

The Influence of Culture in Infant–Toddler Child Care Settings

Joan Test

Missouri State University

ABSTRACT

It is not only in families that young children are influenced to become members of their culture. Around the world and within individual countries, culture influences how care is provided to infants and toddlers in child care settings. In turn, infants and toddlers begin to learn how to act and think as members of their culture. From ways that teachers handle conflicts between toddlers, to how teachers manage transitions, to the organization of groups and physical environments, to more conscious transmission of culture through curriculum, culture influences infants and toddlers to become cultural beings that function well within their culture. This article explores cultural variations in group care and what infants and toddlers learn from these practices about being members of a culture.

When an infant is born that child becomes a cultural being, or at least a candidate to become a cultural being, so says Jerome Bruner (2010) in his forward to *A World of Babies*, a book that described the influence of culture on early child rearing in a range of cultures. Anthropologists have posited a strong relationship between the values of a culture, the influence of the culture on child rearing, and what is consciously and intentionally transmitted to very young children about living as a member of their culture (Whiting, Chasdi, Antonovsky, & Ayres, 1974). In addition to conscious and intentional transmission, “certain aspects of the childrearing process have the effect of strengthening values far beyond the conscious intent” of caregivers (Whiting et al., p. 155). How parents and caregivers raise their children transmits their culture to young children, and this transmission can be both conscious and unconscious on the part of the adult. Furthermore, Robert LeVine, another anthropologist, says that the “environments of infancy and early childhood are shaped by cultural values” (LeVine, 1977, p. 15). So in addition to passing on their culture through interactions with young children, caregivers also create environments within which to raise children that serve to pass on cultural values and behaviors to children.

While most anthropological work has looked at the influence of culture on child rearing in the context of parents and families, many cultures now include environments for child rearing outside the family. Child care centers with groups for infants and toddlers are increasingly common settings for child rearing. Infant and toddler child care centers and programs are also shaped by culture and can serve (both consciously and unconsciously) to influence the cultural values and behavior of the

infants and toddlers who attend. The influence of culture can be seen in many aspects of care for infants and toddlers in child care. Carolee Howes (2010) described early educational practices as particular to cultural communities. Following Rogoff’s (2003) ideas on the role of culture in human development, Howes maintained that early childhood education practices and culture are mutually constructed by a community. Communities create child care environments for infants and toddlers in ways that pass on their culture through social interactions, curricula, and physical environments, reflecting the interesting and unique ways that culture and infant–toddler child care are mutually constructed in that community. This article will explore some of these mutual constructions within infant–toddler settings around the world, as adults consciously and unconsciously influence infants and toddlers to become members of their culture.

Consider some examples of toddlers’ conflict over possessions and how teachers responded in two cultures (see box *Toddler Conflicts and Solutions*).

Why is there this difference between these two cultures’ approaches? What are children learning in each culture about possession and resources? In what way is each culture influencing the teachers’ responses as well as the lessons learned by the toddlers? To answer these questions, it is helpful to look at each culture and the values of adults in the culture. Both American and Swedish culture can be characterized as individualistic cultures, cultures where the individual is of primary importance. However, American culture has been characterized as a vertical individualistic culture (Triandis, 1995), where rights of individuals are of primary importance and people do not need to be the same.

Toddler Conflicts and Solutions

Johnny toddles over to Emily. Emily is thoroughly engaged in playing with a little toy house—opening doors, putting a little dog in and out of the doors, and babbling as she does this. Johnny comes near and reaches for the house. Emily does not acknowledge him and continues to play and babble. Johnny reaches over and tugs on the toy house, pulling it out of Emily's hands and sitting down suddenly on the floor. Emily looks up at him and starts to cry and reach for the little house. Jennifer, their teacher, comes over and sits next to them on the floor. She calmly says to Johnny, "I see you want to play with the little house, but Emily had the house first. Let's give the house to Emily and you can play with it after she is done." Johnny looks up at her but does not respond; he starts opening and closing the little doors on the house. Jennifer speaks a little more loudly, "Johnny, you need to give the house back to Emily. She had it first. You can play with it after she is done." Jennifer gently takes the house from Johnny's grasp and hands it to Emily. Emily stops crying and smiles then continues exploring the little house. Meanwhile Johnny starts to cry and looks at Jennifer. Jennifer says to Johnny, "Let's go look for another toy you can play with." She holds his hand, and they walk over to the shelf together to look for another toy that Johnny might like.

