



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



UNESCO Chair for Early Child
Education, Care and
Development (Canada)



University
of Victoria

CHAIRES UNESCO CHAIRS

IN/AU CANADA

UNESCO Chair for Early Child Education, Care and Development

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Chairholder:
Prof. Alan Pence

Description and history

The UNESCO Chair for Early Child Education, Care and Development (ECECD) works in partnership with diverse national and international organizations to enhance child well-being and development. The focus for the work of the Chair is primarily, but not exclusively, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

Although the UNESCO Chair was founded in 2008, the work upon which it is based commenced in 1994 with a request from UNICEF to the University of Victoria to support their efforts to better promote ECECD as a key element for broader social and economic development in the Majority (Developing) World.

That request led to the development of a series of Early Childhood Seminars, two of which were held in Sub-Saharan Africa (1997, 1998). In turn, the success of the Seminars, which brought together key ECECD leaders from 15 SSA countries, led to a request by the participants to develop a structure through which such leaders could continue to learn together and work together to address ECECD challenges they faced in-country. The response to the call was the development of the Early Childhood Development Virtual University (ECDVU).

With support from the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, CIDA, Bernard van Leer Foundation, and various in-country donors, the ECDVU was launched in 2001. As of 2012, the ECDVU has completed four deliveries involving over 100 participants from 16 countries with a completion rate of over 95%, and less than 1% brain drain from the continent. The graduates of the program have created national policies, developed innovative programs, provided nation-wide training, and engaged in many and diverse capacity building activities that have dramatically impacted children and families in their countries.

Current activities

The work of the Chair currently focuses on the following set of activities:

- Transition of the ECDVU program to institutions in Africa seeking to more fully engage in ECECD capacity development activities in their country or region;
- Continuation of the African ECD International Conference series, launched in 1999 by The World Bank working with the Chair, with subsequent continent-wide conferences held in 2002, 2005 and 2009 (UNESCO-BREDA and ADEA were the chief sponsors for the 2009 Conference);
- Promoting African-based publications addressing issues of young children's education, care and development. An example is the 2008 publication of *Africa's Future: Africa's Challenge: Early Childhood Care and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* with over 25 African authors;
- Development of an African Scholars and Institutions initiative (AS&I) with the following components:
 - A survey of African institutions identifying early childhood and child development courses and programs;
 - Workshops with key administrative and academic leaders seeking to increase scholarly activity in regards to ECECD and to connect with similarly motivated institutions across regions of Africa (ESARO and WCARO for example);
 - Researcher and scholar workshops designed to identify issues and ways forward for African child development and ECECD research;
 - Development of plans for regional 'Centers of Innovation and Excellence in ECECD'.