Chapter 10
The Ethical Dilemma of Early Global Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates ethical dilemmas associated with early childhood education in Confucian heritage countries. It draws on literature in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology in concluding that sociocultural differences between Eastern and Western civilizations amount to an ethical dilemma, which threatens to prevent a basic epistemology as well as a pedagogy for the education of children in the context of globalization and the information technology revolution. As evidenced by inventions, innovations, developments, and other technological and scientific breakthroughs, Western learners enroll in science and technology courses. It seems as though Eastern learners are duty-bound to fulfill a national or cultural objective, which calls for studies in the science and engineering disciplines at the expense of subjects in the arts, independent of individual desire or competency.

BACKGROUND

This chapter investigates the notion of ethical dilemma associated with early childhood education in Confucian Heritage countries. It draws on literature in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology in concluding that sociocultural distinctions between Eastern and Western civilizations amount to an ethical dilemma, which

threatens to prevent a basic epistemology as well as a pedagogy for the education of children in the context of globalization and the information technology revolution.

Curriculum designs and objectives vary by country and to some extent culture or civilization (Hatano & Inagaki, 1998; Lee, 1998; Stigler & Stevenson, 1992; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Whereas Confucius and Socrates espoused the importance of knowledge or learning as virtue, Confucius cultures have weaponized learning through its instrumental implementation for socialization and control. Group orientation is seen as a Confucian Heritage cultural attribute, which is contrasted with the individualism of Western culture. Unlike students from Confucian cultures, Western students have not limited their educational objectives to subjects that maximize economic and financial utility. Most of the graduate degrees sought by Asian students are in science and engineering (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). The arts—dance, painting, music, philosophy, and the like—are often less pursued by learners from Confucius heritage countries than by learners from the West.

The social contexts in which learning takes place can and do vary in many ways. Lev Vygotsky was known for his sociocultural theory focusing on cultural development that is immersed in "values, beliefs, customs, and skills of a social group" (Berk, Mann, & Ogan, 2006, p. 24). Vygotsky's group learning has been adapted into group learning of social and academic skills. Gaskins and Labbo (2007) argued that Vygotsky's theory should be applied to early literacy learning through scaffolding of skills for students until they can accomplish them successfully on their own. Through carefully designed play activities, students begin to understand the authentic purpose behind reading and writing skills through a familiar context (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). Similarly, Urie Bronfenbrenner devised a theory of learning through relationships within a larger context of the environment as a series of nested structures, including but also extending beyond the home, school, and neighborhood settings in which children spend everyday lives. Children development is powerfully impacted by each layer of their environment (Berk et al., 2006).

As evidenced by inventions, innovations, developments, and other technological and scientific breakthroughs, Western learners enroll in science and technology courses. The subject of choice is often based on individual prerogative rather than state-sponsored directives as a means of competing with others in distant lands. It seems as though Eastern learners are duty-bound to fulfill a national or cultural objective, which calls for studies in the science and engineering disciplines at the expense of subjects in the arts, independent of individual desire or competency. Although the Confucian edict of sustained socialization of youth through learning and the duty to pass professional as well as academic exams may seem utilitarian, the unethical practice of cheating (Briggs, Workman, & York, 2013; O'Neill & Pfeiffer, 2012) has been a remedial approach by learners that have had particular course of studies forced upon them. By the same token, a high frequency of juvenile delinquency in

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