect to motivation and psychosocial factors, including liking school better, ... and having greater creativity, pride, less stress, and having greater creativity, pride in accomplishment, and self-confidence than children attending direct-instruction programs."

When I return to South Africa in the future, my professional development with the teachers will focus on the research that supports their successful practices. It seems ironic for me to say that, because that's exactly what I do when I teach educational psychology at USF. I teach teachers the research that supports successful practices. However, my cultural sensitivity made me think it would be inappropriate to impose research with children in the U.S. on teachers in South Africa. What I did not realize at that time was that these practices do not tell teachers what to teach. Instead, they simply suggest that presenting materials that are meaningful to children will engage their attention and motivation for learning. Then it is up to teachers to ask questions and to promote dialogue among children to enhance their learning. This can be accomplished with any materials that are interesting and engaging within the culture of any particular child.

I left South Africa realizing that what I had witnessed in the classroom was the essence of what I could have hoped to achieve. My visit left me feeling that the professional development I provided for the teachers was successful overall and will benefit many children in the years to come.

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