Contrast this with an example from a different culture describing two more toddlers playing:

Anna and Lia are both sitting on the floor with a jumble of toy people surrounding them. Anna picks one up and explores it, making it walk along the floor and then putting it in a little play car and zooming it around. Lia watches, then picks up a toy person and starts to make it jump across the floor. As they play Anna puts more and more of the people into the car while Lia has one that she keeps making jump. Next Lia looks for another toy person to hold with her other hand and finds that they are gone—all in Anna's toy car taking a ride. Lia watches Anna and starts to whine a little, staring up at Anna and then back at her own empty hand. Maya, the teacher in the classroom, has been sitting next to the two toddlers watching them play. She watches a little longer to see what Anna will do in response to Lia's whining sounds. Anna continues playing, but for a moment looks up at Maya. Maya says to Anna, "Wouldn't it be a good idea to give Lia some more of the people, too?" Maya then nods at Anna with a serious look on her face. Maya then looks away. Anna continues playing for a moment. Lia is still whining softly and looking at Anna. Suddenly Anna picks up a small handful of little people from the car where they have been riding and throws them towards Lia. Maya then looks at Anna, making eye contact, and smiles, nodding her head to Anna in approval.

The first example comes from a toddler classroom in a child care center in the United States. Here, the teacher emphasized the "prior possession rule": the child who has the toy first has a right to the toy. This approach to solving children's conflicts over toys is common in mainstream American child care programs.

The second example comes from a mixed age classroom (1–6 years old) in a child care center in Sweden. In this example the teacher emphasized sharing resources with another member of the child care group, saying that this is a "good idea" and further supporting the positive nature of sharing resources with others through her body language, smiling warmly and making eye contact with the toddler when she complies and shares the toys with another toddler.

Sweden on the other hand is a horizontal individualistic culture (Triandis, 1995) where individual rights are also very important, but individuals should not distinguish themselves from the group or have advantages over one another. Most cultures have a mix of individualistic tendencies as well as collectivist. In collectivist cultures, group membership and belonging is more important than individual needs or rights. While American culture leans toward being highly individualistic, Swedish culture mixes aspects of both individualism and collectivism. How do these

cultural orientations influence toddler conflicts and child care teachers' responses? In the first (American) example, the teacher frames the solution in terms of individual rights, following her culture's high focus on individualism and individual rights. In addition, she encourages a solution where one toddler has more of a right to the particular toy at that time than does the other toddler—illustrating her culture's vertical individualism, where one person can have more of a right to something than another member of the culture. The teacher's response emphasizes these aspects of American culture, and the toddlers are learning that this is how conflicts should be defined and settled. Toddlers are starting to form ideas and behaviors that fit this individualistic cultural framework. In American preschool classrooms this learning of American cultural norms is already evident: it is not uncommon to hear children 3 to 5 years old say, "It's mine! I had it first!" during a conflict with another child over toys.

In contrast, in the second (Swedish) example, the teacher frames the solution in terms of group members having an individual responsibility to create a condition of sameness. She encourages the toddler who has more to give some of her toys to the other child, thus equalizing the distribution of resources among the group members. The teacher is positive and warm to the toddler only once the child herself has engaged in behavior to create this sameness. In this way the teacher in Sweden reflects her culture's value on individual rights as well as individual responsibilities to create a positive group sameness.

