

# Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Postmodern Perspectives

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## Minority Directions in the Majority World: Threats and Possibilities

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### Introduction

The idea of progress is the major philosophical legacy left by the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries to the contemporary social sciences . . . The core of the concept [is that] with a few temporary deviations, all societies are advancing naturally and consistently 'up', on a route from poverty, barbarism, despotism and ignorance to riches, civilization, democracy, and rationality, the highest expression of which is science . . . The endless and growing diversity of human societies [that Europeans were coming across] had to be made sense of, or at least ordered and categorized, in a way acceptable to its discoverers . . . What produced diversity? The different stages of development of different societies. What was social change? The necessary advance through the different social forms . . . (Shanin, 1997: 65–6)

The emerging paradigm for human living on and with the Earth brings together decentralization, democracy and diversity. What is local, and what is different, is valued. The trends towards centralization, authoritarianism and homogenization are reversed. Reductionism, linear thinking and standard thinking give way to an inclusive holism, open-systems thinking, and diverse options and actions. (Chambers, 1997: 189)

The preceding chapters have focused primarily on various understandings of young children and early childhood institutions in the Minority World. The influence of that minority is, however, felt around the globe. In particular, we have argued, United States thinking and practice, which is dominated by a particular discipline (developmental psychology) and is located firmly within the project of modernity, is assuming hegemonic proportions on an increasingly global scale, with the increasing likelihood of 'complex globalizations of once localized, western constructions of children' (Stephens, 1995: 8), rationalized through the discipline of developmental psychology which offers a 'Western construction [of childhood] that is now being incorporated, as though it was universal, into aid and development policies' (Burman, 1994: 183). It is ironic that a country that professes grave concerns about the 'toxicity' of its social environments and the well-being of many of its children and families (Garbarino, 1996), as well as about the quality of its early childhood services (Kagan et al., 1996) is looked to as a source of knowledge and guidance about children and services. In such cases, however, hegemonic relationships do not

depend on the application of military force or other means of coercion, but rather the influence of economic, cultural and scientific power which combine to produce dominant discourses which dictate that only certain things can be said or thought, as well as matching technologies of normalization — such as measures of quality.

The imperium of the United States is the latest phase of Minority World dominance in relationships with the Majority World, which started several hundred years ago with European expansion and colonialism. This dominance has been sustained by modernist ideas of linear progress and development, certainty and objectivity, universality and totalization, and the reduction of diversity and complexity. Modernity, therefore, has provided a rationale for colonization and hegemony, its structures of knowledge being implicated in forms of oppression (Young, 1990). Modernity has proved equal to this heavy responsibility, being possessed of great self-confidence:

The positive self-image modern western culture has given to itself, a picture born of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, is of a civilization founded on scientific knowledge of the world and rational knowledge of value, which places the highest premium on individual human life and freedom, and believes that such freedom and rationality will lead to social progress through virtuous, self-controlled work, creating a better material, political and intellectual life for all. (Cahoone, 1996: 12)

Invigorated by such an image, the Minority World has had little compunction in proselytizing such virtues, often with considerable success. The words, thoughts and activities of the colonizers have, in many cases, been absorbed into the life-ways of the colonized, creating a fusion (and in many cases a confusion) of identities. But there has also been a reaction, a growing critique of the project of modernity. Within both the Minority and Majority Worlds the 'positive self-image' noted above is challenged by those who 'see modernity instead as a movement of ethnic and class domination, European imperialism, anthropocentrism, the destruction of nature, the dissolution of community and traditions, the rise of alienation, and the death of individuality in bureaucracy' (Cahoone, 1996: 12).

This reaction is expressed powerfully in the growing problematization and deconstruction of the discourse of 'development' in the Majority World, which began in the 1980s:

Development fostered a way of conceiving of social life as a technical problem, as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people — the development professionals — whose specialized knowledge allegedly qualified them for the task. Instead of seeing change as a process rooted in the interpretation of each society's history and cultural tradition . . . these professionals sought to devise mechanisms and procedures to make societies fit a pre-existing model that embodied the structures and functions of modernity. Like the sorcerer's apprentices, the development professionals awakened once again the dream of reason that, in their hands, as in earlier instances, produced a troubling reality. (Escobar, 1997: 91)

These development professionals, argues Chambers, reconstruct reality to make it manageable, seeking 'the universal in the diverse, the part in the whole, the simple in the complex, the controllable in the uncontrollable, the measurable in the immeasurable, the abstract in the concrete, the static in the dynamic, permanence in flux' (1997: 55). What we see here, spread out on a much wider canvas, are many of the issues addressed earlier in this book, for example, in relation to the discourse of quality; and just as we suggested that an alternative discourse to quality was possible, so too are 'post-development' writers arguing for alternative discourses and new methods of working and knowing. These discourses and methods attach importance to the local, to complexity, to diversity, to the dynamic and unpredictable, and recognize conditions that are difficult to measure yet demand judgment: the new principles, precepts and practices 'resonate with parallel evolutions in natural sciences, chaos and complexity theory, the social sciences and postmodernism, and business management' (Chambers, 1997: 188).

Just as the concept of *development* in relation to Majority World countries is being questioned for its attempt to prescribe a universal model of progress, so too is the concept of development in relation to children, as has been argued in earlier parts of this book. The tension again is between the concept of development as a universal phenomenon, a predetermined linear sequence that all must follow to achieve full realization, or as a construction specific to and contingent on particular times, places and cultures — between a modernist search for foundations and universals and a postmodern recognition of diversity and contextualization. Issues of universality in child development *and* in global development come together in international activities to promote 'early childhood care and development' (known by the acronym of ECCD). While modernist perspectives, foregrounding the general applicability of 'best practices' largely taken from Minority World experiences and claims to universal knowledge legitimated as the product of scientific enquiry, have dominated much of the discussion, there is a growing swell of support for recognizing and valuing diversity, which might be seen as reflecting a more postmodern perspective.

An example of the ebb and flow of modernist and postmodernist sentiments can be seen in ECCD Seminars held at the UNICEF International Child Development Centre in Florence in 1989 and 1996. In the preface to the 1989 Report on the ECCD Seminar (Landers, 1989), the Director of the Centre employed a decidedly modernist tone:

Whether early childhood development activities benefit children is no longer a question. The scientific community has held for some time that children whose developmental needs are met do better in life than children who are neglected in this domain. The *developmentally appropriate care* children receive when they are young has a remarkably positive impact. (Himes in Landers 1989: iii, emphasis added)

'Developmentally appropriate' is a term readers may recall from earlier in the book in relation to the policy document *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*

(Bredenkamp, 1987), published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States. The fact that the terminology of that document, and the thinking that lay behind it, found its way so quickly into this important international forum speaks both to the indirect influence of non-governmental organizations from the United States and the state of international thinking in the early childhood field in the late 1980s.

By the time a follow-up UNICEF seminar was held in 1996, the influence of 'universalist' perspectives was challenged by several of the participants:

There was considerable critical debate about the cultural and financial preconceptions embedded in many ECCD projects. In particular there was a critique of the view that there was an exportable package of 'scientific' ideas about child development which, with relatively minor adjustments to local conditions, could be used anywhere in the world as a basis for programming and project work. (Penn and Molteno, 1997: 3)

The ranks of those willing to make such a critique of universal approaches to tools, practices and programmes appears to be growing, while at the same time 'best practice' advocates consider ways to advance greater global visibility and influence for their programmes. (For example, NAEYC and Head Start, both United States organizations, have recently considered international 'outreach and training' activities, while the High Scope Foundation, another organization originating in the United States, is well advanced in such work.) As an increasing number of Majority World countries consider the importance of the early years, and its implications for 'labor productivity and national economic prosperity' (A. Choksi, vice-president of the World Bank, preface to Young, 1996), it is important that the voices of those concerned with the limitations of universalism be raised alongside the voices of its proponents.

