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ECE 209

Dec 5, 2020

Commentary Paper

On September 29th, 2020 I video called the Cherrish family to interview and meet Paris for the first time. Cherish lived on the east side of the Bronx. I asked the mother if it would be alright for her to set up her phone so I would be able to get a view on both her and the baby. The mother and the child were seated on their burgundy couch; Paris perched on her lap. The mother asked Paris if she would like to wave and say hello to me. With little reluctance, she cooed a sound as her fingers were in her mouth. Her first name is Paris, and she is now 11 months old, her birthday being August 27th. The mother notified me that it would only be her and Paris for the interview seeing as she doesn't have a relationship with Paris father.

The first topic that we've covered was her pregnancy and her experience through her birth. With fondness in her eyes she said that it was a gift to be pregnant. The mother told me she knew when she was pregnant when her menstrual cycle didn't come on the day it was supposed to. She waited until a week after to take the pregnancy test, which was on Christmas Eve. Her reaction to being pregnant was scared and stubborn, her loved ones grew concerned but were supportive of her decisions. The mother stated that the activities she participated in while she was pregnant was walking and stretching, even doing yoga here and there. She believed that these exact activities were the cause of her easy labor. Ridiculous is what she described her pregnancy food cravings, from seafood to fruits, from anything with cheese and dairy, but these

were the foods that made her feel satisfied and more at ease. Overall, she described her pregnancy experience as the best and fulfilling as she deemed that it was like having a friend with you every hour of the day.

When speaking about the birth of the child she explained how easy it went. She went on explaining that four days before the birth of her child she was stressing and panicking, not only on what her baby should wear on her arrival, but if this birth would really go smoothly. “It wasn’t good for the baby of course, but I just wanted my baby to arrive here safely”, she said. However, she was relieved that the birth went more smoothly than she ever imagined. Yes, she felt pain here and there, but she clarified that her mind was only thinking about getting her baby out into the world and finally seeing her. With the father of her child and mother being there to support her it felt easier and the moment most cherishable.

“It was still taking me time to get used to actually having a baby of my own. It was the best feeling. It was the best feeling to actually be able to hold her and kiss her after 9 months of wondering what she would look like.” With the after effects of her birth it overwhelmed her. She went through depression during pregnancy because of this afterwards she went through postpartum. Her body was going through a lot of changes being that she just had a baby and started to faithfully breastfeed.

The mother fed Paris every 2 hours and she mostly slept in the daytime and stayed up in the middle of the night. Her baby still wears diapers and is getting the hang of walking around the living room by grabbing on to items located near her. I asked with this change of her baby 11 months if there were any drastic changes that she wanted to share, she stated that Paris loves being kissed and cuddled. “Pookie, gimme kiss kiss”, Paris turned to her mother, only staring at her for a few minutes before pressing a kiss on her cheek with a “mwah.”

When asked about her cultural backgrounds Cherrish explained that she wasn't very religious, but would attend church whenever her mother had invited her. She celebrated the regular traditions of halloween, thanksgiving, christmas, and other small holidays like valentine's day and st patrick's day. She said that her family background is of african american descent and they would all get together during thanksgiving. Cherrish said that her family was only able to speak english, but she was always open to learning more. What infant teachers can do to incorporate and help maintain and grow heritage culture is to always include foods or little activities that they would do on that specific holiday. According to Gonzalez- Mena & Bhavnagri (2000), "Diversity and Infant/Toddler Caregiving", they explained how a teacher and a parent have a date where they are able to have one on one conversations, but during this progress she noticed that the mother would downplay her child's accomplishment. Teachers need to always understand that there would be cultural differences in taking care of children, and there can be ways to approach this, for example one on one conversations.

Paris is learning to walk and is getting the hang of not tipping over and sustaining her balance. When Paris is getting fed her bottle, Cherrish explained that she would spread out her fingers so she would be able to get somewhat of a grip on the bottle. She said that Paris is able to hold the bottle, but eventually gets tired of having her arm up and letting it rest on her chest. Feeding Paris baby food or the food that she eats, she would hand Paris a piece of chicken or any other foods that she is able to just grab on where she can start attempting to feed herself. I asked if she could spoon feed her and she replied with a yes. Thinking about collectivist vs individualist, I would believe that the family is individualist. With infant teachers I would ask parents if it would be ok to spoon feed the child or to let them try, but also help if needed. When

it comes to getting up and grabbing toys they can be able to reach from shelves themselves and grab, while collectivists can use group help and effort to achieve certain tasks.

It seemed that when the mother spoke Paris understood her facial expression and cooed and babbled back with her fingers in her mouth. She told me that Paris understood what was “no” and what was a “yes” including when her mother showed a distraught expression. During the interview I asked if there were any specific cartoons that Paris takes an interest in, and she told me that Paris loves Nick jr. She explained that when it was time for her nap or when she was busy around the house and needed something to occupy Paris, she would put Nick jr. on and was able to get the task done.

