The Everyday Experiences of North American Preschoolers in Two Cultural Communities: A Cross-disciplinary and Cross-level Analysis

Jonathan Tudge and Sarah E. Putnam

An understanding of everyday lived experience, as well as of the culture that underlies it, shapes it, and is simultaneously shaped by it, is important for the study of human development. Traditional psychological methods, such as observation or experimentation in controlled laboratory and laboratory-like settings, or the use of questionnaires and surveys, have yielded data regarding how people perform in certain circumstances, what they say they do, and how they respond to questions. But a growing number of contemporary psychologists, responding to challenges to the relevance and ecological validity of these methods and seeking a fresh approach to the understanding of human development, have begun to expand their theoretical and methodological repertoire. Scholars are more commonly focusing on studying children and adults in the settings in which they are typically situated – at home, in the classroom, or in the workplace – treating the context in which development is occurring as necessarily integrated with that development (see, e.g., Cosaro, 1985; Dunn, 1988; Heath, 1983; Lave, 1988; Rogoff, 1990; Valsiner, 1987).

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In doing so, these scholars are drawing on models and methods that have been used in other disciplines, notably cultural anthropology and some of the more qualitative approaches in sociology. The ideas incorporated in these methods are not new to psychology, however, but are to be found in the work of several early-twentieth-century theorists, including James Baldwin, Vygotsky, Werner, Dewey, and Mead (Cairns, 1992; Glick, 1992; Tudge, Putnam, & Valsiner, in press; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1988). These ideas are also to be found in the work of some who have taken an ecological position on human development (see Tudge, Gray, & Hogan, Chapter 3, this volume). Although the specific positions of each theorist and each strand of thought are by no means identical, all view social life and individual activity and development as tightly interconnected, encompassing different levels of analysis (e.g., the individual, the immediately surrounding social and physical environment, and the broader level of culture). They also emphasize, albeit in different ways, that to investigate individual development requires understanding of the relations between individuals and the sociocultural world they inhabit.

This ecological and sociocultural perspective is the one that we have adopted in our research, having drawn from related frameworks from several disciplines. From psychology we have been influenced by the cultural-historical school of Vygotsky and his followers and by the ecological position taken by Bronfenbrenner, from sociology by the work of Kohn, and from cultural anthropology by the work of Whiting, Edwards, and their colleagues. In the first part of this chapter we describe the theoretical frameworks relevant to our research, and then indicate the ways in which they have informed this research. In the second part, we discuss the research itself.

Theoretical Frameworks

Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Theory

Vygotsky was explicitly concerned with the social, co-constructive nature of cognitive development. Certain core concepts of his cultural-historical theory of human mental development are central to the present argument: that cultural and social structures, institutions, symbol and meaning systems, tools, and activities are closely interwoven with an individual's mental development; that higher
mental functions, such as thinking and memory, are formed in the course of engaging in activities in the physical and social world; that the original form of higher mental activity is external and social, which is then appropriated by the individual in the course of activity (particularly activity in collaboration with others who have greater competence); and that sign and symbol systems, such as language, are essential tools of culture for the extension and development of human consciousness (Tudge et al., in press; Tulviste, 1991; van der Voer & Valsiner, 1991, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978, 1987; Wertsch, 1985, 1991). These postulates led Vygotsky to seek a unit and a method of analysis that would retain the integrity of the system he envisioned.

Vygotsky called social activity “the principal source of development” (quoted in Davydov & Zinchenko, 1989, p. 29), but it is clear that by social activity he considered the interrelatedness of an individual’s independent level of functioning, interaction between the individual and others in the course of activity, and the sociocultural historically shaped context that gives meaning to the activity (Cole, 1985; Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993; van der Voer & Valsiner, 1991, 1994; Wertsch, 1985). For example, when conceptualizing social interaction, Vygotsky was interested in the relationship between the individual’s level of functioning independently and level of functioning when working in collaboration with someone else, particularly someone more competent at the skill or tool use being learned. He called the “zone of proximal development” the difference between what an individual can achieve independently and what he or she can achieve in the course of collaboration, and argued that it is created in the course of activity, primarily with a more competent partner, but also in the course of individual play (Nicolelou, 1993; Vygotsky, 1978). As Cole (1985) put it, it is within the zone of proximal development that the individual becomes social, and the social becomes individual.