One of those concerned is Martin Woodhead, an experienced observer of early childhood work in the Minority and Majority Worlds. He has, over the past two decades,

become increasingly concerned that much of what counts as knowledge and expertise about children is deeply problematic right down to such fundamental ideas as 'early childhood development programme' . . . Those involved in early childhood development must recognize that many of their most cherished beliefs about what is best for children, are cultural constructions. (Woodhead, 1996: 6, 8)

Another critic of universalizing tendencies, writing of her visits to early childhood institutions in South Africa, observes that:

the written curriculum and pedagogy for the black nurseries were mainly provided by NGOs [non-governmental organizations], almost all of it in English whatever the first language of the recipients. Despite the discrepancies in catchment, funding and organisation of the black and white centres, the curriculum literature and training materials were all derived from western sources, mainly adaptations of

Montessori and High Scope methods . . . Although materials may be adapted for use in educare centres, the western tenets which inform them are generally assumed to be universal. There is perceived to be little or no ambiguity about what constitutes appropriate 'intellectual' or 'social' behaviour. (Penn, 1997a: 107)

Helen Penn expresses concern that, given the significant differences in conceptions of child rearing between African and Anglo-American cultures, 'the enthusiastic transmission of "developmentally appropriate practice" and Western models of nursery education or "educare", far from enhancing competency in young children, may be damaging to those who use it' (Penn, 1997a: 106–7). Serpell, writing about East Africa, makes a similar point about 'the potential of carelessly transplanted forms of day-care for disrupting indigenous cultural values and practices' (1993: 469).

Respected psychologist, Michael Cole, has become similarly concerned that constructions of child development based in Minority World societies have become hegemonic throughout the world. In his 1996 publication, *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*, Cole seeks answers to his overarching question, 'Why do psychologists find it so difficult to keep culture in mind?' He traces the development of psychology from the 1880s, discerning in its earliest formulation by Wundt a still-born 'second psychology', the one to which Wundt assigned the task of understanding how culture enters into psychological processes. Cole's basic thesis is 'that the scientific issues Wundt identified were not adequately dealt with by the scientific paradigm that subsequently dominated psychology and the other behavioural-social sciences' (1996: 7, 8). He argues that 'from at least the seventeenth century on, the dichotomy between historical, universal theories of mind and historical, locally contingent theories has been bound up with another dichotomy, the opposition between "natural" and "cultural-historical" sciences' (1996: 19). Cole paraphrases the contrast made by Berlin (1981) between the assumptions underlying the natural sciences and cultural-historical approaches noting the former's belief that: '1) any real question has a single true answer; 2) the method of arriving at the answers to genuine problems is natural and universally applicable; and 3) solutions to genuine problems are true universally for all people, at all times in all places' (p. 20). Mainstream psychology, having chosen to follow the road of the natural sciences in the decades since its inception, now finds itself estranged from those for whom behaviour and culture are inseparably intertwined.

Somewhat more cautiously, but still voicing doubts about a universal approach to children and their development, Save the Children UK (Molteno, 1996) concludes that while some Minority World research on child development may be true for all children, some of it is bound to be culture- and situation-specific: 'in a world dominated by global pressures — economic, technological, political — there is a danger in thinking that one can find universal solutions to social questions' (1996: 4).

Robert Myers, in his influential book *The Twelve who Survive: Strengthening Programs of Early Childhood Development in the Third World*, undertakes a tentative transition from a primarily universalist, positivist and modernist orientation to

a more indigenous, postpositivist, postmodernist understanding. While his years of experience in the field of international development and early childhood, coupled with his academic training and sensitivity, allow him to appreciate 'both worlds' and the need for bridging frameworks between them, Myers cautions, 'If one had to guess, the guess would be that early childhood programs more often than not are taking their cues from imported models that re-enforce value shifts towards the individualistic, production oriented cultures of the West. Is that where we want to be?' (1992: 29).

Six years later Myer's question remains relevant. At a UNICEF Regional Workshop held in Karachi, Pakistan, in March 1998, and a follow-up meeting at Wye College in Britain in April 1998, the differences between a modernist orientation of 'best practice', non-problematized understandings of 'quality', and the revelatory power of science, seemed at odds with calls at the same meetings for: 'community driven ECCD', respect for 'local diversity', and 'response to the child in context' (UNICEF 1998a,b). These disparate notions ended up as strange bed-fellows, uneasily sharing the same sentence: 'Experience indicates that sustainable ECCD programmes begin with what the culture offers; curricula and activities are built on local childrearing attitudes, practices and beliefs, *with what is currently recognized as universal "scientific" messages being added to replace what are deemed as negative practices within the local culture*' (UNICEF, 1998a: 11, emphasis added). But perhaps the bed is simply too narrow for two occupants, as the next sentence nudges: 'We need to be cautious about our presumption of what constitutes universal truths, as these "truths" change over time.'

In this context of increasing questioning of universal child and social development being voiced alongside established modernist views on the foundational importance of general laws and principles produced by objective scientific methods, and at a time of wide (even widening) inequalities of power and resources between the Minority and Majority Worlds, the aim of this chapter is to consider to what extent the postmodern perspective we have adopted in this book can contribute to a true dialogue, involving listening and respecting the alterity of the Other, and a retreat of hegemonic tendencies in the field of early childhood. Such discussion is much needed not only between the Minority and Majority Worlds, but also between what some literature refers to as peoples of the Fourth World, that is indigenous populations in Minority-World countries, and the dominant population of these countries. Our argument is not that this book presents an alternative perspective that can or should be universally adopted — many people from the Majority or Fourth Worlds may wish to locate themselves within premodern perspectives or within modernity itself, which continues to exert a powerful influence. Rather, it seems to us that our perspective provides *one* way for enabling early childhood workers from the Minority World to develop dialogic and respectful relationships with their counterparts in the Majority World and among Fourth-World people, a relationship based on recognition of diversity, complexity and contextualization and the ethics of an encounter.

One reason for hoping that a postmodern perspective might contribute to such relationships is the origins of postmodernity in a postwar questioning of Eurocentrism

and the part played by Enlightenment thinking in European colonialism. Renewed philosophical interest in the Enlightenment after the Second World War, Foucault (1980b) argued, arose from 'the movement which, at the close of the colonial era, led it to be asked of the West what entitles its culture, its science, its social organization, and finally its rationality itself, to be able to claim universal validity' (54). As a result of this critical re-examination, Eurocentrism was seen to be closely related to Enlightenment thinking and its claims for the universality of its values; postmodernity emerges, in part at least, as a reaction to these claims and their perceived oppressive consequences. Robert Young argues that

postmodernism can best be defined as European culture's awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world . . . Postmodernism, therefore, becomes a certain self-consciousness about a culture's historical relativity — which begins to explain why, as its critics complain, it also involves the loss of the sense of an absoluteness of any Western account of History . . . Contrary, then, to some of its more overreaching definitions, postmodernism itself could be said to mark not just the cultural effects of a new stage of 'late' capitalism, but the sense of a loss of European history and culture as History and Culture, the loss of their unquestioned place at the centre of the world . . . the loss of Eurocentrism. (1990: 19, 20, 117)

It was this issue — of the relationship between the Enlightenment, its grand projects and universal truth claims on the one hand and the history of European colonialism on the other — that contributed to

the distrust of totalizing systems of knowledge which depend upon theory and concepts, (which was) so characteristic of Foucault and Lyotard, both of whom have been predominantly concerned with the attempt to isolate and foreground singularity as opposed to universality. This quest for the singular, the contingent event which by definition refuses all conceptualisation, can clearly be related to the project of constructing a form of knowledge that respects the other without absorbing it into the same. (1990: 9–10)

It seems to us that what postmodernity has to offer to relationships between the Minority and Majority Worlds is the infusion, on the Minority World side, of an uncertainty about certainty, a scepticism about claims of universality, and a self-awareness of the relationship between knowledge and power bred of a recognition of the deep complicity in the history of colonialism of Western academic forms of knowledge. If the modernist perspective strives to find universal and objectively 'true' best practices, criteria of quality, developmental norms and methods of measurement, a postmodern perspective embraces the realization that there are many different, inherently subjective and productive understandings of childhood, early childhood institutions, and of 'good' work with children in early childhood institutions — singular and contingent, not universal and decontextual.

