Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: A Cultural Context

MIRIAM K. ROSENTHAL

Hebrew University
Jerusalem, Israel

SUMMARY: This paper suggests that different cultural communities may hold different definitions of “quality” in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) conforming with their respective, culturally valued educational goals and culturally based beliefs regarding practices that facilitate their attainment. Despite the negative implication of stereotyping socio-cultural communities as “individualist” or “collectivist” (Triandis, 1995), the conceptualisation of cultural variations in educational goals and practices along a continuum between these dichotomous extremes, has a heuristic value in clarifying our thinking about “quality” in ECEC in different cultural contexts. The paper examines valued educational goals (self-identity and motivation, social and emotional behavior and cognitive processes) and valued educational practices (children’s learning environments, learning activities and educator-child interaction) in the context of “individualist” and “collectivist” cultural scripts. In conclusion the implications of this analysis for variations in the understanding of “quality” of ECEC in multi-cultural and rapidly changing societies are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ: Cet article suggère que les diverses communautés pourraient avoir des définitions différentes de la qualité de l’accueil et de l’éducation des jeunes enfants en fonction de leurs propres objectifs éducatifs, liés à leurs valeurs culturelles, et des pratiques qui, selon elles, permettent de les atteindre. En dépit des effets négatifs des stéréotypes des communautés décrites comme “individualistes” ou “collectivistes” (Triandis, 1995), la conceptualisation des variations culturelles des objectifs et pratiques éducatifs au sein d’un continuum entre ces deux extrêmes a une valeur heuristique. Elle permet de clarifier notre façon de concevoir la “qualité” dans des contextes culturels différents. Cet article traite des objectifs éducatifs majeurs (identité, motivation, comportement social et affectif, processus cognitifs) et des pratiques éducatives essentielles (contextes d’apprentissage des enfants, activités d’apprentissage, interaction éducateur-enfant) dans le cadre de scripts culturels “individualistes” et “collectivistes”. En conclusion sont discutées les implications de cette analyse sur la variété des conceptions de la qualité de l’accueil et de l’éducation de la petite enfance dans des sociétés multiculturelles en forte mutation.


RESUMEN: Este artículo señala que las distintas comunidades culturales pueden mantener diferentes definiciones del concepto de “calidad” en la Educación y el Cuidado en la Niñez Temprana (ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care). Estas definiciones se articulan de acuerdo a las metas educativas valoradas por la cultura y a las percepciones acerca de las prácticas que facilitan la adquisición de estas metas.

A pesar de las implicaciones negativas de etiquetar de forma estereotipada a las diferentes comunidades en categorías, tales como “comunidades individualistas” o “comunidades colectivistas”, el conceptualizar la variación cultural, en cuanto a metas y prácticas educativas, a lo largo de un continuo que se mueve dentro de estos dos extremos dicotómicos tiene un valor heurístico. Ello nos ayudará a clarificar nuestro pensamiento acerca de lo que es “calidad” en la Educación y Cuidado en la Niñez Temprana en diversos contextos culturales.

Este trabajo examina las metas educativas valoradas (tales como identidad y motivación, conducta social y emocional y procesos cognoscitivos) y las prácticas educativas valoradas (tales como ambiente en el que se produce el aprendizaje, actividades de aprendizaje e interacción educador-niño) en el contexto de las versiones culturales “individualistas” y “colectivistas”.

En conclusión, se discuten las implicaciones de este análisis para la mejor comprensión del concepto de “calidad” en la Educación y el Cuidado en la Niñez Temprana en sociedades multiculturales y en aquellas en las cuales se nota un acelerado ritmo de cambio.

Keywords: Early childhood; Quality care and culture; Educational goals and practices; Individualism-collectivism.

The issue of quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has been the focal point of much research in recent years. Most of this research investigated the effects of the quality of early childhood group settings on children’s development.

