

From Global to Local and Back

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Global to Local

- South Africa is signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Children and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and many of these rights are enshrined in our constitution.
- These declarations of legal rights have led to plans of action both internationally (Africa Fit for Children) and nationally (The Children's Act).
- Applied Child Development Research in South Africa works within the framework of globally defined objectives.
- These objectives guide practical decisions locally.

Child Development Research in Developing countries

- Inspiration from the international literature
- But the risk factors here for developmental delays are different, more plentiful and more intense than in most developed countries
- Different cultural child-rearing values + different child-rearing practices = different childhoods (different norms and standards)
- All this points to a need to develop local measures and methods
- This will sharpen the resultant information which we need in order to guide local child development policies and practice.

Local to Global

- There is a reason for researchers in Africa to play a part in global discussions
- A high proportion of the world's children live in poverty
- So we can do globally relevant work here
- BUT - in order for local applied child development research to impact strongly on global issues we need improved quality, quantity and focus.

This means:

- Co-operation and collaboration locally
- Attention to culturally appropriate ways of testing
- Attention to language issues
- Better documentation of psychometric properties of measures
- Analytic models which can cope with multiple risk factors

An Inventory of Child Development Measures for use in Africa

- This is one way to build research support for interventions.
- An early version of an inventory of child development measures used by researchers in Africa on the HSRC web site.
- It needs re-arranging and updating
- How can we enhance its usefulness?

What research support is needed for interventions to meet our global aspirations for children in Africa (the MDGs, international conventions and charters), and our national duties as spelt out in the South African Constitution, ratified in legislation, and targeted in action plans?

Is an interactive on-line inventory of test materials a useful way to make a contribution to child development research in Africa?

If so, should we broaden our targets to include other developing regions?

Research Priorities

1. Developing theories of change. Understanding the causes of developmental delays and disturbances in individual children or at community level
2. Improving existing interventions, going to scale and devising new interventions
3. Monitoring outcomes at individual, local, provincial and country level in order to fine-tune interventions and reduce inequities

Priority 1: Developing Evidence-based Theories of Change

- Identifying contexts where children are most at risk
- Examining constructs and associated assessment tools and techniques.
 - Are they *culturally* appropriate?
 - Do our measures have reasonable *sensitivity* and *specificity*?
 - Are there published *local* norms and standards?
- Build models of risk to indicate primary and secondary objectives

Priority 2: Improving existing interventions and devising new ones

- Meta analyses examining costs, coverage, effectiveness
- Establishing sustainability
- Process evaluations to identify missed opportunities
- Appropriate age of child for maximum benefit

Priority 3 Monitoring outcomes at individual, local and national level

- Identifying children who haven't benefited (Note *Toxic Stress* described by Shonkoff 2010 and experienced by so many of our children)
- Process evaluation of scaling up, intersectoral co-operation to improve impact and to extend the scope of interventions.
- Using indicators of positive mental health in children (resilience and competence) in sentinel sites to determine whether inequity between well-resourced areas (usually urban) and poorly resourced areas (usually rural) has been reduced.

If we are to make a real difference to children's development we need to be well-organised with our standards, our indicators, our assessments and our analyses.

We are proposing an inventory of measures which at least gives information on the appropriate ages, the administration times, translations into African languages, psychometric properties, where tests are obtainable, whether copyrighted, cost of purchase, and any published or unpublished studies.

BUT - The devil is in the detail and perhaps we should also discuss other issues

- Children in disadvantaged areas face **multiple risks**, (such as exposure to pesticides, foetal alcohol syndrome, parasite infections, dysfunctional families, orphaning, abandonment, nutritional deficits, lack of stimulation, chronic infection like MDRTB, HIV and the unintended side-effects of medication, disabilities of many types). In the original inventory no assistance was offered with these and perhaps we should have regular on-line discussion papers
- **Other issues** such as exploratory observational studies, meta-analyses, the use of technology to capture data, spatial issues, costing interventions, ethical issues in testing children, techniques for canvassing children's views, the use of appropriate child language during assessments, assessor training and many more could be tackled – do we risk spreading the subject matter too thin?

Some suggestions for improvements and inclusions to the inventory

- A clearer path to access the web site and some advertising.
- In the case of published tests, does one need permission to use them and are there costs?
- Where a copy of the test can be obtained?
- Can it be administered by field staff without professional qualifications
- Is there a manual, in what setting can the test be administered?
- There should be a comments section for people who have used a test to record their views on it.
- A membership list, then we could distribute on-line discussion papers to members on a regular basis.
- An administrator to receive queries from students and direct them to a possible mentor.



Thank you for your attention