The possibility of undertaking cross-national work which adopts this postmodern perspective is well illustrated in the study by Tobin, Wu and Davidson of *Preschool*

in *Three Cultures: Japan, China and the United States*. Their familiarity with the established questions and methods that have guided (and restricted) most Anglo-American early childhood research is evident in their opening statement:

Our research methods are unlike those used in most comparative research in early child education. We have not tested efficiency of various staffing patterns or pedagogical approaches. We have not measured the frequency of teacher-student interaction or computed dollars spent per student . . . or how many minutes a day students spend on reading readiness exercises. Although we touch on all these issues and others in the book, our focus instead has been on eliciting meanings. We have set out not to rate the preschools in the three cultures but to find out what they are meant to do and to be. (1989: 4)

Termed 'multivocal ethnography', their research is far removed from the modernist quest for ultimate 'truth' and the discovery of universals, instead understanding knowledge as constructed through dialogue involving multiple perspectives.

A telling and retelling of the same event from different perspectives — an ongoing dialogue between insiders and outsiders, between practitioners and researchers, between Americans and Chinese, Americans and Japanese, and Chinese and Japanese. In each chapter, the voices, besides our own, are those of Japanese, Chinese and American preschool teachers, administrators, parents, children, and child development experts. (Tobin et al., 1989: 4)

Our vehicle for exploring the potential of a postmodern perspective for cross-national or cross-cultural work is not a research study, but a Canadian project for training early childhood practitioners, initiated by an Aboriginal (First Nations) Tribal Council and involving work between this group of communities and university faculty and staff from the majority population. Unlike the Stockholm Project, this work was not informed by a prior and deep familiarity with modernist and postmodernist thought and the debate about these two perspectives. But in retrospect it can be seen to have struggled with issues which have arisen within that debate, being located at least in part within postmodernity and to have problematized certain modernist assumptions. In this respect, the Canadian work may be similar to other projects which, while not seeing themselves theoretically in relation to the modernist/postmodernist debate, in practice challenge dominant assumptions and discourses in the work they undertake. Like the Stockholm Project and the experiences in Reggio Emilia, the Tribal Council work demonstrates the important relationship between postmodernist theory and field-relevant practice.

### Many Worlds

In various parts of the world, communities are seeking ways to ensure the survival, or revival, of their cultural beliefs, values and practices, while at the same time in

many cases wanting to ensure that their members have access to and competence in the dominant society. In Canada, the more than 600 First Nations, communities of aboriginal peoples colonized by what became a majority non-indigenous society, have experienced generations of cultural suppression taking various forms at various times from genocide to assimilation (Canadian Royal Commission, 1996). Most First Nations' communities in Canada are now actively engaged in reclaiming their culture. Some of those communities are focused primarily on the revival of their traditional culture and do not actively seek contact with non-aboriginal groups. Others, however, wish to prepare their children and young people for growing up in both their own specific culture and community and in the culture and communities of the surrounding society. These communities typically do not seek reproduction of the past, but rather, envision a future that is respectfully informed by a rich past and a multi-faceted present; a new construction with multiple roots and traditions developed through a process over which they have a substantial measure of control through their own agency and actions.

The project described here was initiated in 1988 by the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, which represents First Nations people living in north-central Canada. The Tribal Council sought to prepare their young people, in the words of Louis Opekeew, a tribal elder, 'to walk in both worlds', and sought to do so through establishing a partnership with a university, in the mainstream of the dominant community. The educational approach that emerged through that partnership — termed the Generative Curriculum Model — has now been used with a further six First Nations' organizations which, with the original Meadow Lake group, represent over 25 separate communities. Because each community is itself a complex socio-cultural environment with a unique history and community dynamics, the exact nature and substance of the information that was generated in each partnership could not be identified in advance nor is it the same across all communities. The Generative Curriculum approach embraces diversity and with it a large measure of indeterminacy. Unlike most curricula which are based on a singular construction of pre-established content and outcomes, the Generative Curriculum is a co-construction eliciting the generation of new ideas and possibilities not fully foreseeable in advance.

What follows is the story of an unusual series of partnerships, now extending over almost a decade, but focusing primarily on the very first partnership that was formed and attempting to understand that partnership and the training model that emerged from it through the lens provided in this volume. The story presented is told by one of us, Alan Pence<sup>1</sup>, from his own as well as a Minority World perspective. Currently, the First Nations Partnerships Program office, established to support those communities using or wishing to use the Generative Curriculum approach, is engaged in a two-year project to evaluate the Generative Curriculum based largely on the experiences and words of a broad range of communities' members. This project will provide a better understanding of the dynamics of the Generative Curriculum approach across different sites and enable a clearer and more community-to-community response to inquiries from other First Nations. Given the complexity of the Generative Curriculum Model, a roughly chronological approach will be

- taken in recounting the experiences, with an on-going commentary tying those experiences to the general discourse of this volume.

*Meadow Lake and the University: 'What of us is in here?'*

In the late 1980s the Meadow Lake Tribal Council of northern Saskatchewan became aware of a Canadian federal government funding initiative that could be used to support a strong interest among its nine communities to provide early childhood institutions, on-reserve, for their community members. At the time, such on-reserve services were virtually non-existent in Saskatchewan, and indeed in most other provinces. Earlier in the 1980s the Tribal Council had determined that the future well-being of their communities rested on the health and well-being of their children, and in 1989 formulated a 'vision statement' that articulated the central role of children and their care:

The First Nations of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council believe that a child care program developed, administered and operated by their own people is a vital component to their vision of sustainable growth and development. It impacts every sector of their long-term plans as they prepare to enter the twenty-first century. It will be children who inherit the struggle to retain and enhance the people's culture, language and history; who continue the quest for economic progress for a better quality of life; and who move forward with a strengthened resolve to plan their own destiny.

Children and communities are at the heart of this statement. When the Tribal Council began to contact potential educational partners to support their vision of the future by creating courses to train community members to work in their early childhood centres, they found that either the institutions approached did not have an aboriginal Early Childhood Care and Development Programme and were not in a position to develop one, or that if the institution did have a programme, it was preformed and largely immutable. Many of the existing programmes reviewed represented a modification of mainstream programmes with aboriginal 'add-ons' from different tribal groups across the country, making for a pan-aboriginal conglomerate that did not reflect the reality or experience of any one individual group. The implicit question posed to these programmes by the Tribal Council in their search was, 'What of us is in these materials?' The answer was 'very little'.

'Very little' is the answer that comes from most curricula, regardless of who asks the question, 'What of us is in here?' The roots of academia are deeply embedded in modernist understandings of knowledge in which the intent is the transmission of ideas and of knowledge *already* established, and the definition of parameters which will guide the creation of 'new knowledge'. Education in the modernist tradition, be it early childhood, primary, secondary or tertiary is fundamentally *not* about what the learner brings to the enterprise ('What of me is in here?'). That question is irrelevant within the assumptions of modernity, which is

based on what learners *lack* rather than what they *bring* to the learning activity. Operating from a position of disregard for either individual or group voices, modernist education is a powerful vehicle for the shaping of uni-vocal rather than multi-vocal understandings of the world. Within such a construction the ways of others cannot be respected, but must be challenged by the one, 'true' way.

Viewed in hindsight, the Tribal Council's implicit question 'What of us is in here?'; the self-evident response of educational institutions, 'not much'; and the resolve of the Tribal Council to continue looking for a suitable partner can be seen as the project's first steps away from a modernist path. Reflecting on that late-1980s event, it is not surprising that these steps were taken by a group with cultural roots very different from those upon which modernity is based. As Cahoon has noted, multiculturalism and postmodernism share 'overlapping tendencies' (1996: 2).

Difference, however, may not be enough. For the power of modernity, and its casting of the world as truth engaged in struggle with not-truth, is such that the argument that its ways are 'best' can, and has, led some in the Majority World to accept the argument and the 'new ways'. For example, a 1985 Thai publication, *Handbook of Asian Child Development and Child Rearing Practices*, notes that:

Asian parents have a long history of well developed culture behind them. They are mostly agriculturists who are submissive to the earth's physical nature. Thus many of their traditional beliefs and practices prevent them from seeking and using the new scientific knowledge in child rearing.

