

Preface

In the summer of 2006, we attended an administrative retreat commensurate with our roles in the college at the time, while also being active scholars with global interests in children. Our collective and interdisciplinary interests somehow became known to one another and Dr. Agbényiga asked Drs. Hitchcock and Johnson to assemble for a discussion around the Global and Area Thematic Initiative (GATI)¹ grants at MSU. We represented the right mix of social science disciplines—social work, human development and families studies, and anthropology—to cover an expanse of global issues of children’s development from varying vantage points.² By the end of the 2-day meeting, we were a team having settled on writing a grant for a 3-year project that would bring in scholars from across the globe, develop a conference, and end in a research-based product that could be widely disseminated. The great adventure had begun; new relations, exciting ideas, and contacts were being forged.

We conceived a project that would bring together scholars involved in international work who might wish to make mutual contact and learn about varying approaches to conducting global work and solving the problems of invisible and vulnerable children in the world. Indeed we found that the ideas were intriguing and of value to researchers engaged in such work.

There were three layers of goals we wished to achieve. In the initial phase of the university-wide colloquium series, we intended to provide a forum to explore

¹ The original project was sponsored by the Global and Area Thematic Initiative (GATI) at Michigan State University. Funding for GATI is provided by the US Department of Education through MSU’s Title VI-funded National Resource Centers including the African Studies Center, Asian Studies Center, Center for Advanced Study of International Development, and Women and International Development Program (WID) as well as the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies and the Office of the Dean of International Studies and Programs with support from the Office of the Provost.

indigenous perspectives on “undefended” and children’s issues internationally. We considered the term “Indigenous” knowing that it does not apply to every cultural context and sought to learn more about the contexts in which it was a relevant and meaningful term. National scholars from Ghana and Australia were invited along with one other scholar whose work represented Indigenous views on education and learning in South America. We planned small gatherings with formal presentations and informal discussion afterward to address perspectives and systems of meaning beyond Western thought. And, of course, the most important ingredients for that process of discovery were food and an informal atmosphere.

In the second phase we planned a conference around the broader themes of the grant, *Undefended Children in Global Contexts*, which has now been updated to incorporate the more broadly used term “vulnerable” children. Here the goal was to bring together international and domestic scholars conducting work on unprotected and invisible children globally as a great opportunity for sharing research, fostering collaborations, and providing forums for addressing children’s rights issues as well as solving the policy and intervention problems that emerged in the discussion of the research. One of our greatest honors was to have the then Hon. Dr. Judith Mbula Bahemuka, a Kenyan sociologist and recent ambassador to UN as well as High Commissioner to Canada from Kenya, accept our invitation to keynote the conference.

In the third stage we thought it critical to capture the excellent work shared and produced for dissemination to a wider audience, hence this edited volume. Not only is our anticipation that this volume will be used to further a better understanding of vulnerability and child distress for scholarly use, but also to expose child rights issues and provide updated material for classroom teaching.

Despite the great ideas we launched, we did need assistance to make it all this happen. Our efforts might not have come to such successful fruition if it were not for the herculean efforts of graduate students and other staff who supported us at various stages, Yeon Soo Kim, Linda Hancock, Rosa Homa, Lisa Parker, Lynn Lee, Adell Flourry, Nancy Fair, and Shondra Marshall. Special thanks to Dr. Andrea G. Hunter and Rosa Homa who provided vital feedback and editorial assistance. Key administrators in our departments, Karen Wampler and Gary Anderson, made it possible to acquire additional resources and supports. We are most appreciative of the talent and the passion demonstrated by the contributors to this volume. It is their work, their observations that bring the lives of the world’s children seemingly effortlessly to the doorstep of the reader.

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Vulnerable Children

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