

Young Children's Development in the Context of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Chair: Mariela Páez

Discussant: Thomasine WatsonSmith

Presenters: Catherine S. Tamis-LeMonda, Victoria R. Fu, Lynn Okagaki

- **Cultural Views and Practices at the Transition to Parenting: Dominica, Mexican, African American, and Chinese Families**
Catherine S. Tamis-LeMonda
- **Shared Reading of Picture Books: Teacher Guidance in Preschoolers' Language Development**
Victoria R. Fu
- **Respecting Values and Opening Doors**
Lynn Okagaki

Tamis-LeMonda: The goal of this project is to understand how culture comes to be expressed in parents' expectations, goals, and routines from the very first days of babies' lives. The focus is on infancy because of attachment theory. Infancy is a time when parents and significant caregivers are forming close relationships with the baby, which forms a foundation for child well-being and development. In addition to forming close relationships, family systems are dynamic and in flux during times of meaningful transitions. Infancy is a period of reflection, renegotiation of roles with the family, and genesis of cultural priorities in terms of parents' goals for their children.

Economic theory also plays a significant role. Family resources matter for children's development and pose special challenges to minority and immigrant families. Of concern is the increased expense of a new baby combined with a mother's changing work and income, childcare, and education.

The research project explores what the economic and human capital resources of families from different communities are. Additionally it examines what are the goals and expectations that families bring to the task of parenthood.

Participants are recruited from three public hospitals that serve lower income populations with high concentrations of the target ethnic and immigrant groups in New York City. The focus is on Mexican, Dominican, and Chinese families, as well as African Americans. The Mexican, Dominican, and Chinese are large immigrant groups in the U.S. with growing populations in New York City and other urban communities. They reside in urban poor neighborhoods with high crime rates and face language barriers. African Americans represent a contrasting group of native born mothers and families who are also low income and reside in poor neighborhoods.

Initially, mothers are interviewed for 45 minutes in the hospital just hours after their babies are born. They are interviewed again over the telephone when infants are 1 month and 6 months old for about an hour each time. They are visited in their homes when babies are 14, 24, and 36 months. There are parallel ethnographies of subsets of families from each of these groups in order to further probe some of the questions being explored.

At birth and at one month, families are asked about resources, mothers' and fathers' education and employment, household income, household composition, father residency, and multi-partner fertility. A focus on views asks mothers about their expectations and goals for their children and families, and what they deem to be ideal and non-ideal child qualities.

Although largely low income, families from different cultural communities enter the task of parenthood with different human capital resources. The Mexican and Chinese groups have the highest crowding and lowest educational levels with relatively high father residency and employment among Mexicans and Chinese. Mexicans live in the highest extreme poverty. There is relatively high father residency and employment in Mexican and Chinese. Over 20% of mothers and fathers have children by other partners in all groups except the Chinese. The highest rates of marriage are seen in Chinese families, and the lowest are in African American families. The highest rates of father residency are in Chinese immigrants and Mexican immigrants compared to African American and Dominican families.

In terms of education and employment, Dominicans and African Americans, tend to have the highest rates of high school graduation. Even though African Americans have the highest rate of education, they have the highest rate of unemployment. The highest rates of actually being employed are in Chinese and Mexican families.

Conversations were audio taped, coded, and transcribed by researchers that are bilingual in the language mothers spoke. Using a taxonomy of 25 themes that were factor analyzed revealed six meaningful and reliable factors.

The first factors were mothers concerns' about human capital, childcare, economic conditions, work, living situation and mothers' education. The second factor was items regarding the child's cognitive development, language and physical motor development. The third factor was parenting, the mother/father, mother/child, father/child relationship, parenting routines, parenting roles. Social and emotional items were those that focused on family, happiness, family affect, and child obedience. Health factors were those that focused on mothers' health, child health, family well-being, and child well-being.

Over 80% of mothers in all groups talked about social and emotional changes in the family when their babies are born. Health was also mentioned by almost all mothers, but for Mexican parents this was a significantly higher concern than the other groups.

The question was asked, "What are three qualities you do not want to see in your child when he or she turns 3?" These are borrowed from assorted questions that Robin Harwood asked in her work. Select ethnic differences were found.

Dominicans talked about wanting their child to have good language development, be affectionate, and be generous. Mexicans mentioned language development, health, and again affection and generosity. In Chinese families, mothers mentioned that they wanted their child to be intelligent, famous, obedient, moral, and happy. African American mothers wanted their child to be ready for school, to be a leader in their community, to be respectful, and to have self-control. When asked about what's the worst thing that parents would want to see in their children, lack of proper demeanor (manners and respect) was most mentioned for the non-ideal quality. These are kinds of themes that were prevalent in these specific groups.