In a comprehensive review of research on child care for young children, Lamb (1998) concluded that the quality of these settings “clearly has positive effects on children’s intellectual, verbal, and cognitive development, especially when children would otherwise experience impoverished and relatively unstimulating home environments” (p.104). Recent publications of the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000) lend further support to this conclusion. In addition to the “quality” of their experiences at home, the “quality” of children’s experiences in early childhood settings is a key factor (as opposed to age of entry, or stability of care) influencing the development of children. Poor quality leads to poor performance on cognitive and language tasks and to more behavior problems. Secure maternal attachment of infants and toddlers attending early childhood settings is related mostly to mothers’ sensitivity. However, high quality of care in these settings may compensate for a less sensitive home environment. For instance, within the group of children of less sensitive mothers, those in high quality settings showed a higher percentage of secure attachment, than those in poor quality child care.

Studies carried out on the effects of quality ECEC on children’s development have examined both process and structural criteria of quality. The former refers to children’s social interactions and educational experiences, while the latter refers to conditions such as group size, adult-child ratio, and teacher education and training, as well as the autonomy and support available to educators that encourage the provision of these experiences. Empirical studies have indeed shown structural dimensions to be correlated with the quality of processes such as educational activities and the interaction between educators and children (e.g., Howes, Whitebook & Phillips, 1992;
In a recent report published by the University of Wisconsin’s Institute for Research on Poverty, Vandell and Wolfe (2000) ask whether there is a persuasive economic argument to justify public intervention to improve the quality of child care. Their answer is affirmative, as good quality ECEC benefits not only children, but other members of society as well (e.g., employers, schools) and the society at large, by saving costs of future treatment and schooling (e.g., diminished special education and crime). Furthermore, such public intervention encourages and rewards quality work, and is a natural outcome of a social agenda calling for equal access for all children to high quality programs. Results from the Cost, Quality, and Outcome Study lend further support to this argument (Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997).

Most societies in the modern world wish to provide quality education and care to their young children. The implication of the argument presented by the research quoted above is that public intervention, in the form of social and educational policy, may enhance quality processes in ECEC settings. It can do so by regulating and supporting the organisational and structural conditions that allow the kind of educational practice and social interaction processes that facilitate the achievement of the educational goals valued by the society.

What are “quality processes” in early childhood education and care?

In all the studies into the effects of quality on children’s development mentioned above, the definition of “quality” has an apparent evaluative connotation. The definition implies an evaluation of how successful a program is in providing children with daily experiences that enhance their development towards some valued educational goals (Moss, 1994).

Quality educational practice has been depicted by the American National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) in its guidelines for “Developmentally Appropriate Practice” (Bredekamp, 1997). These guidelines, referring mostly to the “process” aspects of care, were generated by a team of US experts and are used in the curriculum development and evaluation of many ECEC settings in countries outside the US as well. Various research instruments developed for assessing quality of ECEC settings, such as the ECERS, ITERS, FDCRS (Harms & Clifford, 1980, 1984; Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 1990) or the ORCE developed by the NICHD Early Child Care research Network (e.g., NICHD, 1996), reflect the same educational philosophy at the basis of the American NAEYC guidelines.

Cultural values and the definition of “quality” in ECEC

Research in recent years has challenged the widely held assumption that there exists a single universal model of high quality Early Childhood Education and Care. The definition of “Quality Care” is a derivative of the cultural values and developmental goals of each cultural community. It has thus been argued that the descriptions of quality care depicted in the NAEYC guidelines for “Developmentally Appropriate Practice” (Bredekamp, 1997), are based on the values, norms and concerns of the individualistic Anglo-American society. For example, its emphasis on “respect” and “nurturing” of young children reflects practices by which members of the white middle-class in Western societies help children acquire the skills and behaviors that are valued within their specific cultural community (Bowman and Stott, 1994; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995; Woodhead, 1996).

Findings from research assessing ECEC quality as defined by these guidelines tend to show that quality care has a greater influence on children’s intellectual, verbal, and cognitive development, than on early social development. It has been suggested that this finding reflects the valued educational goals and practices of middle-class Anglo-American cultural communities (Rosenthal, 1999a). Correspondingly, as quality measurement scales and instruments developed in the United States (e.g., ITES, ECERS, ORCE) are based on the NAEYC guidelines, they too
emphasise practices that lead to personal cognitive and verbal competence, rather than, for example, to social cooperation within the peer group (Rosenthal, 1992).