This aspect of culture—the value of group belonging—can be seen in a number of cultures in addition to Sweden. Cultures as varied as those in Japan, New Zealand, and Italy also emphasize the value of group membership and belonging, yet in different ways.

Social Interactions: Teachers, Infants and Toddlers Together

In the previous examples cultural influences can be seen in the social interactions between teachers and toddlers. The social interactions that teachers engage in with toddlers reflect their culture's values, and it is through these interactions that infants and toddlers begin to learn about and become members of their respective cultures.

In Japan, the dominant culture can be characterized as a collectivist culture, and there is a strong emphasis on interdependence. This interdependency includes values such as solidarity, cooperation, togetherness, and belongingness (Lebra, 1976). To foster this interdependence, toddlers in child care in Japan, as described by Irene Shigaki (1983), have their naps on mats all pulled together in a group on the floor, with children's mats next to each other. Sleeping close together with others is also common at home in Japan where it fosters a feeling of interdependence that is highly valued (Caudill & Plath, 1974). Toddlers in Japanese child care are already learning aspects of their culture through the social and physical sleeping arrangements during naptime. Contrast this practice with toddler groups in the United States where children sleep on separate cots as spread out around the classroom as

possible, with barriers such as low shelves placed between many of the children to prevent interaction. This emphasizes the individualistic nature of American culture, where self-regulation as toddlers fall asleep is highly valued.

Shigaki (1983) also described toddlers in Japan facing challenges and how toddlers support their peers. She described a toddler group going down a flight of stairs to go outside to play. Each toddler goes down the stairs slowly and with effort, as they are just gaining these motor skills and learning to go down stairs. As each toddler reaches the bottom of the stairway, they stand and turn around and verbally encourage the toddlers who are still coming down the stairs. Teachers stand at the top and bottom with the toddlers. Going outside, a daily transition, becomes a chance to learn how to show group solidarity and belongingness as well as to feel its effects. Doi (1974) wrote about the Japanese quality of *amae*, which he translates as “to depend and presume upon another’s benevolence” (p. 307). As toddlers descend the staircase in child care, the teachers have set up this transition time in a way that reflects *amae* as well as teaching toddlers how to act in accordance with *amae*.

In Italy, parents and professionals speak of early care and education as a way to extend relationships beyond kith and kin (Lubeck, 2001). New (2001a, 2001b) has observed that children are central to life in Italian communities and that children’s well-being is seen as a shared responsibility of the whole community. In addition, social discourse in Italian culture is full of disagreement and negotiated collaborations (New, 2001a). Edwards and Gandini (2001) described close relationships between teachers and children in Italian infant–toddler child care. Teachers encourage close relationships between toddlers and give them room to disagree and work together. Edwards and Gandini showed a photograph of two toddlers eating a meal, one toddler feeding the other, both smiling, captioned, “As children become good friends with the others in their group, they showed how much they liked each other’s company and trusted their intentions” (p. 191). Teachers discuss and debate amongst themselves, yet show empathy and respect to each other and a pleasure in learning. They model the ingredients for negotiated collaborations, and infants and toddlers adopt these aspects of culture through watching and experiencing these cultural patterns for interacting in the group. These behaviors and skills will be useful as they grow to adults in that community.

Corsaro and Emiliani (1992) described another example of Italian toddlers’ play and negotiation.

An entire classroom of toddlers gradually pushes some little chairs together to form a long line, which the toddlers then climb onto and walk along, with all the children participating to some degree. The teachers watch and warn toddlers to be careful, but rarely intervene. The teachers had some misgivings, but decided not to restrict the play because the children were enjoying it so much. This play recurred on a regular basis among the toddler class, sometimes with embellishments. (summarized from Corsaro & Emiliani, 1992, p. 101)



Photo: Stephen Bobb

In the United States, children sleep on separate cots as spread out around the classroom as possible, with barriers such as low shelves placed between many of the children to prevent interaction.