Six categories reliably came up. The majority of responses fell into the categories of individuality and achievement. This finding contrasts with the notion of relatedness being most central to Latino and Chinese families.

Respect coexists with individuality. Following respect, lack of individuality was the most mentioned undesired quality. Frequent mention of both respect and individuality suggests that these are not opposing value systems. Respect both complements and enables personal success and individuality.

Relatedness was mentioned by fewer than one-quarter of mothers. This finding contrasts with prior literature, emphasizing the centrality of the family in Latino and Chinese cultures. It is important to remember that these are immigrant families who are self-selecting to come to the United States, and who bring with them new values, goals, and dreams of personal growth for their children.

Finally, there were not significant associations between human capital measure and views. There was no relation between parents' views or goals with father residency, marital status, multi-partner fertility, mothers' work status, number of children, and number of people in the household. Education, however, does matter. High school educated mothers focused on curiosity and independence as more important, and mothers with no high school education placed more emphasis on respect and happiness.

To summarize, ethnic differences exist already at birth in regards to the goals and concerns that mothers express for their children and families. However, mothers are more similar than not in their hopes and concerns. At birth, mothers share concerns about parenting, social emotional functioning, and infant health. At one month, individuality and achievement are regarded as the most ideal qualities by all mothers. Not having manners or respect or proper demeanor is considered to be the worst quality by all mothers, but again is followed by lack of being an individual.

Fu: Sharing books with children is one way of supporting and enriching children's language development. Picture books with their pictorial representations of objects and actions offer young readers a first step in recognizing the connections among pictorial representations, written words, and oral language. Reading aloud helps children develop listening skills, attention to words, proper pronunciations, and power of language. Picture book reading also

helps them develop knowledge that language comes in different forms; relationships between characters and plot; and through intentional guidance learning can be extended beyond the scope of the book itself. A teacher's role in shared reading is prominent, especially among children who have limited exposure to book reading at home.

Shared book reading offers children opportunities to ask questions and also provides a context for learning how to learn from an inquiry perspective. During shared reading a teacher can model how to find meanings in what is being read by asking provocative questions, making meaningful comments as she scaffolds a child to think, reflect, ask questions express thoughts and feelings, learn to read and read for meaning. In this relationship children learn about words, language, cultural tools, and ways of knowing. The quality of shared reading depends on a teacher's skill in reading, her understanding of children's development, and ways to support the children's emerging questions and comments. There is a need to examine how teachers scaffold this process of learning.

The purpose of the study was to explore teachers' and children's behaviors and roles during shared book reading, and the quality of the reading experiences. Two teachers and twelve 4-year-old children in their classroom participated in this study. Each teacher-child dyad was video taped when engaged in a shared book reading in a quiet room at the center. Categories for coding teacher and child behaviors were developed and two researchers were trained to code these tapes.

The picture book, *In the Small, Small Pond* by Denise Fleming, was chosen for this study because it contains few words but is rich in images. Young children tend to engage in minimal exploration of the print during shared book reading. Reading images provides layers of meaning through interpretation of visual texts. Thus, the teacher and child could focus on the pictures as salient sources for exploring concepts through verbal exchange.

In spite of similar educational backgrounds of the two teachers who participated, there were differences in the child's engagement. Open-ended questioning, in addition to close-ended questioning, and also the teacher's ability to engage the child in reading through verbal sounds and gestures and kinds of expressions affected the child's level of engagement. Teachers might use this as an opportunity to introduce new vocabulary, define words, and then even incorporate punctuation marks.

Findings indicated that there is significant difference between the teachers in both quantity and quality of their verbal and non-verbal scaffolding of the children in exploration of the book. These differences seem to influence the children's engagement, quantity and quality of language usage.

Implications for further research, as well as in-service and pre-service teacher education and parent education in using picture book reading to enhance language development, were discussed.

Okagaki: The diversity in Head Start classrooms may both enrich the experiences of children and present challenges for staff. Given this diversity, it is virtually impossible for any teacher

to know the cultural beliefs and practices that guide the parenting and family life of every cultural group that might be represented in her or his classroom.

Most parents have some goals and expectations for their children. Research indicates that across cultural groups, a common goal is for parents to want their children to acquire the knowledge and skills that will one day allow them to be economically independent. They also want them to be able to acquire good jobs. The differences in the details of the school arise because of the differences in the economic, social, and technological context in which the children are being raised.