The Handbook of Child Rearing may require parents to change many of their beliefs, attitudes, values, habits and behaviours. Therefore, many necessary changes will be met with some resistance. For example, giving the child more of the independence the child needs and making less use of power and authority during adolescence will shake the very roots of those Asian families where authoritarian attitudes and practice are emphasized. (Suvannathat et al., 1985, quoted in Woodhead, 1997: 76)

First Nations in Canada have long been the recipients of western 'best practices' and have been shaken to their very roots. Reams of poignant testimony have been collected describing the suffering to parents, to children and to communities of residential schooling, child welfare practices, and other 'helping' services all deemed, at the time, to be in the 'best interests' of the subjected children and families. Born out of this suffering is a distrust of what is deemed 'best' in the eyes of the dominant, western community. What is 'best' has clearly not been good for many First Nations peoples. As the First Nations have begun to exercise greater political control over their futures, they have adopted a path of caution in considering 'best practices' and 'improvements' from the dominant society. While some communities have adopted a path of reformation in the image of the past (not unlike some fundamentalist religious movements), others have embraced the non-determinacy of an emergent path, a path where it is recognized that 'it is children who inherit the struggle . . . to plan *their own* destiny'. How to do so from a position of being informed rather than preformed is one part of that challenge.

*The Potential of Not-Knowing*

The Tribal Council's search for a partner eventually brought them to the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria, located on the south-west coast of Canada, far removed from the prairies of the Tribal Council. The School did not have an aboriginal curriculum, and at first it seemed there was no reason to meet with the Council. But the Tribal Council persisted and at the first meeting the depth of the commitment of the Tribal Council's Executive Director to the well-being of the communities' children came through forcefully. So too did his clarity that the Tribal Council was in the 'driver's seat' in this initiative. A university was a desired and necessary passenger, but the steering of the project would be done by the First Nations. The depth of the commitment and the clarity of community responsibility were seen as extremely important and positive elements by the School and a partnership was formed.

Reflecting on this stage of the nascent relationship, what was perhaps most critical was an acceptance of the *powerful potential of not knowing*. In the dualism of modernity, and reflective of its roots in western 'revealed religions', having knowledge is equated with 'good' and not having it or not-knowing as 'bad'. In modernity, and in most Minority World cultures, 'not knowing' is pejoratively equated with 'ignorance' — something to be avoided in oneself and rectified in others. Similarly, 'being' or 'existence' has a presence and utility lacking in 'not being'. Those things that 'exist' become the building blocks of modernity, existence supplants non-existence. Such structures may have physical strength, but they lack light and air. The Taoist concept of 'existence' and 'non-existence' as equally useful, like the window in a wall or the hollow in a cup, is not a familiar part of western thought. Indeed, pre-modernist understandings in some parts of the world can be seen as useful contributors to enhanced understanding of postmodernism, reflecting how, as Hall (1996) suggests, 'pre-modernist may be post'.

Knowledge is such a 'concrete' building block in Minority-World societies. Knowledge is known to 'exist', and it is valued far more than not-knowing, and while we may have some difficulty pointing out knowledge, or differentiating it from its counterfeit, it is a commodity that is bought, sold and regulated. Institutions are established to 'trade' in knowledge. Freire's analogy (1985) of education to a 'banking system' is apt: there are means by which a deficit in one's account can be infused with the 'appropriate currency', providing 'credibility' and thereby credibility in the socioeconomic system, allowing one's 'fortunes' to rise.

A very different orientation to knowledge, and one that is consistent with postmodernist thought, is that useful knowledge exists only in interaction, or in praxis. Such knowledge is mutable rather than immutable, it takes its form from the environment in which it was created. More like water than block or stone, it is endlessly transforming.

In the particular case of the discussions with the Tribal Council's Executive Director, what appealed was *not* the knowledge of the way forward (for we did not know what this would be), but the *absence* of that knowledge and the opportunity it provided to explore together *a* way forward, to merge the different experiences

and different bases of knowledge of our respective communities and see what could be generated out of a new dynamic, a new combination of ideas. Supporting this leap of faith was an understanding that what had been tried before had not worked; the new road was dangerous, but the road more travelled could not take us where we wished to go.

Central to this agreement to proceed into that-which-we-did-not-know was a trust in and resonance with each other. In engaging in *this* process of knowledge creation, an impersonal approach to knowledge transmission, such as often occurs when filling up one mind from another, a banking system of knowledge transfers, will not suffice. The act of co-creation or co-construction requires a level of trust and sharing seldom found and not required in knowledge transfer approaches. By understanding knowledge as a commodity, something that can be bought and traded without engendering personal commitment and sharing, the heart of learning is ignored and with it the affective power within which transformational learning resides. Knowledge accumulation without transformation is a sterile process bereft of progeny. With such wealth one can accumulate, but not create. Such distinctions are critical if we are to move beyond the limited vision of modernity.

With the partnership established and funding secured, the challenge of creating a post-secondary programme for training early childhood workers that was not entrenched on modernist ground was the formidable task at hand. Reviews of existing post-secondary curricula in the human services revealed little that deviated from a preconstructed, knowledge transferral base. Such bases might be critical of other bases, philosophies or theories, but few invited students, and none invited communities, to engage in an *activity of co-construction wherein the outcome was not predetermined*. A number of individuals likened our approach to that of Paulo Freire, and indeed there are similar terms and concepts. However, in reading Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, it is clear that his 'critical pedagogy' possesses a specific desired outcome — a revolutionary, emancipatory outcome — but a pre-determined outcome or preconstruction nevertheless. The approach sought in the First Nations partnership was one of *indeterminate* co-construction, a cooperative process wherein the result would emerge as part of the process of engagement and would not be predetermined. A distinction between ourselves and Freire was that his 'envisioning' suggests an objective, a product or outcome; whereas our own emphasis on 'emerging' was *process* focused.

The project's openness to 'what will come' has posed a challenge throughout, for example, in employing course developers and instructors. The basis of much Minority World thought and action lies in predictability, in defining pre-established objectives, learning outcomes. It was difficult to find course developers or instructors who were truly understanding or appreciative of the power of indeterminacy. A number of those employed had an outcome in mind, often an outcome that challenged the status quo. In the Generative Model, knowledge and understanding that challenged the status quo was *one* of the possible outcomes. But the outcome might also prove to be consistent with an established conservative order, such as support for the Catholic Church, a long-standing presence in several of the most northern communities.



A key characteristic of the curriculum as envisioned by the partnership group was that it must be open to and respectful of information from the Meadow Lake communities, from academia and potentially from other sources as well. The established educational literature and post-secondary practices reviewed had not actively problematized the challenges posed by a respectful coming together of community knowledge and academic knowledge. 'Community' for most educators meant the physical placing of the classroom or the learner in the community — however, the *content* would continue to come *from* academia and from an academic instructor! Such trappings were not sufficient if this approach was to achieve a level of meaning making beyond knowledge imparting. 'Culturally sensitive' was similarly inadequately problematized in most practice, resulting in the academy selecting several readings or inviting in a few 'cultural guests' to augment the core curriculum which remained firmly rooted in dominant academic thought and practice. In both cases, the curriculum and the expected outcomes were predetermined.

For a similar set of reasons (as disconcerting to our more radical critics as the preceding comments may be to the more conservative) the curriculum could not simply be based in or emerge solely from the community either. Rather, this curriculum should be *suspended in the space between* — the void, the space that is *not* filled and is thereby charged with potential. A space where dissimilar ideas might meet, mingle and mutate.