Corsaro and Emiliani maintained that this “doing things together” fosters the development of a peer culture among the toddlers. It also gives toddlers the chance to develop trust together as they protect and care for each other during the somewhat risky play. The Italian teachers seem to understand and foster these relationships through allowing this kind of play and giving the toddlers space to support each other, rather than depending on adult intervention.

In addition to social interactions that function to influence children’s development, there are also other ways the local culture influences care in infant–toddler settings which in turn influences children’s development as members of a particular culture. The structure and organization of infant–toddler child care groups is another aspect of care where the influence and learning of culture can be seen.

Structure and Organization of Care

A culture’s orientation as individualistic or collectivist can be seen in how infant–toddler care is structured and organized within a child care center. In Sweden, infants and toddlers are in mixed age groups, including children from 1 year through 6 years old, called “sibling” groups. Children join a sibling group when they enter the program at 1 year old or later, and stay in the same group until they leave for primary school. Swedish teachers consider this a very important aspect of child care: children should feel a strong sense of group membership. They also feel having a sense of group membership and belonging is important for children’s future social and emotional development. Without this basis of feeling a member of the group, a child would never feel right for the rest of their life, say some teachers, they would have a feeling of never belonging and this would handicap them for life. Some centers also have mixed age groups for children 1 to 3 years old, and children stay



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with these same group members as they move up to older groups later, fostering this sense of group membership that is so much a part of Swedish culture.

In Italy, infants and toddlers are in mixed age groups from 1 to 3 years old. They stay in this same group with the same teachers until they move to a preschool. In Italy, this structure fosters a sense of relationship and trust with peers and teachers, an important aspect of Italian culture as described above, and a goal articulated clearly for infants and toddlers when the structure of infant-toddler care is described by teachers in Italy (Gandini & Edwards, 2001).

In the United States, there are two major approaches to infant-toddler group structures. Many advocates concerned with the state of infant-toddler care in the U.S. (e.g., Lally, 2001), have argued for continuity of care, where infants stay with the same teacher for multiple years, fostering attachments and relationships with a caregiver. As a result, in some programs, such as Early Head Start, a federally supported program, infants and toddlers are in mixed age groups from birth to 3 years old and ideally stay with the same teachers in the same space for that time. A number of other programs are starting to adopt such a structure, either in birth to 3 groups or with infants and toddlers in separate groups, but moving yearly to a new classroom with the same group of peers and teachers. However, many programs for infants and toddlers continue with a previously popular arrangement in the U.S. Infants and toddlers are grouped in relatively narrow age ranges, such as 2–12 months, 12–18 months, and 18–24 months. Children are then promoted on the basis of their age or on development of a particular skill, such as walking. Each child is promoted individually to the next age level when they are “ready”—having reached the required developmental level—and at that time have new teachers and new peers with each transition. In this individualized promotion structure it is clear that individual needs and developmental levels are considered of most importance in the structure of child care groupings and in organizing when children shift classrooms.

In the highly individualistic American culture, the individual’s needs for being in a developmentally appropriate group are considered of most importance, and the group membership is not considered to be as important for children’s development. However, current changes in how infant toddler groups are structured might indicate a more group-oriented approach. It is interesting that the rationale for these more recently adopted American structures that promote continuity in infant-toddler care focuses on individual children’s needs for attachment and an individual relationship with a caregiver. As Lally (2001) stated in his advocacy for continuity, caregivers should plan “how to form a relationship with each individual child and best meet each one’s needs and relate to each one’s unique thoughts and feelings” (p. 20). This group structure that in Sweden and Italy emphasizes community and relationships, is seen as a good way to support individual identity and individual needs in the United States, following and supporting the American cultural orientation of individualism. Thus, the same group structure is conceptualized differently in terms of its value for children’s development, depending on the culture of the adults providing care. Culture influences not just behavior, but also conceptualizations of why a practice is valuable and how a practice contributes to high quality care. One way that people in a culture make their goals and ideas about what constitutes quality care for infants and toddlers more explicit is through the curriculum that is adopted and the role of assessment within the curriculum, whether this is a national, regional, or local curriculum.