Many investigators have shown that beyond (a) the shared goals of promoting the survival, health and overall well-being of children, and (b) the universal goal of socialising children into adults who adapt well to their eco-culture, cultural communities differ in their specific goals for the development and education of their children (e.g., Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Harkness & Super, 1996; LeVine, 1974; Rogoff et al., 1993; Roer-Strier & Rosenthal, 2001; Rosenthal & Roer-Strier, 2001). These goals vary in accordance with the community’s views of the relations among people and of the skills required for adaptation to life in the community (Roer-Strier & Rosenthal, 2001).

It has further been argued that eco-cultural contexts and their social values are related to the understanding of the fundamental nature of the child and the socialisation and teaching methods employed by the adult community to reach its valued educational goals (Greenfield, 1994; Goodnow, 1997). Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu & Mosier (1993), who observed toddlers and caregivers from different cultural communities collaborate on a variety of everyday tasks, suggest that the “joint engagement” of toddlers and caregivers is a universal educational process. However, they indicate that the specific patterns of involvement between children and adults vary across cultures. Thus, while joint engagement of toddlers and caregivers is probably an important aspect of the learning and development of young children in all cultural communities, the particular characteristics of this engagement vary considerably. Bronfenbrenner (1992) argued, likewise, that a society’s valued educational goals (“what does it mean to do well”) and beliefs as to the best practice to attain these outcomes (“what does it take to get a child to do well”) reflect its socio-economic history and its basic cultural values.

This paper suggests, therefore, that the concept of quality of ECEC in a given society reflects the valued educational goals and valued educational practice of the cultural communities constituting that society. Hence, different cultural communities, within any society, may adopt different definitions of quality in ECEC in accordance with their specific culturally valued developmental goals and culturally based beliefs about the practices that facilitate the attainment of these goals (Holloway, 2000; Rosenthal, 1999b).

**Educational goals and practices: different cultural scripts**

Is it possible to identify relevant dimensions, or cultural scripts, by which to compare the valued goals and valued practices of different cultural communities? Cultural scripts reflect the shared beliefs, attitudes, norms and values of a given socio-cultural community. Many of these beliefs, attitudes and norms reflect the culture’s valued balance between individual and community.

Cultural developmental scripts reflect in addition the community’s understanding of the nature of children and the nature of change in development, as well as the understanding of what is meaningful in development (Hwang, Lamb & Sigel, 1996; Saarni, 1998).

Cultural scripts of different socio-cultural communities have been compared in terms of their valued balance between individual and community, characterising socio-cultural groups as “individualistic” or “collectivist”. This balance is also reflected in cultural developmental scripts characterised as “independent” or “interdependent” (Greenfield, 1994; Kagitcibasi, 1996; Kim et al., 1994; Markus&Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Valued educational goals and valued educational practices reflect these cultural developmental scripts of the community (Holloway, 2000; Rosenthal, 1999b).

There has been much debate in the past two decades over the characterisation of cultural scripts. Some of the debate revolves around the complexities of defining “culture” as a singular and stable characteristic of a given society, as opposed to a “hybrid”, characterising societies by their ever changing intra-cultural diversity, evolving many “personal cultures” within any given society (Azuma, 2000). Triandis (1995) has suggested that rate of change, population density and number of in-groups contribute to the relative cultural complexity of a given society. Culture-based developmental scripts may indeed change over time following social, economic and politi-
cal changes in the society (e.g. globalisation) and/or in the life of the individual (e.g., migration). These may lead eventually to changes in valued educational goals and valued educational practices. Thus, for example, one may observe changes in educational goals and practices with the strengthening of an individualistic orientation among some Japanese socio-cultural groups (Holloway, 2000).