An example of how these various ideas might meet and change over time was provided in the opportunity to visit a practicum site for some of the students in a community-based infant care centre. Initially, only the skin colour of the children and staff would lead one to know that this was not a centre in a white suburb of a major Canadian city. The bright, new cribs with neatly folded blankets, the purchased toys for rolling and pushing, the crawling space with a rail, were all designed to allow exploratory motor behaviour; relatively free movement was possible, even during nap time. Returning some weeks after the Elders had discussed the tradition of the cradle board (a decorated board designed to hold a swaddled infant) and exhibited a number of beautifully crafted and beaded boards with a 'dancing fringe' before the children's eyes, I was surprised to see several beautiful boards lying in the crib, swaddled children sleeping peacefully inside. Upon waking, the child and board were taken out of the crib, the board placed near where the children were crawling and climbing, the board becoming both a functional and symbolic object in the environment that spoke to a vision of 'different traditions'. Over time staff tried out the boards at different times and in different ways, noting not only how each board was different and associated with a particular family, but how each child's relationship to the board was different — some seeming to sleep most comfortably in it, others not. The board was not only a cultural connection between the child and caregiver, but also a connection between parent, caregiver and community. Over time the boards' use and presence varied, continuing indeterminate outcome of a meeting place 'between cultures'.

Looking back over the seven Generative Curriculum projects, the *space between* the many possible worlds of understanding can be seen as the source of energy for much that has transpired. Protecting that space from the belief systems of individuals and groups that fear rather than appreciate the unknown and seek to fill all that is unfilled has been a significant challenge. The power of the space is in its *not* being 'known' or 'owned' by any group or ideology. The space can be used by any, but claimed by none. It is the space where difference is valued, for difference alone is generative, and what is generated can change and transform over time as interaction and dialogue with children, parents, other staff and the broader community bring various thoughts and ideas into the flux of learning.

### Starting with Principles

At the outset the Tribal Council/University team could not envision what a generative curriculum would look like. Indeed the term 'generative' would not enter into the discourse for many months. In the initial meetings there was greater clarity regarding what we wished to avoid than what should be embraced. The reality of time pressures, however, meant we must act, for there were only three years to create and deliver a curriculum for a full two-year training course. A decision was made to concentrate initially on identifying a set of general principles that could guide the development process, rather than moving prematurely to create the curriculum itself. A set of six principles were identified, or co-constructed, by the Tribal Council/University partnership team. The principles, in essence navigation points in uncharted waters, included commitments to:

- supporting and re-enforcing community initiative in a community-based setting;
- maintaining bi/multi-cultural respect;
- identifying community and individual strengths as the basis for initiatives;
- ensuring a broad ecological perspective and awareness of the child as part of families and community;
- providing education and career laddering for students such that credit for this course work would be fully applicable to future study and practice;
- creating an awareness that while the immediate focus was on early childhood, this training should provide the basis for broader child, youth, family and community serving training and services.

Some of the principles identified, such as educational laddering, represented structural issues in Canadian post-secondary education that the university partner would need to take the lead in addressing. Most, however, indicated a joint role for both partners.

As the team worked to develop the guiding principles, they were also aware of constraints within which the partnership operated, for example: the need for the

programme to be viewed as academically credible and rigorous; the need to meet legislated licensing and accreditation criteria; and at the same time ensuring the appropriateness of the knowledge within a community context. As in the Stockholm Project, we recognized the necessity 'to walk on two legs'. The programme was to be a first in Canada, and whatever was developed would need to be suitable for delivery in other First Nations settings as well. The road ahead was uncertain, but what lay behind had proven inadequate. There was little to lose and much to gain. The partnership emerged from the initial months of planning reinforced in its belief that a cooperative (later understandable as a co-constructionist approach) was not only desirable, but necessary. Having committed ourselves to a position that multiple 'truths' must be respectfully represented in our work, and appreciating that such knowledge is not disembodied but must come through the people who live that truth, the partnership moved beyond commitment to requirement — all paddles must be in and pulling if we were to move. This knowledge that paddling harder on one side would in no way compensate for less paddling on the other provided an internal corrective to asymmetric leadership.

### *Including Community*

Unlike most post-secondary education that requires two main ingredients to commence the activity — students and the post-secondary institution — the approach envisioned with the Generative Curriculum Model required the addition of a third, the students' communities, as an active participant. The inclusion of community added a further unknown to the 'normal' recipe for education.

The decision that, for the vision of the partnership to be realized, the community itself must have a place to speak in the curriculum, became a significant breach in the wall of modernist education that would allow the project to move into relatively unexplored territory. The decision at the time was not seen as radical, but necessary and sensible. No texts or materials existed which could provide information on traditional practices and values within these communities, indeed many of the community members themselves were long estranged from this knowledge. Meadow Lake identified a number of Elders of the communities and some other respected community members as those who could speak to the students about the traditional understandings and ways of the communities.

Initially the words of the Elders were understood as the principal generated component of the Generative Curriculum. Over time our understanding of 'generative' would change and expand forcing a reconceptualization of the initial model used to describe the Generative Curriculum Model. The initial Generative Curriculum Model was a spiral structure (Pence et al., 1993). Each level of the spiral represented a multi-voiced interaction, with the material generated at the previous iteration being incorporated into the successive course offering. This approach to the Generative Curriculum Model proved to be flawed both pragmatically and conceptually.

Pragmatically, because for most of the relatively small First Nations communities that might use the Generative Curriculum Model there would probably be only one cohort of students every five or six years. Annual or successive intakes, it was increasingly clear, were not probable. If there were successive intakes, most likely these students would be drawn from a much broader geographic and cultural area leading to a regional training approach rather than a community-based approach. Such a regional approach, it was feared, would inevitably lead to the same type of pan-aboriginal representations of native beliefs and understandings which had been rejected by the Meadow Lake Council communities in their original search for an educational partner.

Conceptually, the spiral idea reflected a sense of linearity, moving from a less complete to a more complete curriculum over time. Initially, the desire to 'generate' information that had hitherto been largely inaccessible and not recorded for the future use of the communities was a major objective of the project, as was its incorporation into further 'building the curriculum' through successive iterations of courses. However, as the pragmatic problem of successive cohorts became evident, and the probability of the Generative Curriculum's life being that of an itinerant curriculum, the conceptual conflicts became clearer as well. In hindsight the spiral model can be viewed as a hybrid incorporating elements of content *building* sympathetic to modernist notions of knowledge 'refinement', and content *generation* more sympathetic to a postmodern perspective. While the former inextricably moves towards a state of completion, becoming ossified as most curriculum is, the latter has the potential for creating a new and unique generation at each delivery — a 'living curriculum'. In the former model, the term 'generative' had a stronger sense of leading to an *output*, for example, information generated by the community for the use of the community. As the project evolved, however, generative became ever more associated with the *process* of generation, rather than the *products* of generation; this process emphasis continues to the present. At the same time, the model itself shifted from that of a 'spiral staircase', each step building on the one before, to a circular representation (Halldorson and Pence, 1995), with each iteration representing a new and unique coming together of different ideas and interactors. The outcome of such a process can never be known in advance, indeed, the outcome is not singular but multiple — as diverse as the students, instructors and community members who participate. Typically those multiple outcomes are themselves mutable, provisional, transformational, as was the case in the cradle board experience. Not truth, but possibilities emerge from the generative process.

### *Forums, Plazas, Arenas and Big Houses*

The image that began to emerge through the partnership discussion and through daily experiences in the field was that of a 'forum' for learning (or what the Stockholm Project might refer to as 'the arena of realization'). This forum, arena or plaza became increasingly inclusive. By design, Elders had been brought into the class to share their knowledge and wisdom, but increasingly the students wished to

play a larger role in shaping the invitations, the questions and thereby the possible dialogues. Students also suggested other community members who they felt could make a useful contribution, and the forum expanded further. The principles of respect and voice identified by the original project team and their lived reality within a caring, supportive and inclusive educational environment, resonate with the discussion in Chapter 6 about the conditions needed for a vivid dialogue and an egalitarian sharing of ideas. Hearing the diverse voices and views — from Elders, texts, community members and instructors — students became more fully aware of their own voices, their own views and how these related to others. Instructors, hearing voices they had not heard before, were similarly challenged and stimulated — all became learners, all became teachers.