Curriculum and Assessment

Curricula for infants and toddlers in general involve a more intentional transmission of a culture’s values than do social interactions or group structures. A culture’s view of childhood is often apparent in a curriculum, as is the culture’s emphasis on collectivity versus individualism, relationships and group membership versus individual social-emotional development, or responsibilities to others versus individual needs. As seen earlier, some cultures have a blend of these values (individualism and collectivism) and this is seen in their curricula as well (see box Culture and Curriculum).

In comparing curricula from many cultures, Pramling Samuelsson, Sheridan, and Williams (2006) found that quality in child care, in their view, focuses on “what is best for a child’s learning and development in a specific culture” (p. 23). Thus a curriculum which is of high quality is defined differently within each culture. The curriculum’s intentional transmission of cultural goals for children reflects this definition within each culture about what is most important for children.

When designing child care programs for infants and toddlers, in addition to planning the curriculum, professionals plan physical environments designed to support and house the program. Culture influences the physical environments of infant-toddler child care centers, and these in turn influence infants and toddlers to become members of their culture.

Physical Environments and Culture

Approaching a child care center, just outside a small city in Sweden, I am surrounded by tall pine trees. Coming closer, I see sandy areas for play, a small garden and wooden climbing structures outside the center, and a number of bicycles leaning near the entryway that parents use to give their children a

ride to the center. In the outside courtyard of the building, I pass windows into the “small children’s” area (1 to 3 year olds) and see toddlers looking out, wondering who is coming. Entering into the large foyer there is space for baby carriages and strollers and a rack for adult coats and boots. Looking to the right I see a door and enter into the small children’s area. I find an open area with low soft cushions in the center for

Culture and Curriculum

Culture can influence infant–toddler curricula in a variety of ways. Often, the influence is an intentional and explicit transmission of a culture’s values, while sometimes the influence of culture on curricula is less conscious. Curricula can reflect a culture’s view of childhood as well as a culture’s individualism, collectivism, or a combination of these. Here are examples from five countries.

Japan: Being Human and Human Relationships

Human relationships figure prominently in the curriculum for birth to 3 year olds in Japanese child care, and the curriculum “pays special attention to fostering a sense of humanity through care and education” (Mori, Nezu, Samizo, Naito, & Ishizuki, 2009, p. 119). In Japan, teachers feel that infants and toddlers learn through their daily lives in child care and that play is part of this learning; furthermore they see the role of play is for children to develop social relationships (Mori et al., 2009). The emphasis on fostering humanness and relationships clearly reflects the culture’s emphasis on interdependence as a major defining characteristic in what it means to be human.

Sweden: Independence With Shared Responsibilities

In Sweden, with a combination of individualism and shared responsibility, the national curriculum emphasizes care, nurturing, and learning together, as well as children having a voice in curriculum. Curriculum builds on the child’s perspective, establishing a kind of intersubjectivity (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheriden, 2009). In Sweden, the goals for children are to be independent and engaged, have choices, make friends, communicate, and interact, reflecting the mix of individualism and group responsibility that is the hallmark of Swedish cultural values. In addition, child care should be enjoyable and rich for learning. While programs are evaluated or assessed, children never are.

Italy: Children as Children in a Community

In Italy, there is an emphasis on relationships: among children, teachers, family, and community (New, 2001a; 2001b). There is much regional variation in infant–toddler curricula, yet the many regional examples seem similar in their emphasis on child care as a place to build relationships among children as well as with the adults in the community beyond children’s families. As in Sweden, infants and toddlers are seen as active partners with teachers in the process of creating the curriculum (Gandini & Edwards, 2001). While teachers observe children as part of the process of creating curriculum, children are never assessed or evaluated.