This theoretical position necessarily involves an interweaving of levels of analysis – the individual, the interpersonal, and the cultural. The position taken by Vygotsky and his followers (primarily Luria and Leont’ev) is that an understanding of development will be incomplete if scholars concentrate solely on what the individual brings to bear on any problem (the individual level – what the person can achieve independently) and on the interpersonal level (joint activity that creates a zone of proximal development). The very nature of interactions between people, the interactional forms considered appropriate, the types of activities in which they jointly participate, and the tools they use in the course of activity can be fully understood only by reference to the cultural level. Vygotsky proposed that psychological processes first occur on the social plane and then are appropriated (made one’s own while being transformed in the process) to the psychological plane. Since social interactions are culturally organized and internally transformed, the internalized psychological processes are simultaneously culturally, interpersonally, and internally co-constructed and organized. Development is thus viewed as the co-creation of world and mind on the basis of a history of actions that individuals perform in the world, actions that are shaped and given meaning simultaneously by people around them and by culture and history. At the same time, as some scholars have pointed out (Corsaro, 1985, 1992; Holland & Skinner, Chapter 7, this volume), cultures themselves undergo transformation in the course of their own reproduction.

Saying that “any fundamentally new approach to a scientific problem inevitably leads to new methods of investigation and analysis” (1978, p. 28), Vygotsky sought a new method with which to test his theories. He thought that the new method should retain the quality of being straightforward and should be a structural method for the analysis of human mental development (Davydov & Zinchenko, 1989). Just as you cannot better understand water by breaking a molecule into its constituent parts for observation, Vygotsky felt that the unit for studying mental processes must retain the relationship between these processes and their cultural, historical, and institutional settings. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner, in many recent publications (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1988, 1989, 1993; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), has argued that an ecological perspective forces scholars to consider the interrelationships between the developing individual and the physical and social setting in which the individual is developing, with social setting considered at both the proximal and the distal levels (see Tudge, Gray, & Hogan, Chapter 3, this volume). From this perspective, scholars would need to identify some proximal processes through which developmental change is brought about (such as interpersonal interaction in the course of joint activity), the personal characteristics of the persons involved in the processes (e.g., gender or some other biological...
cal or psychological characteristic), and when and how those processes vary as a function of a broader context in which the processes take place (with context considered as incorporating such things as culture, social class, physical features of the environment, historical cohort, racial or ethnic group).

Bronfenbrenner argued that it is essential to consider the processes linking contextual factors (of either a proximal or distal nature) and characteristics of the individual. Simply differentiating two or more groups of children on the basis of some "variable," such as social class, race, or gender in terms of some developmental outcome or test score is of limited utility. Bronfenbrenner argued that studies did no more than this were based on "social address" models (see Mekos & Clipp, Chapter 5, this volume). He thought that such comparisons drew unwarranted inferences on the basis of little more than environmental labels. Social class is among the most common social addresses in the research literature (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983), usually with no attention given to the physical and social environment, what activities are taking place, what the processes involved might be, or how these things could affect the development of the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1988). Not surprisingly, given Bronfenbrenner's indebtedness to Vygotsky and his followers (Bronfenbrenner, 1993), his theory also involves methodology that draws from the individual, interpersonal, and cultural levels of analysis.

Cultural Anthropology and Cultural Psychology

Among cultural anthropologists, particularly those interested in children's social development, and developmental psychologists interested in culture, it is in the course of everyday routine activities that children gain cultural knowledge—ways of behaving and thinking considered important in their cultural community (Edwards & Whiting, 1980; Harkness & Super, 1985, 1986; LaVine & White, 1986; Mead, 1961; Morelli & Tudge, 1989; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Rogoff, 1981; Tudge, Putnam, & Sidden, 1993, 1994; Valsiner, 1989; Whiting & Edwards, 1980). Competent members of the community engage in activities viewed as important, and make those activities more or less available for children to participate in. In technologically simple cultures, the type of adult activities in which children will be expected to become competent occur around the children. For example, in hunter-gatherer and agrarian groups, a girl is more likely to be involved in helping her mother in such activities as tending to the crops, cooking, and learning to weave, and from an early age will be involved in caring for younger siblings. By contrast, a boy is much more likely to be encouraged to learn how to hunt (in the course of observation and participation to the extent of his capability) and from 6 or 7 will be expected to look after the animals. (Ember's, 1973, discussion of a counterexample occurred only where the group had a large preponderance of boys.)

By contrast, in industrialized societies much of the work that is critically important for economic self-sufficiency occurs away from the home, and children therefore have to learn the skills they need to become self-sufficient in specialized institutions (various types of child care centers and schools). Nevertheless, work also occurs in and around the home, and children are in some instances encouraged to participate (helping to set the table, for example) and in others are not (lighting the fire). Children, simultaneously strive to get involved in the activities that are going on around them. They seek opportunities to participate in ongoing activities, to start new activities, and recruit others to participate with them. The availability (and lack of availability) of activities and the extent to which children are involved are thus mutually determined by culturally and historically related factors, the values and beliefs of more competent members of the culture (who arrange different types of activities for their young, and encourage them in different ways and to different extents to participate in them), and by the children's own active attempts to participate in and start activities (Fischer & Fischer, 1966; Goodnow, 1984; Goodnow & Collins, 1990).

