

In Memoriam: Remembering Ernesto Pollitt Burga (1938-2016)

In Memoriam: Recordando a Ernesto Pollit Burga
(1938-2016)

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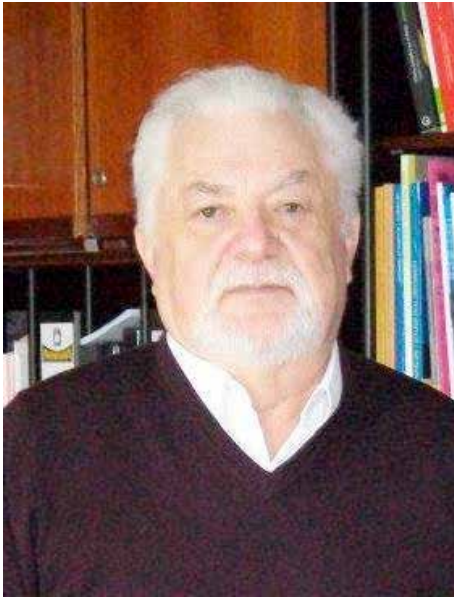
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This year started with unfortunate news for the national and international psychology community. In the early morning hours of January 5th Dr. Ernesto Pollitt Burga passed away, Peruvian psychologist with over 50 years of continuous research on child development. His researches - published in the most prestigious journals of psychology, pediatrics and nutrition - his books, his human qualities and his theoretical and methodological contributions talk about the significance of his

work and justify these few lines about his life and work.

Ernesto Pollitt was born on April 21th, 1938 in Lima. He joined the Faculty of Arts at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú in 1956. He initially studied law, then transferred to the career of Philosophy. Eventually, he pursued studies in psychology, where he had as professors important figures of the Peruvian psychology and psychiatry at the time, such as Baltazar Caravedo, Arnaldo Cano and Emilio Majluf. He traveled to the United States where he worked as an assistant researcher of Dr. John Money at the Unit of Psychoendocrinology of John Hopkins University. Along with Money he published papers on dwarfism psychology (Pollitt & Money 1964; Money & Pollitt, 1966) and cytogenetic and psychosexual ambiguity (Money & Pollitt, 1964). After two years working with Money, Pollitt returns to Peru to travel to the city of Chiclayo in order to research the impact of protein-fortified foods administration on the development of malnourished children. This event marked Pollitt's decision to devote himself to researching on malnutrition consequences on child development.

He studied Developmental Psychology at Cornell University (New York), and then worked at the Department of Pediatrics of Yale University and at the Child Study Center. Years later, Pollitt started working at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in Geneva. During these years he presented his first works on motor and mental development in children with severe protein calorie malnutrition (Pollitt & Granoff, 1967), and on the role of biological and social variables in relation to height in children in slums of Lima (Pollitt & Ricciuti, 1969); topics that were later addressed in other publications (Pollitt, Gilmore & Valcarcel, 1978; Pollitt & Wirtz, 1981; Pollitt, 2008a).

He was an Associate Professor at the Department of Nutrition and Food Science of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and an Associate and Tenured Professor at the University of California, city of Davis, where he is Professor Emeritus. During these years he conducted researches in Egypt, Guatemala, India and Indonesia on the effects of fortified foods, as well as on the long-term malnutrition effects on development, from pregnancy to adulthood (Gorman & Pollitt, 1993; Pollitt, Saco, Laibel & Viteri, 1986; Pollitt, Gorman, Engle, Martorell & Rivera, 1993). His other topics of interest in recent years were the influence of multiple deficiency conditions of children on their decision-making ability (Pollitt, 2008b), and the foundation of the gross motor development milestones as indicators of overall development of children under 2. (Pollitt & Bacallao, 2009; Pollitt & Caycho, 2010; Pollitt, 2012).

Due to his important contributions, Dr. Pollitt has been a consultant to several Peruvian and foreign institutions. Furthermore, he has received several awards: Sir Clavering Fison Visiting Professor at the University of London; International Public Health Prize Prince Mahidol, in 2000, awarded by the Mahidol Foundation of the Thailand Royal House in Bangkok; Award in Nutrition from the American Academy of Pediatrics (1999); Research Excellence Award from the American Society for International Nutrition

(1998); Honorary Professor at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (1998); Emeritus Member of the Latin American Society of Nutrition (2003); Nutrition National Award from the Peruvian Society of Nutrition (2007); Honorary Professor at the Ricardo Palma University (2007); Member of the National Academy of Sciences (2009), the only Peruvian psychologist within this prestigious academic organization, among others.

Among the major contributions of Dr. Pollitt's work we can mention, first, his studies on the effects of calorie-protein and iron deficiencies on children's development, demonstrating the negative consequences of iron-deficiency anemia in learning and motor development. The results of this work generated initiatives of public policies implementation in many countries (Cueto, 2005). Second, he demonstrated that the malnutrition effects can be reversed according to the type of nutritional deficiency, its duration and age of illness. Third, Pollitt conceives development as a probabilistic process which involves internal and external factors to the body in constant interaction. Finally, he considered, among the various dimensions of the psychobiological development of the child, that motor milestones arising during the first 24 months of life are the best predictors of intellectual development and academic achievement.

Dr. Pollitt's life cannot be understood without the presence of two pillars: Dr. Carmen Saco-Pollitt, his wife since 1970; and Ricardo Pollitt Saco, his first and only child, doctor and specialist in epidemiology at the Stanford University Hospital. They both were his main motivations.

To finish with a personal tone, the author of these lines met Dr. Pollitt in the summer of 2009. I was chosen by him to be his research assistant for nearly two years. During this time I was able to know his simplicity, humility, diligence and discipline to work. He taught me that it is possible to be a psychologist and a scientist, and that only scientific research will contribute to the development of our communities. I still remember his encouragement

words and countless anecdotes, trying not only to contribute to my academic work in progress, but also to my personal development. I was fortunate to be close to the psychologist, researcher and man. His legacy and advice will continue inspiring many generations.

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