United States: Individual Progress in Developmental Domains

In the United States, there are many variations on curriculum for infants and toddlers. In general, American curricula focus on the individual developmental levels and needs of the infant or toddler. Children are assessed with standardized developmental measures and then individualized activities for

infants or small groups of toddlers are planned at children’s developmental levels. The activities support the infants or toddlers to progress in their individual development in the social, emotional, communicative, motor, and cognitive domains. This focus on individual development follows clearly from the emphasis on the individual in American culture. Attachments and relationships to teachers and social interactions with peers are valued as important experiences for infants and toddlers in groups, however, as discussed in the section on group structures, these are seen as important for individual development of emotional and social well-being and developing an individual identity, rather than for fostering a sense of belonging or group membership. Assessment of infants and toddlers is an integral part of these individualized approaches to curriculum.

United States: More Voices, More Cultures

In the United States, there has been an emphasis on quality of care, as defined by practices that are seen as appropriate to a child’s level of development. Yet appropriateness has been defined in terms of the dominant culture’s view on how it is appropriate to interact with infants and toddlers and how to best support learning in very young children. Carolee Howes (2010) looked at the multiplicity of curricular approaches in the United States that reflect varying values for interacting with children and teaching young children, suggesting these variations reflect the multiplicity of cultures within the United States. Howes argued that there is a relationship between a cultural community and quality, stating that “a practice in one program could have a very different meaning in another” (p. 6). The United States is a multicultural country, and this work is a beginning at understanding how multiple cultures influence curriculum in addition to the dominant individualistic culture.

New Zealand: Relationship, Belonging, the Whole Child

New Zealand has adopted a national curriculum that is bicultural, reflecting the emerging nature of New Zealand as a bicultural country. The curriculum reflects and includes many cultural values based on the traditional Maori culture of New Zealand. The curriculum is called *Te Whariki*, meaning a woven mat. The curriculum interweaves strands, goals, and aspirations with views of the child and the child’s extended family, giving a shared vision for all children in New Zealand. *Te Whariki* does not prescribe methods, but rather offers a shared vision for children based on both cultures; its focus is on the whole child, rather than planning for different aspects of a child’s development. The first goal for infants and toddlers is to develop a sense of belonging. This is worked on first as a base so that children can then go and explore. There is a strong emphasis on relationality. “Relationality refers to our lived relation to other human beings, other living creatures, and to the non-living entities with whom we share our spaces and the planet” (Ritchie, 2013, p. 307).



In Sweden, many centers are in apartment buildings, with an entire apartment serving as one child care classroom.

children to sit and change from outerwear to indoor clothes and slippers, and looking up I see cubbies lining the walls, each with a child's photograph on it. There are no infants, toddlers, or teachers here now and I wonder where they might be, so I explore further. Walking into an adjoining room I find them, toddlers playing on a couch piling up pillows, teachers sitting at a table doing individual activities with children, more teachers sitting on the floor with one or two younger toddlers. I look to my left and see yet another room that is part of this group's space, with a number of large sinks and benches. I find out later children use this area for washing up and brushing teeth after lunch, three or four together around a large sink. I ask, "Are all these rooms for your one group of children?" Yes, they say, smiling.

This arrangement is typical of child care centers in Sweden, whether for mixed age "sibling" groups (1–6 year olds together) or "small children's" groups (1–3 year olds together). A class has multiple rooms, and the interiors are arranged to be welcoming and homelike. While this center is in a separate building, many centers are in apartment buildings, with an entire apartment serving as one child care classroom. This is by preference and design. The center should be homelike and near to children's homes, whether those are city apartments or houses in small towns or suburbs. Teachers say they feel it is important for children to feel at home in the center (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2009).