There are clearly points of connection between these culturalanthropological and cultural-psychological perspectives and the theoretical positions presented earlier (Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory). However, the relationship between culture and the outcomes of interest are not always established by those interested in cultural issues. Just as Bronfenbrenner was critical of the use of social address models, Whiting (1976) has criticized reliance on "packaged variables." Many cross-cultural researchers, particularly but not by means exclusively in psychology, treat culture as a packaged variable—a variable that is used simply to differentiate one group from another, one culture from another—with no attempt to elucidate the features, mecha-
nisms, and processes that serve to translate culture into the different practices or beliefs that are the focus of attention (Shweder, 1990). Whiting (1976) explicitly called for cultural anthropologists and psychologists interested in cross-cultural issues to “unpack” culture so as to shed light on the processes important for understanding development in different cultural settings.

Sociology
From sociology we have found particularly useful the work of Kohn and his associates, who have explored the relationship between social class, parental workplace experiences, and child-rearing beliefs and practices (Kohn, 1977, 1979; Kohn & Schooler, 1983; Kohn & Slomczynski, 1989; Luster, Rhoades, & Haas, 1989). In its packaged form social class frequently appears in multiple regression models as an independent variable and, in fact, has considerable predictive value. Nonetheless, the meaning of the variable social class is little understood, its processes cloaked behind a descriptive label. Kohn’s research began the task of discovering the meaning of belonging to a particular social class by examining values and beliefs of middle-class and working-class parents.

Kohn (1977) found that class, statistically controlling a set of other major social variables, was more powerfully related to parental values than was the totality of such other major social variables as race, religion, region, and national background, controlling for class. Kohn found that the higher the parents’ social class position, the higher the value the parents placed on their children’s self-direction, the use of initiative, and independent thought and judgment. Why should social class (or, to be more explicit, position in the social stratification system – Kohn & Slomczynski, 1989) be related to these values? Kohn argued that occupations higher in the social structure are more likely to be substantively complex, to be relatively free of supervision by others, to allow self-direction and initiative, and to be involved with people rather than things. Kohn argued that there were two relevant consequences. The first was that as parents are likely to try to instill in their children the qualities that have enabled them to be competent in their work, there will be a tendency for behavior exemplifying those qualities to be encouraged in their children. The second is that parents who view self-direction and initiative as possible and efficacious are likely to believe that the same will be true for their children, and therefore encourage it. By contrast, parents who are more closely supervised at work are more likely, Kohn found, to value conformity and obedience in their children. An additional point is that the more that men are controlled in their everyday lives, the more they are likely to try to exercise control in the one place where they have power – within the family (Tudge, 1987).

Social class is more than workplace practices, of course. Kohn (1977) argued that it constitutes a complex of conditions, including occupational circumstances, education, levels and stability of income, that “structure men’s view not only of the occupational world, but of social reality in general” (p. 164). In a footnote, he claims that “it is not just that class is related to men’s capacities to perceive and to judge, but that class shapes the reality that is there to be seen and to be judged” (p. 187). Social class thus shapes the goals parents have for their children, their methods of discipline, parent-child relationships, and, by extension, their views of what is appropriate for girls versus boys. One consequence is that children tend to learn the very values that fit them into the types of occupations that their parents have (Tudge, 1982; Willis, 1977).

What Kohn has thus accomplished is to move discussion of social class from a social address position to one that posits the processes or mechanisms that serve to translate membership in social class to child-rearing practices, and thus to reproduce class-related practices from one generation to the next. We would argue that different social classes within any society have different values, beliefs, and meaning systems that are instantiated in parental practices and reproduced in the next generation. Social class, like culture considered in broader terms as nations or societies, embodies systematically differentiated conditions of life that profoundly affect people’s views of reality and provides guidelines by which values and orientation of the social structure are translated into individual action. On the basis that meaning systems and conditions of life are not only different in different social classes, but are reproduced from generation to generation, we would argue that there is a clear connection between membership in a social class and membership in any cultural group. As Bronfenbrenner (1989) expressed it, cultures (whether considered across or within societies) may be distinguished by the fact that “the patterns of belief and behavior characterizing the macrosystem are passed on from one generation to the next through processes of
socialization carried out by various institutions of the culture" (p. 229). To this statement we would have to add that those being socialized are simultaneously highly active in the process of socialization themselves, co-constructing or collectively reproducing their culture.

Methodology

We argued at the outset that our research has been informed by theory drawn from a number of different disciplines although, as is clear, the particular exemplars we have found useful have much in common. In what ways have we incorporated them into our research? At the theoretical level, the greatest influence has been from Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner. Elsewhere (Tudge et al., 1993, 1994) we have discussed this research from the perspective of Vygotskian theory. In this chapter, therefore, we shall concentrate on drawing the connections to Bronfenbrenner. Kohn’s research has been influential in focusing our attention on social class and the mediating connection with workplace experiences (the exosystem level in Bronfenbrenner’s terminology). The work of cultural anthropologists and cultural psychologists (particularly Whiting and her colleagues, and Rogoff and her colleagues) is seen most clearly in the methods we used to collect our data.

