USF Global Academic Partners Program for Innovations in Collaborative Research, Teaching and Creative Activities

An Exploration of Early Childhood Teacher Education in Ghana

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Background on Early Childhood Education in Ghana

Early childhood education (ECE) in Ghana is rooted in colonialism. It began as part of the missions from abroad that were established to convert the population to Christianity (Morrison, 2000). Since Ghana gained independence from colonial rule in 1957, the new republic has remained committed to educating young citizens. For example, in 1965, the Ministry of Education established the Nursery and Kindergarten Unit to develop preschools. Yet, “The financial strain of supporting cost-free basic education and tertiary education (university, teacher training, and professional) left the government with limited resources to focus on education before the age of 6” (p. 216). Despite this, a grassroots movement in the 1990s propelled preschool expansion by setting up child care centers across the nation and seeking funds from a variety of non-government organizations.

Focused development of ECE programs is now in demand. The general disposition is that the age-scope of the universal, free compulsory basic education should include kindergarten, and the Government of Ghana has stipulated that by 2010 every Ghanaian child should have access to kindergarten education at age 5 (Republic of Ghana Ministry of Women & Children’s Affairs, n.d.). Moreover, a model to enhance the quality of preschool age children (4-5 years old) to ensure their developmental readiness for school will be in place for national replication by 2010.

As a result of continued interest in expanding early learning opportunities, questions have arisen about how to prepare teachers for work in these contexts. According to Morrison (2002), the nation’s teacher training colleges do not have adequate specialized coursework for the preparation and development of early childhood teachers. “The majority of teachers receive their early childhood training through in-servicing while on the job” (p. 316). The Ministry of Education’s Nursery and Kindergarten unit, established in 1965 in the capital city of Accra, reflected concern with offering specialized early childhood teacher education program. Individuals who engage in teacher preparation at the unit travel to other regions to disseminate knowledge. Despite difficulty ascertaining resources, Ghana remains committed to early schooling. Given this commitment, Morrison (2002) concluded that “There is still much to be done in reaching the goal of a systematic early childhood training program. . . .” (p. 317).

According to the UNESCO International Bureau of Education country profile report on Early Childhood Care and Education programmes in Ghana (2006), among the 22,014 early childhood teachers, only 22.2% have received training. Despite the rapid expansion of preschool
services, the quality of instruction is of great concern. National policy in Ghana aims to address current problems of access and quality in early childhood education by promoting the professional identity, prestige and respect for early childhood educators. The Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy of Ghana focuses on building the capacity of ECCD practitioners and instructions among its goals and objectives. To achieve this, teacher education institutions such as University of Cape Coast need to expand and maximize use of their training facilities, as well as prepare researchers and early childhood leaders who can assume critical roles in advancing early childhood education throughout the nation.

**Purpose and Overview of the Project**

In many countries around the world teacher education faces great challenges attributable to economic constraints, including shrinking resources, the low status of teachers—exacerbated by declining incentives—and an entirely theoretical approach in teacher training programs. These challenges are further intensified by variations in the trainees’ diverse backgrounds and by the lack of collaboration between different education sectors. In this context, the USF Early Childhood Faculty are proposing to work in partnership with a colleague from the University of Cape Coast Ghana to provide contextually appropriate, effective teacher education programs.

The Early Childhood Faculty has ongoing experience working with graduate students from other countries and has a highly effective model of international partnership through our M.A. program taught in Jamaica. This program was initiated in 2000-2001 and was made available through an agreement with Shortwood Teachers’ College (STC) in Kingston, Jamaica. The significance of the ECE program in Jamaica is that “basic schools” in Jamaica are starved of skilled administrators and teacher leaders as the vast majority of educators have at most a diploma in education with only a smaller group of teachers holding a baccalaureate degree. Devoid of situated leadership and their own university professoriate (there are only four PhD’s in ECE living in Jamaica at this time), this partnership between USF and STC has proven to be a wonderful arrangement.

There were two other U.S. universities offering a Masters in ECE in Jamaica in 2000 but to complete both programs residency was required in the U.S. and students would come to the U.S., accept teaching positions here, and fail to return to Jamaica. Our program was the first where all aspects of the program were completed in Jamaica so these emerging leaders have, by and large, stayed in that country. In addition, the interdisciplinary program faculty represented four different departments in the College of Education. One of the distinguishing features of the program in Jamaica has been the great care taken to recognize, respect and incorporate the situated educational cultures of Jamaica into the masters. The goal of situating the theory and practice of the degree so that we have ‘cultural positionality’ has driven the methodologies of the program faculty. At all times the vision and multiple perspectives of the Jamaican teachers has been honored and we would expect to bring the same essential philosophy to our work with partners and colleagues at Cape Coast University.