### *All Learners, All Teachers*

Skipping ahead many years in this chronology, one of the most powerful experiences in the history of the Generative Curriculum Model was late in 1996 when instructors from four different partnerships (including the original one with Meadow Lake Tribal Council) came together to share, over a two-day period, their stories of the Generative Curriculum experience. A recurring theme was that of transformation, significant personal changes in the instructors' own view of the world and ways of being in it. Participants were moved to laughter and to tears as they reflected on their own journey through a landscape of many voices and different world views. Indeed, this need to share their own story of personal challenge and change has become one of the characteristics the project listens for in introducing new 'instructors' to the programs. Those who are aware of their own learning and transformation are far more likely to be able to support learning and transformation in the 'students'. Those who relate to their own teaching, but not to their own learning, are not suitable for this approach.

At the instructors' gathering, one spoke of how initially the Elders' stories seemed too rambling and off-topic, but then several weeks or even months later, those words would find a place in the course discussion and she or a student would bring them forward, words not bound by time. Another non-aboriginal instructor reflected on her failure to honour Elders in her own family and her resolve to treat her own Elders as respectfully as she would others. A third recounted the relationships she began to observe among Elders, students and other community members outside of class; the forging of relationships surpassed the place and time of the forum. These relationships in turn supported some individuals' involvement in traditional gatherings, such as those within the 'big house', as well as contemporary gatherings around children's birthdays or seeking advice on child and family issues. Reminiscent of Robert Putnam's (1993, 1995) research into the relationship between social and economic well-being, the presence of 'bowling clubs and singing groups' as key indicators of rich 'social capital', the stories of students, instructors and community members interacting in new and meaningful ways provide evidence of the importance of 'meeting places' and the ability of such forums to move out

from the setting and condition that created them — be it a post-secondary education forum or an early childhood institution in Reggio or Stockholm — to impact on the lives of individuals and on communities.

### *Ivory Towers and Fairy Tales*

Such a multitude of voices, each speaking their own 'truth' and understanding, is in sharp contrast to 'normal' academia, and its traditional images of ivory towers and fortresses. Such institutions have long posited their role as protectors of unpopular perspectives, but the very walls that have been constructed to protect these views have themselves become prisons, obstacles to hearing, seeing and interacting with others' truths.

This critique of the university as a fortress/prison was not on the minds of the partnership team in the early stages of discussion and formulation. The initial effort was neither deeply philosophical nor critical — it was simply the team's best efforts to follow the lead of the community and the students, within the constraints identified and consistent with the principles employed, while at the same time suspending belief in the importance of colouring inside the lines. In other words this was a pragmatic and heart-felt desire to be true, first and foremost, to the other — the partner.

That commitment to the partner, like so much else in the project, would later be understood to have unlocked a door deserving much deeper investigation and understanding. Different community's and individual's understandings of 'self' and 'other' are central to how children's well-being could be addressed. Seeking to understand the depth and meaning of these differences would become a significant, long-term activity of the project, but the initial motivation was pragmatic — the university did not possess that knowledge, nor was it our place to do so.

The knowledge of the community was held in the community and for that knowledge to come in, the community itself must enter into the place or 'forum' of learning. Taking seriously the question, 'What of us is in here?', it is not possible for one cultural group to render a full and appropriate representation of the values, beliefs and practices of another group. Even if elements of the knowledge may be understood as singular, describable 'artifacts' of a culture, the embedded meaning and the medium of the message (to paraphrase McLuhan) are critical elements of its representation, and they too convey meaning. Even within cultures, different members carry different messages, different knowledge and different forms for conveying that information.

The breaching of the wall that community participation in an educational process represents, provides a broad opportunity for bringing multiple perspectives into the field of early childhood, to create an inclusionary practice in pedagogical work. Through students' exposure to an inclusionary and multi-voiced forum in their training, it is hoped that they will be more sensitive to such an approach in their practice, and there is some evidence to support this hope. Such practice would not rely on 'one best way' and the authority of the early childhood worker, but

would seek instead to bring multiple perspectives — of children, parents and others in the community — to the task of understanding or making meaning of pedagogical work with young children and engaging in on-going dialogue about what we want for our children. This potential influence of the Generative Curriculum on practice will be discussed further later in the chapter. I will return now to some additional descriptions of the Generative Curriculum Model as it evolved within the Meadow Lake project.

### *Learning Evolving*

These further extensions of the Generative Curriculum Model were not fully understood in these formative stages of the work. The major effort in the early work was to follow and to support the community's lead; to respect not only what we, the academy, would bring, but what the community must provide as well. To this end, the instructors who the community had searched for and had employed (in consultation with the university) reported back to the development team (based at the university but including a key community leader) on all facets of the curriculum delivery including student activity, Elder presentations and other community involvement. This information was critical in the shaping of an approach to curriculum that was specifically inclusive and multi-vocal in nature.

Initially, and perhaps ironically, the course materials that began to be produced were quite heavily scripted. Student learning and teacher delivery packages typically numbered 100 to 150 pages per course in each community. Each course included 13 weeks of 3 hours a week instruction plus homework and outside class projects. In this respect the courses could be seen as consistent with modernist education packages such as those found in many print-based, distance education courses. The reason for this heavy scripting related primarily to the different approach taken by the Generative Curriculum Model in terms of what students and community brought to the learning. Scripts and suggestions regarding how one might elicit, support and extend community-based information contributed significantly to the size of the course materials. Not insignificantly, the bulk of the materials contributed to their credibility; in a society like Canada where numbers matter, the thick text mattered to those who count pages. However, the Generative Curriculum materials deviated from 'normal' practice to a significant degree in the nature of the assignments and in the augmentation of instructor and text information with Elder, student and community information. This approach to an 'opening up' of curriculum came to be described later as an 'open-architecture' approach to curriculum design (Pence, 1999).

In the original partnership, one afternoon was set aside each week for the Elders to speak. Initially the topics had been suggested by the course writers, complementing the course materials for that week. For example, an Elder midwife would speak on her understandings, experiences and knowledge during the week the course addressed peri-natal care. But over time, the students themselves identified the topics they wished to hear addressed. Often the Elders spoke in Cree or

Dene, the mother tongue that many students did not fully understand. The talks were translated and written down by one of the instructors or a community member. After the programme had been running for about a year, many of the Elders consented to having the sessions discretely video-taped with the tapes becoming the start of a Tribal Council archive on the 'Words of the Elders'. The presentations were also transcribed into a Tribal Council publication, materials *generated* through the Generative Curriculum process (Greenwood et al., 1994).

Consistent with the principles developed by the partnership team, whenever possible the words of the community serve as the starting point for other parts of the discussion, which include those that follow from Minority World texts and instructors whose degrees are generally based on largely modernist perspectives. It is the intent of the programme to provide an orientation for the instructors to the Generative Curriculum approach before they commence their activities. This second part of the process is the representation of the 'other' world of the dominant culture. In that world the theories, interventions and understandings typically conveyed in an academic course are introduced — not as 'truth' or 'best' practice, but as one way, one practice, ideas to be shared, respected and considered along with other respected ideas and ways of understanding already introduced. Often there is a convergence or a complementarity across information sources, but sometimes not. The effort is to appreciate the context from which different information emerges as well as the context of the communities and individuals. Final agreement or a group consensus is not the intention — dialogue, personal awareness and reflection are. It is the *process*, the recursive consideration of these different views, the seeking out of what Freire would call 'new knowledge', that represents the heart of the Generative Curriculum Model. Freire's formulation of the 'circle of knowledge' is complementary to our own: 'The circle of knowledge has but two moments . . . the moment of the cognition of existing, already produced, knowledge, and the moment of our production of new knowledge . . . both are moments of the same circle' (1997: 192).

### *Elders' Words*

Initially, the Generative Curriculum Model saw the Elders' presentations as a balancing of traditional community knowledge with academic, text-based knowledge, providing that knowledge in ways that would be more contextually appropriate through the community-base rather than a distant academic base. But this approach to knowledge and the conveying of knowledge exemplified in many Elders' stories also links with postmodernist discourses on language. Philosopher David Hall (1996) comments on postmodernist language:

If we are to have a language that evokes difference, however, we must find a new sort of metaphor. In place of metaphors which extend the literal sense of a term, we shall have to employ 'allusive metaphors'. Allusive metaphors are distinct from the expressive variety since they are not tied to a literal or objective signification.