To exemplify the type of ecological person–process–context model discussed by Bronfenbrenner (for more details see Tudge, Gray, & Hogan, Chapter 3, this volume), these data should allow simultaneous understanding of “developmentally instigative” characteristics of the person, “developmentally instigative” characteristics of the environment, and analysis of the processes of development. As was made clear in Chapter 3, Bronfenbrenner’s model is based on Lewin’s famous equation \[ B = f(P,E) \], but was expanded to state that development (rather than simply behavior) is a function of the interaction of the person and the environment. Bronfenbrenner’s model is thus built on the premise that understanding of human development cannot be based solely on characteristics of the individual or of the environment, but rather on their synergistic interaction.

In the data we shall discuss in this chapter we satisfy the minimum requirements of the person side of the equation in two ways, by examining who it is that initiates activities and involvement in activities, and we look separately at males and females. Gender constitutes a developmentally instigative characteristic – indeed, from the mo-
values held by parents with different workplace experiences. As discussed earlier, Kohn’s data suggest that parents who believe that self-direction and initiative are important for economic self-sufficiency are likely to encourage their children to exhibit more self-direction at home. By contrast, parents whose jobs are more closely supervised are more likely to value conformity and obedience in their children. Our expectation was that children whose parents differ in their workplace experiences are likely to initiate lessons differentially and to imitate their own involvement in those lessons differentially.

Finally, at the macrosystem level, we must consider broad cultural values, beliefs, institutions, and resources, both physical and social, that are held in common by a group. “From this perspective, social classes, ethnic or religious groups, or persons living in particular regions, communities, neighborhoods, or other types of broader social structures constitute a subculture whenever the above conditions [shared belief systems, conditions of life, etc., that are reproduced from generation to generation] are met” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 229). At the level both of community and of socioeconomic status our research relates to the macrosystem. Data collected in Korea (Lee & Tudge, 1995; Tudge, Lee, & Putnam, in press), Russia (Hogan, Tudge, Snezhkova, & Kulakova, 1996), and Estonia (Tammeneveski, Melsas, & Tudge, in press) (divided similarly between children whose fathers are either professionals or blue-collar workers) will allow a broader examination of macrosystem factors, at both the cross-societal and within-societal levels.

We adopted our methods of gathering data from those more commonly used by cultural anthropologists such as Whiting and Edwards (1988) and their colleagues and cultural psychologists such as Rogoff (1990) and her colleagues. The spot observational methodology is one that requires observers to pick a point in time and note, for the person who is the focus of attention, what that person is doing, who any partners are in that activity, the physical setting, who else is in that setting, and so on. Typically many such observations are taken of each “focal,” or target, individual at different times of the day, so as to get a good sense of the varied settings inhabited by the targets, their activities, and their partners. (For more detail, see Ellis, Rogoff, & Cromer, 1981; Munroe & Munroe, 1971; Rogoff, 1978; Whiting & Edwards, 1988.)

The methodological techniques most commonly employed by de- developmental psychologists to assess the nature and processes of adult–typically mother–child interaction and activities differ in crucial ways from those used by cultural anthropologists. For the most part, Western researchers interested in young children’s activities and in adult–child interactions have collected a vast amount of data in laboratory settings or in the course of structured or semistructured home observations. Observation of adult–child activity (whether in the home or laboratory) is often deliberately structured so as to ensure a minimum of interruption; it occurs at a time when the adult (typically the mother) does not intend to cook dinner, go shopping, entertain friends, clean the house, watch television, or do any of the myriad activities that typically occur. Thus, the implicit or explicit message communicated to mothers by researchers is to interact or play with their children, as time is set aside for mothers to engage their children and be child-oriented, at least to the extent to which this is a part of their normal behavioral repertoire. Yet the adult-oriented activities that are a regular part of the fabric not only of her life but of her child’s are precisely those areas in which children are most likely to be exposed to and participate in adult life in that community. By restricting the “disruptions,” developmental psychologists may thus have presented a misleading picture of the extent to which adults engage their children in the ongoing adult-oriented activities available in their communities. Richards (1977) has argued that, as a result, we know more about the naturally occurring activities of non-Western children than about those in this country – at least in part because methodological techniques designed to document and understand the activities of non-Western children have rarely been employed in research on North American children.

