BOOK REVIEW

Child and Adolescent Development by Dap Louw and Anet Louw (Eds.)

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The nature of childhood and the qualities of maturity are conceptualised differently in different communities and at different historical periods (Engelbrecht & Green, 2001). The conceptualisation and criteria used for assessing child development are a challenge when they are borrowed from other countries. This has been so in the past and it is still so in the present post-apartheid South Africa, especially when South African children’s developmental assessments are based on American and European standards. As far as the development of children is concerned, the authors of Child and Adolescent Development (p. 5) maintain that children are hampered by various factors that could have a significant negative effect on their potential; hence this book’s content is interpreted against that background.

According to the authors this book targets undergraduate students, but I feel that it may be beneficial to postgraduate students and to anyone who is interested in the field of child and adolescent development. In South Africa teacher education programmes are aimed at students from divergent socio-cultural backgrounds
Maistry, 2009). This statement should not be regarded as déjà vu as it is crucial in the post-apartheid era. In the past, South African scholarly books were imported from other countries, especially from first world countries that have different norms and standards from ours. It is evident that the content of imported books is in many cases not relevant for the South African population.

The present and the future constitute daunting challenges (Nkomo, Weber, & Amsterdam, 2009) that call for the acknowledgement of diversity in South African Universities. Higher education institutions in post-apartheid South Africa are undergoing a transformation process on many levels (Portnoi, 2009) and areas. One of the transforming areas is the curriculum transformation that needs to take into account the diverse groups of students. Universities constitute several sites for knowledge production, referred as teaching, research and engaged practice (Blunt, 2005). Information is most ‘efficient’ when it is structured and sequenced in accordance with learner’s predispositions (Bruner 1993, in Blunt 2005). Child and Adolescent Development is relevant for South African universities as it captures the content with which most South African students are familiar.

**Contribution of the book**

The contribution and the strength of *Child and Adolescent Development* is that it provides recent scientific information, theories and research that are based on South African data.

Theory is regarded by Engelbrecht and Green (2001) as human knowledge, extracted from the experience of different individuals and communities, expressed in fairly abstract language, and subjected to a repeated process of verification by empirical and logical or analogical reasoning. Engelbrecht and Green (2001) further mention that the vast theoretical literature on human development and education is valuable as it stimulates engagement in the process of knowledge construction. Furthermore, it offers systematic frameworks for understanding and interpreting experience and suggests particular courses of action. The authors of *Child and Adolescent Development* managed to incorporate South African scenarios in their explanations and interpretation of theories. A good example of their research focus is on page 36 where the authors highlight that historical information from recent psycho-biographical studies on the lives of famous and enigmatic South African personalities, such as Mandela, revealed that there are certain common characteristics that characterise great individuals in their childhood and adolescent stages.

*Child and Adolescent Development* has seven chapters and its themes are well structured. The sub-themes in the first six chapters are; orientation, physical development, cognitive development, personality development, and social development.

The language is very ‘reader friendly’. Readers are provided with additional information in boxes with topics designed to stimulate and encourage critical
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thinking. Students are provided with an opportunity for self evaluation at the end of every section.

The authors have a unique and innovative way of presenting the content. One that fascinates me and I hope students as well, is the use of humour by means of Zapiro’s cartoons, pictures, tables, graphs and drawings when explaining, analysing and interpreting theories and child development stages. These visual ways of content presentation are likely to draw students’ attention to the learning content.

Limitation

Chapter seven of Child and Adolescent Development has a different structure from the first six chapters. Chapter seven addresses various issues related to social, emotional concerns, psychological deficit (vulnerability) and positive approaches (resilience). However, these are not linked to the child developmental stages that are the main focus of Child and Adolescent Development.

Conclusion and recommendations

Child and Adolescent Development is relevant to the intended audience. I recommend that it should be prescribed to students at South African universities as it encapsulates South African scenarios and examples that elucidate research, practice, and theories.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Mokgadi (nee Kekae) Moletsane is a senior lecturer in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria. She obtained her PhD in Educational Psychology from the University of Pretoria. She coordinates research modules, supervises Masters and PhD research students and is involved in Psychological clinical supervision. Mokgadi also presents an undergraduate module on Child development.
REFERENCES