They are free-floating hints and suggestions. They *allude*; they do not *express*.  
(p. 705)

Students and instructors often commented on the Elders' use of stories to teach, stories that might seem to have little relationship to the immediate topic at hand, but which at some later point would ring powerfully. Consistent with Hall's analysis of premodernist thought in China and postmodernist critiques of language, it would appear that Elders' stories resonate with the Taoist idea 'that the thing that can be named, is not the thing'.

The Generative Curriculum approach, in line with a postmodernist perspective, sees the knowledge of the dominant group as a particular construction based on certain assumptions and experiences. From the perspective of the Tribal Council this construction and these assumptions are valuable as they inform and shape patterns of behaviour and understanding in the dominant Minority World. But also valuable are the assumptions, behaviours and understandings that inform their own communities, which are also not static but evolving. An image that one Elder used to describe the Generative Curriculum Model was that of a feather — there are two sides to a feather, and both are needed to fly.

Flight is an apt analogy for the Partnership Projects. Many First Nations communities believe they have lost the ability to soar above their troubles, to hope and to dream. The suicide rate among First Nations young people is three to four times that among the rest of Canadian society. In one western province First Nations people accounted for less than 10 per cent of the population but over two-thirds of the children in care. On some reserves a significant percentage of children born suffer from Fetal Alcohol Effects or Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (Assembly of First Nations, 1989; Canadian Royal Commission, 1996). The social science literature on First Nations in Canada is a litany of woe, some of the most disturbing and depressing literature in existence. When First Nations communities look at why it is so hard to fly above the pain and sorrow, some Elders see feathers that have been damaged on their traditional side, sheared of their strength and beauty.

It is clear to many First Nations that if they are to fly again, this damage must be repaired and that only those programmes and approaches that nourish that which has been damaged will provide them with the necessary strength to go on, to try to rise above. Yet despite, at some level, an awareness among the social science and education communities of the Minority World that great damage has been done, that something fundamental has been broken and must be repaired, the reaction to presentations on the Generative Curriculum partnership approach invariably produces alarm within a substantial part of the academic community attending. The basis of the alarm is that First Nations communities do not know how to heal themselves; implicit in this position is that they, the professionals and experts, do. One can only sit in stunned disbelief that intelligent and well-intentioned individuals can truly believe that they know more about what a community needs than the community itself. Such is the power of modernist belief that it can erase the evidence of history, the generations of well-meaningness that have reduced a

population to death and despair, and still sincerely believe that *this* time it will be different, *this* time they will be proved right, *this* time it will work.

### *Evaluation as Practical Wisdom*

As the project entered its third and final year and students neared completion of the two-year academic programme, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council was obliged by the funding body (the federal government) to formally evaluate the program, to determine if the partnership and Generative Curriculum approach had worked and had met its 'objectives'. These objectives were a required part of the original application and focused to a large extent on concrete things that could be counted (e.g. students registered, services established, and so on). The Tribal Council employed a respected Elder to do an evaluation, an individual who was not from the Meadow Lake area but who knew the communities well. In her evaluation she highlighted the importance of 'unanticipated outcomes':

Some of the greatest benefits of the MLTC Indian Child Care Program are those that were not included in the list of eight basic objectives . . . these spinoffs have had a significant impact on the lifestyle and community spirits.

The involvement of the Elders in the Indian Child Care Program and subsequently into all community events and undertakings has led to a revitalization of cultural pride and traditional value systems. These individuals are those that hold the fabric of community life together. They have increased the awareness of the need to work together, to have self respect and respect for others, that unless there is a healthy community environment there cannot be healthy community members, and that traditional values and ceremonies have a rightful place in the modern world. (Jette, 1993: 58, 59)

The Elder evaluator not only discussed the intended and unintended outcomes of the project, but provided eloquent testimony to the limitations of established ways of knowing and measuring:

[The unanticipated outcomes] cannot be measured in dollars and cents but are perhaps more important to the people of First Nations than achievement in the more measurable and tangible areas. To visit the Meadow Lake Tribal Council district and to feel the new vitality and resurgence of cultural pride and self respect is to know that this program has been successful. (1993: 60)

The Elder evaluator's words, as the Generative Curriculum project itself, is not framed in postmodernist vocabulary, but a critique of modernity is there nevertheless. Embodying Schwandt's (1996a) concern that 'many social scientists believe that method offers a kind of clarity on the path to truth that philosophy does not' (p. 60), she consistently steps outside the narrow pathway of pre-established objectives

and outcomes. She looks for and listens to voices that fall outside the power structure and the normal participants; she is not led by a predetermined understanding of 'best practices'; and she is sensitive to diversity and difference. She and the project itself were led by a pragmatic desire, or what Schwandt refers to as 'practical wisdom', to be 'true to the thing itself', not some external or *a priori* representation of what should be. Neither she, nor the project, knew what 'the thing itself' would be, but they trusted that it would emerge from openness and honest engagement. The starting point for the project was 'not knowing' and excitement to enter that place. She resonated with that beginning, quietly addressed the objectives that the funder identified, and then began her search for making meaning of this work through listening to the voices of the community, not knowing what she would find.

She and the project itself were led by such pragmatic impulses, and those impulses are not modernist in nature. They are not fully rational, they are not fixed, they do not await discovery like some monoliths on an ancient shore. Rather, they emerge in the doing, they are part of a praxis in the moment, yet their mark may remain while they themselves have gone, like tide lines on a beach. Her effort was to identify their mark, to see where they had passed, and to comment on it. In this effort she is more postmodernist than modernist, yet she would probably identify her process as coming from an 'old' place, not a 'new' place. In the same way that Hall suggests that Chinese premodernist thought has similarities to postmodernist thought, the Elder evaluator seems to be tapping into an older discourse which resonates with a postmodern perspective.

Elements of modernist and postmodernist thought have been with us a very long time. They wear various guises at various times, but the essential drama is the very human one of knowing and not knowing, certainty and uncertainty. Some Hebraic traditions, for example Judaism, Christianity and Islam, cast these forces as an oppositional dualism. Other traditions, such as Taoism, perceive in them a necessary complementarity and synergy of the whole. By extending this volume's discussion beyond the Minority World into the Majority World we open a door, which allows us to encounter ways of understanding and socio-philosophical dynamics, which can contribute to and extend postmodernist thought.

The case of the Generative Curriculum, with its bringing together of the two different worlds of western academia and tribal communities, is one illustration of efforts to step outside a modernist approach — albeit this is more apparent in retrospect, than at the time. In doing so, plausible alternatives to normal, modernist ways of proceeding have been encountered, many of which build on each other, stimulating additional changes and new directions as the approach evolves. These alternative approaches have also revealed glimpses of an alternative world view that are profoundly non-modernist, based not on postmodernist construction, but ancient premodernist understandings some of which resonate with postmodernist orientations. Further exploration of such pre-, post- and other- convergences is beyond the scope of this volume, which will now briefly consider further extensions of the Generative Curriculum approach beyond post-secondary training, linking those extensions with other recent writings in the Majority World development literature.

### *Ripples and Further Extensions*

The Elder evaluator focused much of her commentary on the broader community impact of the Generative Curriculum Model. One of the community members interviewed likened it to 'a ripple effect, impacting on all other programmes . . . in the district'. In retrospect, those ripples' movements were made possible by the project's efforts to meaningfully *bring in* the community — to engage community members in a forum of idea sharing, or practical discourse, involving the future of their communities and children's key role in that future: 'It will be the children who inherit the struggle' (Meadow Lake Tribal Council, 1989). Through the Elder evaluator's focus on the unintended outcomes, and finding there the most significant influences of the programme, the university partnership team began to shift their understanding of the Generative Curriculum Model from that of a tertiary education project, to a community development project that employed tertiary education as a tool. Unexpected or unspecified outcomes have since become a major area of interest for the team, and those dynamics are currently being investigated in a major evaluation project.