Most of the studies that focus on everyday activities of children in the United States, for example, draw explicitly on cultural anthropological The best examples are Fischer and Fischer’s (1966) observations in Orchard Town as part of the Six Cultures Study, the Claremont spot observational study reported by Whiting and Edwards (1988), and the use of spot observations to describe patterns of age and gender segregation in Salt Lake City (Ellis et al., 1981). Other studies use a similar methodology, such as the longitudinal studies of social interaction conducted by Clarke-Stewart (1973) and Carrow (1980), but these are rare. A somewhat different methodology, focusing on one child and attempting to report all that that child did during one day, was used by Barker and his colleagues (Barker & Weight, 1951).
Ethnographic accounts of children’s activities and behavior in school are easier to find (e.g., Corsaro, 1985; Dumont & Wax, 1976; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Hood, McDermott, & Cole, 1980; Lubeck, 1985; McDermott, Gospodinoff, & Aron, 1978), and children’s naturally occurring play in different cultural communities has received some attention (Blanch & Prilegrim, 1989; Fmm & Wooding, 1777; Schwartzman, 1978, 1986, Smilansky, 1968), but studies like these do not attempt to cover the full range of children’s everyday activities.

It should be clear, then, that the spot observational methods we employed to observe children’s activities differed from those used by Kohn and his associates, who used survey and interview techniques. Kohn was interested in data on parental values and beliefs about child rearing, rather than in an examination of what the parents (or their children) actually did, which was our focus. The data presented in this chapter complement Kohn’s rather well, and data recently collected (Hogan et al., 1996; Tudge et al., in progress) make the connection yet stronger.

In summary, one goal of our research (the Cultural Ecology of Young Children Project) is to retain the dynamic relationship between the children’s activities and the cultural, historical, and institutional settings within which and with respect to which they are organized. The unit of analysis, like the metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions underlying the research, must be one that crosses levels. Our unit is thus conceptualized as “child in activity within a culturally constructed setting,” a unit that retains the interrelated nature of human beings and their environments.

Participants and Methods

In this chapter we focus on the activities, partners, and settings of 20 Caucasian preschoolers who ranged in age from 28 to 45 months. The children were drawn from two cultural communities (one named “Holden” in which parents tend to work in professional occupations and one named “Summit” in which parents tend to work in the nonprofessional sphere) in a southeastern city in the United States. The Holden group of children consisted of 6 girls and 5 boys, and the Summit group consisted of 5 girls and 4 boys.

Participants were located in the following manner. Community was defined as an area of town bounded on all sides by relatively clear boundaries (major roads, railway line, etc.), with no major roads cutting through the area, relatively small in size (1 1/2-2 square miles), and judged to be fairly homogeneous in terms of types of housing and racial makeup. A list was then generated from the birth records of all children born in that area between 1 and 4 years earlier. Letters were sent to all families who appeared still to be living in the area (information derived from the telephone book and/or city records) and were followed by a screening call. In order to participate, the family still had to be living in the area, and had to fit education and occupation criteria. For the Holden community, at least one parent had to have a minimum of a college degree and have an occupation judged to be professional according to Hollingshead criteria; for the Summit community neither custodial parent could have a degree (one nonresidential, divorced father had a degree).

Of the 28 families contacted in Holden, 10 declined to participate, 7 were willing to participate but did not meet our requirements, and 11 participated. The minimum median family income (families responded to an income range rather than a precise amount) for this group was $70,000 (ranging from $40,000 to more than $85,000), and the median Hollingshead ranking for all working parents (excluding the 6 mothers who worked at home) was 8 (administrators, lesser professionals), range 7-9. The mothers’ median educational attainment was a bachelor’s degree (ranging from some college to graduate degrees), and their average years of full-time education after age 14 was 8.1 (SD = 1.23). The fathers’ median (and minimum) educational attainment was also a bachelor’s degree, but two had doctoral degrees, and their average years of full-time education after age 14 was 8.9 (SD = 1.7).

Of the 18 families contacted in Summit, 4 declined to participate, 5 were willing to participate but did not meet our requirements, and 9 participated. The minimum median family income for this group was $25,000 (ranging from $10,000 to $40,000), and the median Hollingshead ranking was 4 (skilled manual workers), range 2-5 (all mothers but one worked outside the home). The mothers’ median and maximum educational attainment was “some college” and all had finished high school. On average, these mothers completed 4.9 years of full-time education after age 14 (SD = 1.54). The fathers’ median educational attainment was completion of high school and ranged from “less than high school” to “some college,” and their average years of education after age 14 was 4.6 (SD = 1.62).

The percentage of families who wished to participate was high,
given the intrusiveness (20 hours of observation of each child) of the study (64% of the Holden families and 88% of Summit families), perhaps a reflection of the fact that each family that participated received a $250 savings bond in the child's name. Seven of the 10 Holden families that declined to participate gave busy schedules as the reason. When pressed, 1 family also cited the intrusiveness of the research, the primary reason given by the other 3 Holden families. Of the 4 Summit families that were unwilling to participate, 2 had in-home babysitters who refused to be observed, 1 had a newborn and was planning to move out of the neighborhood, and in 1 the father cited his occupation in law enforcement. The reasons given for not participating appear to indicate that those individuals who were feeling more stress or were less comfortable with the idea of having a stranger in their homes were unlikely to participate. The families that participated were also quite busy, as evidenced by the wide variety of activities and settings in which observations were made, but they may have been better able to cope with their busy schedules and more relaxed with the presence of an outsider.