The types of activities that the mother participates in with Paris is reading books, playing with her shaped blocks, and any plushies that squeaks. She said that they hardly spend time indoors, she believes that children should be able to explore more outside and sight see. She told me that she took Paris recently to Empire Fulton Ferry State Park, in Brooklyn so she can see the water and all the tall buildings. She said that Paris is the most happy when they are outdoors adventuring. “It’s always satisfying to see that huge smile on her face because of the environment.”

I asked Cherrish if she had a set routine for taking care of Paris throughout the whole day, she replied with a yes and listed the things she did. First she would wake up Paris if she is still sleeping by playing her favorite tv shows, change her while preparing to give her a bottle. Cherish said that after she dressed Paris in clothes she was on her way to her mother’s house since she had to work. After work, and going to pick up Paris, she would explain that depending on the weather and how Paris is feeling she would take her outside to walk around the park or go somewhere out to eat. At night, she would prepare the bottle and cradle Paris in her arms and

hum until she fell asleep. She also told me that it was ideal for Paris to go to sleep before 9:30 pm or Paris wouldn't have a proper night's rest. What teachers can do to incorporate this routine for school is conversation with the parents first on how they take care of the child during the day and night. According to Natural Rhythms vs Set Schedules, having a set schedule for the infant would help them as they grow up. The infant would become adaptable to scheduled routines and how to work their way around them. Paris spends most of her time with her mother, father, and grandmother. On the weekends she would be at her father's house, while on weekdays she would spend her mornings and nights with her mother and afternoons with her grandmother. Paris would learn new things by observing her mother or looking at what's going on in her cartoon show. I asked Cherrish what new skills that Paris is currently learning and she answered that she is already trying to introduce the potty to her. Cherrish said that she would introduce the potty and demonstrate what Paris was supposed to do, like sit. But she said that she wasn't really big on potty right now, but trying to get Paris used to holding spoon and fork objects and feeding herself. The infant's favorite activity she said was dancing, Paris loved it when music would be on and she would be in her crib jumping up and down and even twisting her body while holding on to the crib handles. The baby uses rattles, tripod gyms with dangling toys, music, and books. The baby enjoys looking at videos on youtube that have music or watching her favorite tv shows. Paris likes to sleep with her white and pink patterned blanket and her pink and white butterfly plushie. I asked Cherrish what she and the family cooperated with Paris learning and she informed me that they would read picture books for learning words, voicing everything she does to Paris, like talking to her while changing her diaper or making her bottle. Instead of yelling at the infant when they are crying and distressed she coo's to Paris and asks "What wrong?". She

told me it is important to validate the infant's feelings and to make sure that when things go wrong that they could rely on you.

When asked about her child's temperament she said she would say that Paris was easy going/flexible. Cherrish explained that Paris never had a problem when it came to getting comfortable around strangers and always having her environment to play around with. Paris was easily distracted and would play with anyone and everything in her reach. I asked Cherrish how Paris would act if I was to go to their house and introduce myself to her, she said that she would collect all her toys and books and give it to me one by one and sit in front of me. Cherrish said that she would consider me as a playdate and play with me for the whole day, where if it was time for me to leave she wouldn't easily let me go.

While on a video call with Paris, she was very curious as to how I was on that tiny screen moving. She would waddle her way towards the phone and grab it, putting it close to her face. The mother tried to get Paris to babble or coo my name or show any interaction that Paris was trying to communicate with me. The phone was a huge distraction and Paris focus was mainly on her mother and the phone. The mother told me that Paris is really outgoing and friendly, Paris would not hesitate to meet new people and go out her way to touch them or even babble.

In general, I asked the mother if she would do this all over again, and with little hesitation she smiled and laughed a huge yes and kissed her baby. She told me that pregnancy and birth were two different experiences that she was glad to partake in even though it was a huge surprise. She believes that the pregnancy of Paris and her birth was a clear message that she needed. "Paris is literally my best friend. My life has been more fulfilling and it certainly gives me a reason to wake up the next day and try my best."

I am eager to know that the mother wanted to keep in touch with me in case she needs any guidance on raising her child. I asked her if it would be possible to interview her partner, to which she responded it would be possible. I would like to know his side and how he takes care of the child in his own way and his own experience with the birth and pregnancy. With a final goodbye, the mother assured me that if I need her and Paris again for an interview or a report that she would always be available.

The most important thing to remember as an infant/toddler teacher is to make sure that they are comfortable in this new environment that they would be in for hours a day. During the first introduction, even when talking to the infant/toddler, meeting them on their level will cause them ease when trying to communicate with you. Understanding the different cultural needs and practices that would occasionally happen in the room and acknowledge that not every parent or family uses the same practice as you. Infants/Toddlers will have different needs and not every child in the aspect of what they need, how they play, and especially their cultural background.

The strategies I think will help baby and family settle into the infant classroom is having a day where family and infants can have a school day for them to do activities together. Building programs, providing emails and your number, having schedules one on one with the parents if they are not understanding something or in need of help. Assuring the parent that you are going to help with the development of their child.