The evaluation focuses on hearing from the community itself what participation in the project has meant. Not only participating students, instructors and Elders are interviewed as part of the process, but also family members, tribal administrators, service providers and other community members. The effort is to hear not only what various community members have to say, but also to have them hear from each other and to promote broader and potentially on-going dialogues regarding the well-being of children and families within and among communities. The image of ripples generating out from initial points of contact, and then working to understand the interaction of diverse ripples with each other over time is part of the intent of the evaluation. Some describe such work as *ecological* in nature, the communities often use the word *holistic*. In either case the intent is far removed from a modernist process of evaluating predefined outcomes, based on predetermined points of interest, utilizing preselected tools.

### *Worlds Beyond*

The approach taken in the Generative Curriculum Model breaks with traditional modernist assumptions regarding the role and practices of post-secondary education. By valuing more highly being true to the spirit of the partnership and the desires of the community to reclaim, reconstruct and co-construct, the approach violates assumptions that reach back over the centuries to doctrines of revealed truth — a bedrock of modernity and a source of its enduring strength. As long as truth is conceived in this way, as singular and revealed rather than multiple and constructed, there is little room in it for accommodation to the beliefs and values of others. Focusing on the necessity to challenge and confront established assumptions in a forum that depends on community involvement and dialogue, the Generative



Curriculum Model provides elements of a postmodern model of education that imbues learners with a respect for 'many truths', many bedrocks of understanding.

Starting with the *training* of early childhood workers, rather than with pedagogical work with young children, the project highlights the many entry points that can be used to advance alternative discourses. Utilizing a *process-driven*, rather than a 'product-driven', approach to education, the Generative Curriculum approach models and supports the skills and processes required for effective, community-supportive and community-involving practices. Such community-involving skills are largely absent from mainstream, modernist, human services in education, reinforcing an implicit philosophy of 'doing to' rather than 'doing with'. Utilizing a modernist frame of reference and orientation to practice, the calls for community that dominate services to children and families in North America find a limited capacity for response from those who have been taught that the answers lie without, not within, the specific community.

Cross-national and cross-cultural early childhood relationships and work, such as the Meadow Lake Project, can draw inspiration and in turn inspire those seeking new approaches and methods for development work in the Majority World. Although Chambers focuses on rural development, the challenges and changes he identifies fit well the challenge for early childhood workers in the Majority World and beyond.

The practices are personal and professional, requiring changes which are radical but surprisingly practicable: to question our values; to be self-critically aware; to see simple as often optimal; to help people do their own analyses . . . to test and use participatory approaches, methods and procedures; to encourage decentralization and diversity; to put people before things. (1994: ix)

Chambers' critique and recommendations, like the Generative Curriculum Model, do not originate from a postmodernist perspective, but both seek to move from a place that can be clearly understood as a modernist orientation to one that is not. Reminiscent of Tribal Administrator Vern Bachiu's comments (1993), 'what we are trying to do is turn the world upside down', for Chambers the way forward represents a 'turning upside down' of 'normal practice' and moving to a respectful inclusion of the relevant community. An approach advocated by Chambers in the early 1990s is Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).

PRA is a growing family of approaches and methods to enable people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate. Its extensive and growing menu of methods includes visuals such as mapping and diagramming. (Chambers, 1997: 102)

With PRA it is less outsiders, and more local people themselves, who map, model, diagram, score, observe, interview, analyse and plan. Experiences with PRA in South Asia, East and West Africa and elsewhere, have shown that local people are better at these activities . . . we have witnessed a discovery of capabilities which earlier were little expressed and little expected by outsider professionals. (Chambers, 1994: 97)

Chambers' recognition of indigenous strengths and abilities is similar to Malaguzzi's description of children born with 100 languages and losing 99. It is not the children or the local population who are dramatically limited, but rather the professionals and experts whose ability to listen, to see, and to create is blocked by what they 'know'. Neither Malaguzzi nor Chambers would say that there is no role for professionals to play, whether in early childhood pedagogy or rural development. But what that role is must be examined closely and deeply, it must be problematized and open to reinterpretation, to voices too seldom heard, and to insights that are paradigmatically different from what has come before. The inclusion of those most affected will bring the power of pragmatic, thoughtful action into the discussion and give 'legs' to the abstract, connecting it to practical decisions 'on the ground'. Or as Patti Lather (1991) says, such inclusion allows for 'working the tensions between high theory and everyday practice'.

Participatory Rural Appraisal has been complemented by Participatory Learning and Action, and the creation of *PLA Notes* in 1988, a clearinghouse for a growing number of approaches committed to the 'common theme . . . of the full participation of people in the processes of *learning* about their needs and opportunities, and in the *action* required to address them' (PLA notes, 1996: cover page). The February 1996 edition was a special issue on 'Children's Participation'. With the emergence of that literature from the Majority World, describing children and communities as powerful, knowledgeable and capable, we find much in common with the perspectives adopted by Loris Malaguzzi in Reggio Emilia and in the Stockholm and Meadow Lake Projects. In all of these cases we can begin to see the potential for a productive relationship between postmodernist theory and practice — whether in rural development, pedagogical work or training early childhood workers, we can see a world of possibilities, a world filled with potential.

Such potential flows from diversity and complexity, the celebration of multiplicity and uncertainty, not from attempts to standardize, normalize and simplify. This diversity and complexity will flow not only from the individual voices of diverse peoples, but from the 'little narratives' of local knowledge that Lyotard (1984) proposes to replace the 'meta-narrative' of modernity. The dream of universality can also be understood as the nightmare of uniformity and the vulnerability of similarity. It is diversity, not similarity, that is the fount of creativity. To diminish diversity is to diminish possibility. But possibility also requires the coming together of diversity, the exchange of ideas and insights, forums of interaction and dialogue. They suggest the potential of the local, of the forum in civil society, where knowledge and understanding can be produced in fresh, creative and useful ways. Through refocusing our attention from the dream of universality, to the potential of diversity, doors to the future will open that are as yet unimagined.

We started the book with what we called the dominant language of early childhood, a language with its own particular vocabulary and that produces a particular type of conversation and question. The rest of the book has been about the possibilities for talking about early childhood differently, using a different language, having different conversations, asking other questions. We have talked about

the rich child, the co-constructing child, the child as citizen; about the early childhood institution as a forum in civil society, with possibilities for many and varied projects, a place for children and childhood; about meaning making and pedagogical documentation and generative curricula; about power and freedom; about dialogue, confrontation and reflection; about plurality, singularity, uncertainty and contingency; about the ethics of an encounter and relating to the Other. Through this different language, and the postmodern perspectives we have used, we have found new ways of understanding, new opportunities for practice, new spaces where new issues can be explored — so that when we look now at early childhood it is as if we know ‘the place for the first time’.

Clearly, we are exhilarated by the possibilities offered by working with postmodern perspectives. But some may not be so sure. Instead of new possibilities, they may see chaos and risk. In some respects they are right, for as Foucault noted ‘everything is dangerous’ because nothing is neutral, power is everywhere and uncertainty is our only certainty.

Modernity has comforted those who fear an unpredictable and complex world, allayed their concerns with images of knowability, predictability and order. But like Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, ‘the baseless fabric of this vision shall dissolve . . . we are such stuff as dreams are made on’. Indeed, the dream is already over. The dream to create foundations that could support the weight of universal truths and certainties — in understanding children’s development, in knowing the ingredients of quality care, in evaluating environments, in predicting child outcomes and more — never was more than a dream. A dream born out of the promise of modernity.

For some the awakening is a nightmare, but it need not be so. Modernity was never risk free; quite the opposite. Postmodernity is not, can never be, a panacea; but neither is it unproductive. There are theories that can lead us in fruitful directions. There are now sufficient examples that indicate the opportunities that exist from working with different understandings of ourselves and the world. There is evidence that great potentials lie untapped, not from more of the same but from some of the other. The risk we face is not in exploring the unknown, but in retreating to the comfort of the ‘known’.

## Note

- 1 Alan Pence is coordinator of the First Nations Partnership Programs, which has involved partnerships with seven geographically and culturally diverse tribal organizations, starting with the Meadow Lake Tribal Council in 1988. The team at the University of Victoria working in this field has varied in size and membership over the 10-year period, but Lynette Halldorson and Jessica Ball have been key contributors.