In our society, the primary way in which children acquire the knowledge and skills that will one day allow them to acquire jobs is through school. Most parents want their children to do well in school. While all parents want their children to be intelligent, what they particularly meant by being intelligent was not necessarily the same.

In a previous study with Peter French, parents of 4th and 5th graders who were Latino, Asian American, and European American, were asked about their expectations for their children's schooling. Questions were asked, "What about grades?" and "How do you feel about your child's grades if your child brings home an A, B, C, D or F?"

After examining the relation between parents' expectations for their child's school performance in terms of grades at the beginning of the school year, and children's school achievement at the end of the school year, it was Hispanic and European American parents' expectations about D's that predicted children's school performance. For the Asian American parents, it was their expectations about B's, whether or not a B was okay versus getting a B was an indication for concern, predicted children's school performance.

Compared to the other parents, Asian American parents had higher educational aspirations and expectations for their children. The Asian American parents ideally wanted their child to obtain a graduate or professional degree. They expected their child to graduate from college and the minimum amount of schooling that was acceptable to them was that the child graduate from college.

The European American and Latino parents ideally wanted their children to graduate from college. They all expected that their child would obtain some college, but differed in terms of their lower boundary. For the European American parents, high school graduation was the minimum amount of schooling that was acceptable. For the Latino parents, getting some college was the minimum amount. In this study of 4th and 5th grade parents, the Asian American parents had a somewhat different vision of education, what it meant to do in school, and how much schooling was really essential for their child.

Parents want their children to be smart and to do well, however without knowing what they mean by that, it is not possible to assume that the way they look at being smart or doing well in school is the same as what teachers in the classroom actually think.

Parents from Cambodia, Mexico, Philippines, and Vietnam with children in kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade, were asked to state how important it was for parents to help their children in terms of developing their thinking skills, problem solving skills, and creativity. Additionally, they were asked how important it was for parents to help their children learn to follow rules and regulations, to obey their teachers, to obey parents, and to learn to tell the truth.

All parents thought that it was important to do all of those things to some degree; however, the European American parents emphasized developing problem solving and intellectual thinking abilities. In contrast, all of the immigrant parents emphasized teaching their child to be obedient, to follow the teacher, and to tell the truth.

Some of this reflects true cultural difference, but some actually reflect differences in what parents know about the culture of school. In a longitudinal study of immigrant families from Mexico and Central America, Gallimore and his colleagues at UCLA reported that the parents expressed the belief that learning to read begins with formal instruction in school when children are taught letters and sounds and how to put these together. They believed that their responsibility was to teach children to know right from wrong, to be respectful, and to behave well. The parents did not view the kinds of emergent literacy activities for pre-reading development to be meaningful learning activities for young children.

These parents did not read to their children until, from their perspective, the child understood the content of the stories. Typically, they did not begin reading to their child until the child was in kindergarten. The purpose of reading was to teach the child moral content, as opposed to helping the child's language development or pre-reading skills. It is not the case that the parents were uninterested in their child's education. They were doing what they believed was their responsibility in terms of helping their child prepare for school.

Learning to read begins in school, but it is also important to talk to parents about pre-reading skills and how important it is for parents to read or tell stories, if they do not read. They could tell about different events that happened in their life in order to develop the child's vocabulary. This is one way that parents are preparing their child for school.

It is also important to help parents understand how the school system works to help them develop an education road map. This allows parents to know how to get the child from preschool to college, and the education milestones that the child should be meeting in order to progress along that path. It creates a more transparent pathway from preschool to college or to whatever career the parents and ultimately the adolescent hopes to have one day.

Discussant: WatsonSmith reemphasized the impoverished conditions of the participants and stated that while these responses might have been influenced by culture, it may be equally true that the information was a result of the respondents' socioeconomic conditions. She added that sharing this type of information with appropriate staff may begin to help them. It also permits programs to achieve the goal of getting children to develop into socially competent beings.

WatsonSmith emphasized that even within ethnic groupings, there are cultural differences. It also is important to be able to work with families in creating programs or activities for acquiring the skill of social competence. Both she and Fu emphasized the importance of the competency of the teacher and good classroom management as integral to the success of the program.

WatsonSmith also addressed the pervasiveness of messages of individuality in American culture. She asserted that the immigrants may have internalized that message. An audience member agreed and hypothesized that the longer immigrants were in the US, the more mention of individuality there might be. Another audience member pointed out that for African Americans, individuality is not just part of American culture, but a response to neighborhood crime rates, adding that individuality is a way that children can succeed by not falling under the influence of “bad” peers.