Other debates focus on the issue of stereotyping and the dichotomous characterisation of socio-cultural communities and their members (such as Individualism vs. Collectivism), as opposed to a perspective that assumes the coexistence of different cultural scripts within any culture and within individuals. Like cultural complexity, such coexistence of cultural scripts is more likely to occur in multi-cultural societies and in those undergoing rapid socio-economic and political changes.

This paper suggests that despite the negative implication of stereotyping socio-cultural communities, the conceptualisation of cultural variations in educational goals and practices as being located along a continuum ranging between dichotomous extremes, such as “collectivism” and “individualism”, has a heuristic value in clarifying our thinking about “quality” in ECEC in different cultural contexts. It provides us with a framework that facilitates the discourse over the different aspects of “quality ECEC”, and the discussion of diversity as well as changes in valued goals and practices that are related to variations and changes in the cultural scripts of a society.

Kagitcibasi (1996) has suggested that dichotomies such as individualism and collectivism (e.g., Triandis 1995) and/or independence and interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) may serve as universal dimensions for variance among cultural communities, and enrich our understanding of children’s development and education in different cultural communities.

The attributes associated with these dichotomies refer to personality characteristics, self-concepts, motivations, attitudes, conflict resolution styles, social behavior, interpersonal relations and inter-group relations. Specific cultures, as well as specific individuals within a culture, may emphasise different combinations of individualist or collectivist attributes (Triandis, 1995).

Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi and Yoon (1994) highlight the different fundamental assumptions of the individualist and collectivist cultural scripts and their related attributes. This dichotomy is highly related to the dichotomy of Independence - Interdependence (Greenfield, 1994; Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Individualism, as well as the value of independence, is based on “rationality and reason” with a social structure anchored in “principles, rules and laws”. Cultural communities with individualistic orientation stress values such as personal freedom, autonomy, privacy, curiosity, creativity and critical thinking, as well as self-determination, self fulfillment, personal happiness and uniqueness. They are founded on the assumption that unrelated individuals interact with one another through rational principles of equality, separateness and non-interference, and sharp boundaries are set between one individual and his or her fellow.

Collectivism, as well as the value of inter-dependence, refers to cultures with clear group identity and distinct boundaries between the in-group and others. Emphasis is placed on group affiliation and on “we-they” relations. In collectivist cultures, great import is placed on group harmony, solidarity, conformity, interdependence, sharing and concern for communal welfare, and less on the individual’s self-fulfillment. Participation in group life and social knowledge (based on communal norms related to duties and one’s role in the group) are considered more important than critical thinking or technological knowledge, which are at times considered a threat to traditional authority (Kim et al., 1994; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989).

While some cultural communities (cultural sub-groups, or individuals within a culture) are extremely individualist, or independent, and others extremely collectivist, or interdependent, the cultural scripts of most cultural communities fall somewhere between the two polarised ends. Thus, while members of white middle class Anglo-American communities tend to hold more values and beliefs characteristic of “individualist” and “independent” cultural scripts, members of many non-modern, traditional, communities may have values closer to the “collectivist”, or “interdependent”, end of this continuum.
The main tenet of this paper is that our understanding of quality in ECEC, our valued educational goals and practices, are derived from the culturally-based developmental scripts characteristic of our cultural community. The paper discusses valued educational goals, as well as valued educational practices derived from the attributes associated with individualistic/independent and collectivist/interdependent cultural orientations.

Valued educational goals

Beyond the universal goals of survival and acculturation into adaptive adulthood, cultural communities with different value systems differ in the goals they set forth for the development and education of their young.

Table 1 outlines the educational goals valued by socio-cultural communities characterised as Individualist/Independent or as Collectivist/Interdependent. It summarises the differences in terms of self identity and motivation, socio-emotional behavior, and the cognitive processes a society values in its members and would like its children to attain in its ECEC settings.