Walking down the sidewalk from a large parking lot, I come to a child care center that occupies the first floor of an apartment complex in a large east coast city in the United States. Across a grassy area I see large windows where an infant sits in a loft, looking out. As I approach, I see a small fenced area with a sandbox to my right, and then I pull open the front door and walk into an entryway. To my right is a low wall with a gate, and I see many infants crawling or lying on the carpeted floor with teachers sitting near them. Another teacher moves around the room preparing a bottle for an infant. I go a little further down the entryway hall and find another low wall with a gate

and look in. I see many young toddlers running around the large open room with areas that are carpeted, and areas with linoleum floors where there are toddler-sized tables and chairs. Outside the large windows of the toddler room, I see a large outdoor play area with many riding toys awaiting the toddlers when they go outside to play.

This physical design for infant–toddler care is typical of centers in the United States, where each age group has one large open space with floor coverings and furnishings designed and sized specifically for that age group. There are soft areas for infants and much room to move for toddlers. This design responds to individual developmental needs of the children at specific ages, and is often a different environment from what children experience at home.

Comparing these two centers and cultures there is at first not an easy correspondence to individualistic and collectivistic values, however each culture's view of childhood is evident. In Sweden the child care centers are more integrated with home life. Children can go into rooms to be alone or find rooms where others are present to play and interact. Children can also sit with adults and work on activities at a table if they wish. The environment is set up to respond to and support children at multiple ages. It is flexible and feels much like a home—although larger. This environment supports the cultural value of being together, but also recognizes the need to be alone—something also very common in Swedish culture. Daun (1991) suggested the need to be alone in Sweden is a result of the high stress and effort required to maintain sameness and shared responsibility in groups; some time alone is also needed as a balance. Here the particular mix of individualism and collectivism that is Swedish culture can be seen.

The American centers respond to the individualized approach also seen in American curriculum, where the developmental abilities of a particular age are considered in the physical design of centers and classrooms. This fits with the American notion of developmental appropriateness in early childhood, as well as the ethic of vertical individualism, where people can have different resources and experiences based on their need, and that is acceptable. The center is seen as a place to support development—educational, rather than as a part of home life for young children. Most infant and toddler classrooms in the U.S. are made up of one large room, and in that way child care centers feel more institutional and less homelike in the United States.

In Italy, centers for 1 to 3 year olds also favor the small apartment, multiple room style seen in Swedish centers (Gandini & Edwards, 2001). Child care is seen as a place to form relationships and be nurtured and so this homelike arrangement fits with cultural goals there.

The Natural World as Curriculum and Center Design

Visitors to Sweden are often struck by the beauty of nature and the way this is brought into the child care curriculum as well

as the physical design of many child care centers (e.g., Kagan & Hallmark, 2001). In Swedish culture nature is highly valued. In child care, children's relationship to nature is encouraged and spending time outside, even in very cold and inclement weather, is usual.

Coming to observe at a child care center in Sweden in the winter, I zipped up my down coat, pulled on my hat, wrapped my scarf around my neck and face with only my eyes poking out. The snow was coming down heavily, the wind was blowing, and it was very cold. I entered the center, happy to be inside its warmth and protection from the wind. In the entryway, I met the small children's group who were getting ready to go outside on a walk! The youngest member of the group, 9 months old, was bundled up in her warm snowsuit and laid in a baby carriage; the 1-year-olds and toddlers put on their snowsuits, hats, mittens, and boots, and out again we all tromped, walking around in the snowstorm for 20 minutes.

Garrick (2009) described the Scandinavian forest preschools where young children experience an active and outdoor childhood and they can take risks and build self-confidence in physically challenging environments in all seasons of the year. Supporting children's relationship to nature is a highly emphasized goal in Sweden, including in child care. Garrick also discussed the approach in one Italian city where environment is considered as "the third teacher"—whether that is the center's garden or environments in the community. In the United States a walk outside is often considered a pleasant activity for infants and toddlers in child care in good weather. Outdoor play is common for toddlers, and considered an excellent way to foster motor skills, and as a positive balance to more quiet indoor activities. However, a concern for children's individual safety often shapes outdoor activity in the United States, where taking risks and facing challenging environments (in summer heat or winter cold) is frequently curtailed in favor of safe areas to play.