Families were asked to keep their daily routines unchanged as much as possible during the observation period. Each child was observed, wherever he or she was, for 20 hours over the course of a week to capture the equivalent of an entire waking day. Observations were continuous in 2- and 4-hour blocks, but activities, partners, respective roles, and so on were only coded during 30-second “windows” every 5 1/2 minutes, using the modified spot observations discussed earlier. Activities were coded as being “available to” the child if they occurred within his or her ear- or eyeshot. Children were coded as being “involved in” the activities if they were physically participating or were observing.

The activities in which we were interested were lessons (4 categories), work (5 categories), play (10 categories), conversation (3 categories), and “other” (6 categories, including sleeping and eating). (For full details of the coding scheme, please refer to Tudge, Sidden, & Putnam, 1990.) In brief, lessons were defined as involving the deliberate attempt to impart or receive information in four areas: academic (spelling, counting, learning shapes and colors, etc.); interpersonal (teaching etiquette or “proper” behavior); skill/mastery (how things work, why things happen); and religious. Work was defined as “activities that either have economic importance or contribute to the maintenance of life” (Tudge et al., 1990) and was broken down into

work involving no technology, technology modified for a child's use, or “adult” technology. Play (including exploration and entertainment) was defined as activities that were being engaged in for fun or for their own sake, with no apparent curriculum (which would constitute a lesson) or sense that the activity had economic importance (work). Thus, a child looking at a book or being read to would be coded as engaging in play with an academic object, whereas the child asking what a particular word was or being asked to name the colors would be coded as being involved in an academic lesson. Conversation was defined as talk that was not related to the ongoing activity and had a sustained or focused topic. Talking that accompanied play, work, or a lesson was not coded as conversation. During any 30-second window, more than one activity could occur and could be coded.

Results

Activities Coded

A total of 3,584 observations were taken of these 20 preschoolers, 1,967 of the Holden group (11 children) and 1,617 of the Summit group (9 children). Because we coded all activities that occurred in the child's immediate vicinity (irrespective of the child's involvement) and because during the 30-second period a child could change activities, a total of 5,799 activities were coded: 2,676 for the Summit group and 3,123 for the Holden group. However, some of the observations took place while the children were sleeping (98 for the Summit group, 212 for the Holden group), and the activities taking place at those times (a total of 204, not including sleep as an activity) were clearly not available to the children. This left 5,185 activities that were potentially available to the children, 2,453 for the Summit group (47% of the total) and 2,732 (53%) for the Holden group. Because both groups featured one more girl than boy, the proportion of observations on girls was somewhat higher in both communities (55:45).

Activities: Availability and Involvement

Many activities occurred within ear- and eyeshot of the children, and were therefore potentially available to them, even if the children
did not get involved in them. In both the Holden group (where the parents worked in the professional sphere) and Summit group, play (including exploration and entertainment) was the most common activity occurring around these children (about 40% and 45% of the activities observed in the two groups, respectively). Conversation was more likely to occur around the Holden children than their Summit counterparts (17% vs. 8%, respectively), whereas work was somewhat less likely to occur (15% vs. 22%, respectively). Lessons occurred least often (about 7% and 4%, respectively).

Turning to activities in which the children were actively involved (either as participant or observer), play occurred with even greater frequency, particularly so in the Summit group (62% vs. 48% for the Holden children). The children from the two groups were involved to the same extent in work (approximately 8% of all activities in which they were involved), but the Holden children were more involved than their Summit counterparts in both conversation (14% vs. 7%, respectively) and lessons (8% vs. 5%, respectively). The remaining activities in which the children were involved fell into the category of other.

Lessons

Our focus for the remainder of this chapter will be on the lessons in which children were involved. Lessons were available 279 times and children were involved in 232 of them, either as active participants or as careful observers. As seen in Figure 9.1, the Holden children engaged overall in more lessons than their Summit counterparts, particularly with regard to academic lessons (lessons about reading, numbers, colors, etc.) and skill/nature lessons (such as tying shoes or learning about the workings of nature). Interpersonal lessons (dealing with manners, getting along with others, etc.) were more evenly distributed, but it is clear that these lessons constituted the majority of lessons in which the Summit children were involved (58% of their total lessons), whereas the Holden children’s lessons were more evenly distributed across the three types of lessons. (It is also interesting that the Holden children were far more likely than those from Summit to play with academic objects – looking at books or playing games with explicitly academic purposes – 108 vs. 60 instances.)

The following examples are illustrative of academic lessons in the two communities:

Figure 9.1. Types of lessons, by community.

