Chapter 64
The Ethical Dilemma of Early Global Childhood Education

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

BACKGROUND
This chapter investigates the notion of ethical dilemma associated with early childhood education in Confucian Heritage countries. It draws on literature in philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology in concluding that sociocultural distinctions between Eastern and Western civilizations amount to an ethical dilemma, which threatens to prevent a basic epistemology as well as a pedagogy for the education of children in the context of globalization and the information technology revolution.

Curriculum designs and objectives vary by country and to some extent culture or civilization (Hatano & Inagaki, 1998; Lee, 1998; Stigler & Stevenson, 1992; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). Whereas Confucius and Socrates espoused the importance of knowledge or learning as virtue, Confucius cultures have weaponized learning through its instrumental implementation for socialization and control. Group orientation is seen as a Confucian Heritage cultural attribute, which is contrasted with the individualism of Western

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 culture. Unlike students from Confucian cultures, Western students have not limited their educational objectives to subjects that maximize economic and financial utility. Most of the graduate degrees sought by Asian students are in science and engineering (Tweed & Lehman, 2002). The arts—dance, painting, music, philosophy, and the like—are often less pursued by learners from Confucius heritage countries than by learners from the West.

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

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

In the United Kingdom, curriculum emphasizes literacy, mathematics, understanding the world, expressive arts, and design (U.K. Department of Education, 2014). The definitions of early numeracy and number sense goes together with development (van de Rijt et al., 2003). Scientific knowledge is an appealing prospect to international organizations, governments, and corporations pursuing an instrumental agenda (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). In Poland, the curriculum changes the limits of the teaching of theory, the former curriculum, and places more emphasis on the practical and experimental skills of math and science (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2015).

Because learning is typically situated—that is, contextual, no learning occurs in a vacuum. Local cultures face a dilemma when they have to conform both to local epistemology and at the same time implement global standards in response to globalization and the information technology age. A typical example of how globalization and technology influence 21st-century learning has to do with communicative competence, which entails learning a foreign language. Cultural differences (Genc & Bada, 2005; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001) make it necessary that second or foreign language learning instruction (McKay, 2003; Scovel, 1978) be in conformity with curriculum objectives in the particular learning environment. Such an arrangement raises ethical questions and poses a dilemma for Confucius heritage countries that promote group epistemology at the expense of individual initiatives and critical thinking (Nisbett et al., 2001). A utilitarian approach to curriculum as well as a Confucian-oriented