All of the faculty involved are proud that by the end of fall 2007 over 50 students had graduated from the ECE in Jamaica, with a further 21 students beginning their masters in the summer of 2009. We have graduated one new Ph.D. and have two other doctoral candidates from Shortwood Teachers College who originally completed our M.A. in Jamaica studying at USF. Those individuals will become critical to continuing efforts to build a future professoriate in their country. We would use the needs assessment process with University of Cape Coast to establish similar goals and would look to create a partnership that was mutually beneficial and productive.
This initiative will focus on the opportunities and challenges for early childhood teacher education in Ghana. To ensure that early learning experiences and environments are optimizing young children’s growth and development, professional teacher training and development programs are critical. Moreover, early childhood leaders who can advocate for quality programming as well as engage in improved and systematic program evaluation, monitoring, and research are needed. In order to promote early childhood programs and their quality, it is necessary to create an infrastructure for teacher education as well as the preparation of advanced scholars in the field who can assume roles as leaders and teacher educators.

Since the majority of the writing and research on early childhood teacher education is rooted in the context of the U.S., Europe, Australia and New Zealand, unique approaches are needed to design teacher education training appropriate for the situated educational and cultural context of Ghana. The cornerstone of our approach is to collaborate with partners in Ghana, build on the strengths of existing early childhood systems, and draw from a wide variety of technologies and program designs that meet the specific needs of Ghanaian children and families. We strive to build local capacity and empower Ghanaian scholars to assume roles as mentors who encourage others to apply their newly learned techniques and skills in their context. The initial steps involve exploring the vision and multiple perspectives of various stakeholders in Ghana to design a model of implementation that is responsive to national-level policy issues; considers tension between methods vs. content mastery; promotes meaningful teaching practice in low-resource contexts; explores alternative models for teaching practice; achieves balance between in-service and pre-service approaches; and takes into account teacher ability levels in the language of instruction, vernacular vs. national language instruction, teacher support, teacher supervision and upgrading; and so on. We seek broad understanding of the problems, approaches, and current knowledge about the most effective solutions that can promote equity and quality. By the end of the project, we hope to develop a systemic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in Ghana that may result in effective early childhood teachers for their schools. Our needs assessment will focus on key issues, such as:

- Current approaches to pre-service and graduate education
- Current approaches to in-service education
- Alternative models for teacher training
- Management and supervision of teachers
- Economic and salary issues in the provision of teachers
- Distance Education and the role of new technologies in Teacher Training

Subsequently we would desire continuing the collaboration to assist with the implementation of the model as well as identify areas of mutual interest for future curriculum and policy work. It is anticipated that this will springboard into additional teacher education doctoral training opportunities and common projects and research to help inform the field.

References
**Project Timetable**

The main focus of this project is to work with the University of Cape Coast on the development of their early childhood teacher education programs so that they can recruit and train leaders and professional development experts in response to their national mandates for quality early childhood education.

**January – April 2010**

*Conduct needs assessment and background data gathering via technological collaborative tools and email communication with Dr. K. Etsey, University of Cape Coast to allow us a fuller understanding of the current educational opportunities and challenges for early childhood in Ghana. This communication will focus on identifying key stakeholders as well as foster sharing of information on existing programs and plans for future programs in an effort to establish authentic needs of the early childhood community in Ghana. The USF early childhood faculty will provide expertise on early childhood teacher education and support for advanced graduate education in early childhood.*

Possible sources of information:
- Ministry of Education documents
- Policy makers
- National Teaching Council (NTC)
- National Inspectorate Board (NIB)
- University Professors and Graduate Students
- Distance Learning Colleges
- Kindergarten Teacher Training Programs
- Kindergarten Teachers & classrooms
- Primary Teachers & classrooms
- Community Leaders
- Parents
- Potential university students

**May – June 2010**

*Plan and coordinate 7-day visit to Ghana by two (2) USF Early Childhood faculty.*
- Meet with possible information sources as mentioned above
- Physical examination of resources, geography, and barriers to the implementation of the educational policies.

**June – July 2010**

*Analysis of the information and data collected*
- Analyze data gathered
- Develop draft of ideas for consideration with partners

**August 2010**

*Plan and coordinate 7-day visit to USF by the University of Cape Coast Co-PI.*
- Review information
- Develop an action plan.
- Identify areas of mutual collaborative interest for future curriculum and policy work

**Sept. – Dec. 2010**

*Final report developed / Phase two plans proposed*

Springboard to additional teacher education doctoral opportunities and common projects and research
## Budget

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