Forty-five-month-old Mary (a pseudonym) lives in the Holden community. In this example, she is attending a party at her aunt’s house. Mary’s 15-year-old sister is entertaining Mary and two cousins, who are about Mary’s age. They are sitting on the stairs, and Mary and her two cousins are drawing with markers on paper big sister is holding on her lap. Here, older sister initiates an academic lesson for the three young children.

Sister: Okay, I’ll write… Can you write your name?
Mary: I… I can write my name. I can do it. I want to give you an L.
Sister: Your name doesn’t have an L in it. I’ll show you. This is an M. This is an A. Then an R, and this is a Y. And you both have an A [points to the two cousins]. A for Amy and A for Andrew.

Thirty-four-month-old Eric (a pseudonym) lives in Summit. In this scene, Eric is playing Uno, a card game, with his mother. His father is sitting nearby, watching television. The academic lesson here occurs in the context of being able to count cards as part of playing the game.

Eric: You got to draw two cards.
Father: You got seven this time.
Eric: Nah-uh, I’m going to turn over another one.
Mother: Let’s see how many you got. No. Lay ‘em down one at a
time. Say, one... Lay 'em down. You've got to count the same
ones over again.

Eric: I got one, two, three, four... [As he counts, Eric places cards
on the ottoman that they are using as a card table. Sometimes he
does down one card, sometimes several cards as he counts.]

Mother: Count them right. Lay 'em down one at a time. One... No,
I didn't say slide it off. One, two, three, four, five...

Eric: I did count 'em.

Mother: You weren't counting right.

Father: Eric, count the cards.

Eric: I did count 'em.

Mother: Lay 'em down.

The proportion of Summit boys and girls involved in lessons was as
expected, given the greater proportion of observations of girls. In the
Holden group, however, boys were proportionately and actually more
likely to be involved in lessons than were girls. As Figure 9.2 shows,
however, boys in both groups were more likely to be involved in
academic lessons than were girls, whereas the opposite was true of
interpersonal lessons.

These data indicate that children from the two communities were
involved in rather strikingly different types of activities. Those from
the Holden community were more likely to be exposed to lessons and
conversation than were their Summit counterparts. Similarly, they
were much more involved in these activities. The differences between
the two groups were most striking in terms of academic lessons, skill/
nature lessons, and academic play, with the Holden children more
involved than the Summit children. By contrast, the greatest propor-
tion of the lessons in which the Summit group was involved were
interpersonal lessons — that is, lessons dealing with good behavior
toward other people.

If Kohn's analysis is correct, parents who work in the professional
sphere should value independence and self-initiative in their children
more than parents who work in the nonprofessional sphere, whereas
parents who work in the nonprofessional sphere should be more
likely to value obedience and following rules. Although our data on
the parents' values and beliefs about child rearing have yet to be fully
analyzed, they appear to support Kohn's position (Hogan et al.,
1996). Kohn left unexamined the issue of whether or not parents
actually encourage or support their children's attempts to show these
qualities in everyday life, although he was able to show that children
do subscribe to the same values (Kohn, Slonezynski, & Sechenbach,
1986). The children in our study were too young to allow a verbal
assessment of their own values; instead, we were able to examine
directly the extent to which children initiated activities and became
involved in those activities under their own direction or following
suggestion from someone else.

In general (as depicted in Figure 9.3), people other than the child
were more likely to initiate lessons — but the Holden children were far
more likely to initiate (to ask how something is done, how to spell a
word, and so on) than those from the Summit community (26% vs.
10% of initiations, respectively). Differences between boys and girls
were minimal.

More striking, however, was the fact that irrespective of who initiated
the lesson, the Holden children were far more likely to initiate
their own involvement in it than were the Summit children, as shown
in Figure 9.4 (self-initiated involvement in 55% vs. 27% of the les-
sions, respectively). The Summit children were more likely to be
involved because someone else had ensured that they would —
providing unrequested information or telling the child how to be-
lieve. It is worth noting that, in both groups, girls were actually and
proportionally more likely than boys to initiate their own involve-
ment in lessons, though this was a good deal more apparent in the Holden than the Summit group. These data, which clearly suggest that these children are accustomed to some degree of self direction before they are 4 years of age, appear to support Kohn’s thesis that professional parents set goals for their children of independence and control over their environments.

By following these children over an extended period of time (20 hours, spread over 1 week, covering the equivalent of each child’s entire waking day), we were able to get a reasonable sense of the different physical environments in which they were situated. Both groups of children spent about two-thirds of their time in or around the home and about 10% of their time in public spaces (parks, shops, church, etc.). The major difference was that the Holden children spent more of their time than the Summit children in formal preschool settings (20% vs. 14%, respectively) but less in other people’s homes (5% vs. 9%), with much of this difference accounted for by the Summit children’s greater time spent in less formal child care arrangements.