The valued goals in individualist societies, described in Table 1, are derived from the NAEYC guidelines of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekemp, 1997), and from the outcome measures employed in research into the effects of ECEC on children’s development in Western societies (Rosenthal, 1999a). These studies focus on assessing the achievement of an overall educational goal of competence and adjustment of individual children. (e.g., Caruso & Corsini, 1994; Chin-Quee & Scarr, 1994; Clarke-Stewart, Gruber & Fitzgerald, 1994; Egeland & Hiester, 1995; Field, 1991; Howes & Hamilton, 1993; Kontos, 1991; Kontos Hsu & Dunn, 1994; McCartney, Scarr & Grajek, 1985; NICHD, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000; Vandell, Henderson & Wilson, 1988). The most commonly used outcome measures are those of "intellectual, linguistic and academic achievement" and "socio-emotional adjustment" (e.g., lack of personal behavior problems, social acceptance of the individual among peers, and compliance).

The valued educational goals in collectivist societies, described in Table 1, are derived from studies carried out in East Asian and African communities in other parts of the world. For example, in ECEC programs in Japan, developing a "sense of group identity and concern for others" is deemed an especially esteemed goal. In Chinese ECEC settings the development of "citizenship, discipline and perseverance" is a particularly important educational goal (Tobin et al., 1989). Korean-American schools, distinct from Anglo-American ones, have a "collectivist orientation where social harmony, group identity and self control" are prized (Farver, Kim & Lee, 1995). Cameroon society in Africa also expects its children to "acquire a sense of solidarity and responsibility" (Nsamenang, 1992). The Chewa parents in Zambia value "trustworthiness, [social] wisdom, quickness, and craftiness" more than the "knowledge-acquisition" emphasised by the British model of the formal education system in Zambia (Serpell, 1996). The valued educational goals in the former Soviet Union are consistent with the values of a collectivist totalitarian society, emphasising loyalty, cooperation, group-mindedness, nearness, conformity and obedience (Bronfenbrenner, 1970; Ispa, 1994).

These are examples of educational goals characteristic of societies close to the extreme ends of the dichotomy. As was stated above, many societies may hold mixed developmental scripts. Research in some other Western societies reveals a pattern of educational goals which is closer to what Kim (1994) described as a "relational mode" of Collectivism. Thus, we see in Denmark and Sweden a greater emphasis on "social relationships and helping younger children" (Langsted, 1994), or "knowing how to take care of another child" (Calder, 1995), than in the Anglo-American societies. And while Anglo-Australian parents expect their children to become "independent and self-reliant" and maybe also a "good team player", Greek-Australian parents expect their children to become "good in-group members" and maybe also "self-reliant" (Rosenthal & Bornholt, 1988).

It is much more difficult, however, to identify characteristic valued educational goals in multicultural societies or in societies undergoing social, economic and/or political change. In these societies one encounters several difficulties. First, one is likely to find significant differences between the educational goals expressed through the policies of the education system, and those
### TABLE 1: Valued educational goals in cultural context