There are many ways that culture shapes practices and environments in infant-toddler child care, as seen throughout this article. What happens when multiple cultures come together in one child care center? In New Zealand, the national curriculum attempts to unify the two major cultures of that country into one set of goals for all children in any form of child care. However in many countries, families and their infants and toddlers come to child care, living in a culture at home that

differs from the culture of the child care center (see box Cultural Variation Within a Child Care Center).

Summary and Conclusions

Culture has a clear and strong influence on child rearing outside the family in infant-toddler child care. From social interactions among teachers, infants, and toddlers; to curriculum; to the organization of groups and the physical design of infant-toddler centers and classrooms; culture influences the provision of child care for infants and toddlers in ways that shape children's development, so that young children become members of their culture, whatever that culture might be.

Joan Test, EdD, is associate professor of Childhood Education and Family Studies at Missouri State University. She was an infant teacher in child care in the United States before starting graduate studies. Later as a Fulbright scholar, she studied child-teacher interactions in child care in Sweden. In her current research she studies young children's social interactions and development in child care.

Cultural Variation Within a Child Care Center

Families of infants and toddlers may have a home culture that varies from the child care center's culture for many reasons: immigration, temporary international visitors (e.g., foreign students and visiting professionals), or longstanding cultures within the region (e.g., Laplanders in Sweden; or Hispanic, Native Americans, First Nations, and African Americans in North America).

Culture Clash

When parents raise their infants and toddlers to be members of their culture at home, there is often a period of culture shock or culture clash when children attend child care that is based on another set of cultural goals, child-rearing strategies, and values for children. There is likely to be a difference of opinion about practices with infants and toddlers when center practices, based on one set of cultural goals, vary from those that parents practice, based on their culture's goals. Depending on the perspectives of the parents they may feel intimidated or out of place in the infant-toddler program, they may conflict tacitly or openly with center practices, or they may feel their own experience and knowledge as parents is not valued or respected. Such devaluation can happen regardless of parents' education level or socioeconomic status, and often parents may feel this devaluation in other areas of their lives away from children as well. Because culture has such a strong influence on adults' values and practices with infants and toddlers, this can be a very potent area for conflicts between families and programs.

Supporting Parents and Their Infants and Toddlers

Gonzalez-Mena (2008) recommended that teachers and administrators of infant-toddler child care centers honor differences, try to communicate across cultures, and try to resolve cultural conflicts through listening and understanding more about the infants' and toddlers' home cultures. Parents' views on interdependence and individuality influence how they interact with their young children, and this interaction may be quite different than teachers' approaches. Parents' practices for feeding, putting infants and toddlers to sleep, responding to children's communication and cries, as well as supporting attachment and separation each day may all vary in relation to culture. This can be confusing for the adults and children involved without an awareness of how culture can influence infant and toddler child care. With respect and openness teachers from the center culture can try to understand the family's culture and negotiate together with parents how to support infants and toddlers who are now candidates for membership in multiple cultures as they enter the life of the center.

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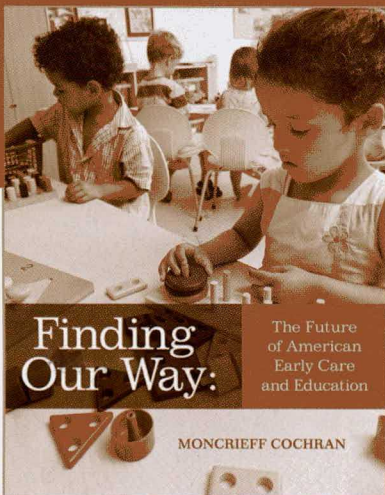
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