The two groups of children differed in that the types of lessons in which they engaged were either rather consistent across home and preschool setting (in the Holden group) or inconsistent (in the Summit group). For the Holden children, the proportions of academic, interpersonal, and skill/nature lessons were approximately the same in home as in school, although there were rather more academic lessons in preschool and rather more skill/nature lessons at home (proportions of 27.35, 38 at home, 86 lessons in total; 37.40, 22 in school, 40 lessons in total). For the Summit children, however, the proportions were strikingly different (proportions of 6.51, 43 in the home, 51 lessons in total; 39.61, 18 at school, 38 lessons total). Very few lessons occurred in homes other than their own (6 in each group of children), evenly divided by lesson type in the Holden group, 4 being interpersonal lessons in the Summit group.

Interesting differences were also found in the children’s social partners in lessons. In both groups, the children’s mothers served as the primary social partner in lessons – in 70% of all lessons in the Holden homes and in 61% in the Summit homes. However, although the fathers were only rarely involved in lessons with their children in Holden (6% of all lessons at home), they were much more likely to be involved in Summit, featuring as partner in almost 16% of the cases. This pattern actually reflects the situation more generally – even
when taking into account the fact that fathers were somewhat more available to be partners in Summit (i.e., they were within the immediate setting for a greater proportion of observations than was true for the Holden fathers), they were still far more likely to serve as their child's partner in all activities.

Conclusion

We have argued that social classes may be thought of as constituting different cultural groups within society, cultural groups that have different sets of values about child-rearing practices and different expectations for their children that are passed on from generation to generation. In that sense, the study reported here is a comparison of different cultural groups, defined not by national boundaries or racial category, but by the value systems that shape the contexts and processes that make up their life experiences. Holden and Summit children, engaging in their regular everyday activities with their typical social partners in their typical settings, are engaged simultaneously in the process of coming to understand their culture and in the process of constructing it anew, with the help of those more experienced in the ways of that culture.

If psychologists are to move away from considering cultures or social classes simply as "social addresses," or as ways of dividing up data for purposes of statistical analysis, it is necessary to examine the ways in which membership in these groups translates into different life experiences. By actively engaging in the life experiences available to them, these children are involved in processes of development that distinguish two groups in the same city, living only a few miles apart, sharing the same racial background, but nevertheless living different lives.

To understand these activities, we have drawn from psychological and ecological theoretical frameworks that emphasize the interrelatedness of individual development and sociocultural phenomena, and that stress the need to cut across different levels of analysis. We have examined what Bronfenbrenner has termed "developmentally instigative" characteristics at the individual level (gender and self-direction) and found that boys and girls are differentially involved in the activities that are available to them, and that the children in one group are much more likely than those in another to initiate activities and initiate their own involvement in activities once they have started. We have examined these activities as they formed, focusing on who started them and how, as well as who were the partners involved. However, without consideration of the broadest level, the macro level of culture (here instantiated as social class), it is difficult to understand why it is that the children and their partners in these two groups act as they do.

The distinct patterns of available lessons and of children's involvement in them suggests a structure, a system shared by the broader group on which the pattern is based. For a connection between the broader world and what is occurring in the lives of these children, we have relied on the insights of Kohn and his colleagues. Their data, collected in a very different way (using surveys and questionnaires, and drawing on a large number of respondents), strongly suggest that parental workplace experiences may in part account for the values and beliefs that parents have about how to raise their children so that they can become economically self-sufficient. If this is the case, we argued that these values and beliefs are likely to be reflected in the types of activities that parents make available to their children and the extent to which parents encourage children to exhibit either self-direction or conformity. This is, of course, what our data reveal.

Kohn's sociological account provided a link between parental workplace practices (the exosystem in Bronfenbrenner's terms) and child-rearing values and beliefs, which we extended to the everyday activities of young children and their social partners, using methods adapted from cultural anthropologists and cultural psychologists.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological (person-process-context) model required that we focus on developmentally instigative aspects of children. In this instance we have examined both gender and the degree to which children initiate (instigate) their involvement in activity. It also requires that we focus on developmentally instigative aspects of the surrounding context, cutting across two or more levels. Here we have chosen to examine social class as an exosystem factor (impacting children indirectly), the different settings in which children spend their time as a mesosystem factor, and partners in activity as a microsystem factor. The processes that are assumed to be operating and that serve to translate social class differences into different outcomes for the children growing up within different social classes are jointly constructed by the children themselves (their own active involvement in activities and their active initiation both of the activities themselves and of their participation in them) and by their social
partners, who make different settings and activities available to their children and engage with them to different extents.

It is clear that individual communities, differentiated along a complex of factors (income, education, and occupation) that serve to mark social class, variously arrange activities considered important in this society. Their children, moreover, before the age of 4, have come to behave dissimilarly—at least to the extent of differing in the degree to which they are self-directed—and to engage differentially in these activities.

References


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