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<th>Valued Educational Goals:</th>
<th>Individualist Society</th>
<th>Collectivist Society</th>
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</table>
| **Self-Identity and Motivation** | - Identifies self as separate and independent of others in the social group  
- Is self reliant and assertive  
- Is able to make autonomous choices among activity options  
- Is motivated towards self actualisation, happiness and personal satisfaction  
- Is motivated towards personal achievement and recognition of self worth | - Identifies self as a responsible member with a social role in the group  
- Relies on the cooperation of others  
- Is able to accept decisions made by an adult, or by the social group  
- Is motivated towards group solidarity, communal well being and harmony  
- Is motivated towards the success, achievement and recognition of his social group |
| **Social and Emotional Behaviour** | - Assumes responsibility for oneself  
- Is socially well adjusted and popular  
- Is assertive in self expression and competitive in attaining personal goals  
- Inhibits impulses to facilitate achievement of personal goals  
- Is able to maintain privacy in the group setting  
- Is able to engage in open conflicts and resolve them, with group members and others  
- Maintains some autonomy in accepting or rejecting group norms and teacher’s demands  
- Engages in clear and direct verbal communication  
- Focus on the accuracy of the content of communication  
- Shows respect to children and adults alike. Expects respect in return | - Assumes responsibility for others  
- Is able to maintain group harmony  
- Self expression and assertiveness are restrained to avoid offending or entering into conflict  
- Inhibits impulses to maintain group harmony  
- Avoids excluding himself from the group  
- Avoids open conflicts with group members. Able to negotiate disagreements  
- Conforms to group norms, is obedient and submissive to teacher’s authority  
- Restraints direct communication to avoid offending group members  
- Focus on the manner of transmitting a message  
- Shows respect to teachers, elders and other authority figures. Does not expect them to respect children |
| **Cognitive Processes** | - Curiosity and exploration are means of acquiring knowledge  
- Uses independent thinking and problem solving  
- Thinking is rational and critical  
- Is able to compare and evaluate alternative options as answers | - Uses respected authority and tradition as sources of knowledge  
- Remembers and follows traditional thinking and problem solving  
- Thinking conforms to valued group tradition  
- Shows ability to memorise and understand “known”, “proven” answers |
which parents may have for their own children. In societies moving from a more traditional, usually collectivist, way of life into a modern, usually more individualistic, lifestyle, one is likely to find the education system supporting individualistic valued goals while parents, as well as many veteran teachers are holding on to more collectivist goals (e.g., Holloway, 2000; Serpell, 1996). In our work in Israel we find a similar gap between statements of individualistic-oriented goals set forth by the Ministry of Education, and those held by collectivist-oriented parents from various socio-cultural groups, as well as the goals reflected in the actual practice of educators in ECEC settings (Roer-Strier, 1996; Roer-Strier & Rosenthal, 2001; Rosenthal, 1999a, 1999b; Rosenthal & Roer-Strier, 2001).

Another difficulty lies in the different meanings, or interpretations, of supposedly similar goals by different cultural communities in the same society. Thus, for example, while it has been suggested that many cultural communities would like their children to be intelligent, definitions of “intelligence” can be quite diverse (Goodnow, 1976). While the individualistic definition focuses on “technical intelligence” (literacy, problem solving, critical thinking, etc.), more collectivist groups define intelligence in terms of social and emotional skills, and as “responsible participation in family and social life” (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). Similarly, “social competence” is defined in many individualistic societies in terms of the complexity of exchanges with peers (Andersson, 1992; Howes & Hamilton, 1993; Howes, Hamilton & Matheson, 1994; Rosenthal, 1994; Volling & Feagans, 1995). In more collectivist cultures, however, “social competence” is understood in terms of “conformity to the in-group” or “maintaining group harmony and solidarity” (Tobin et al., 1989).

“Independence” too is a culture-bound notion. In our studies in Israel, we found that while many parents of young children would like their children to be “independent”, the understanding of “independence” among parents of different cultural communities is very different. Thus, Israeli-born Jewish mothers value more “psychological-independence” i.e., making decisions and solving problems on one’s own, whereas Russian-born Jewish mothers value more “instrumental-independence”, i.e., “taking food or washing on one’s own” (Roer-Strier & Rosenthal, 1997). Similarly, Jewish mothers born in the former USSR interpret “socio-emotional adjustment” to mean “the ability to control the expression of fear and anger”, while for the Jewish Israeli-born mothers it means “being able to express negative emotions openly and directly” (Rosenthal & Roer-Strier, 2001).

Valued educational practice

Goals and culturally valued developmental outcomes are closely linked to the educational practices valued by a society. Vygotsky’s work highlighted the fact that learning always occurs within a cultural context. Learning and development transpire through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Rogoff and her colleagues regard this process of guided participation and involvement in shared endeavors as universal. The specific forms, however, of guided participation, the specific forms of communication and arrangements of children’s activities, are likely to vary across different cultural communities (Rogoff et al., 1993).

The definition of the nature of the environmental requirements for learning and the means by which a cultural community goes about encouraging or discouraging a given behavior vary dramatically across societies (Rubin, 1998; Sigel, 1992).

The research literature indeed suggests that educational practices, like educational goals, are related to the cultural eco-social context and its underlying values and beliefs about development and its malleability. As Table 2 suggests, these are evident in the ways in which cultural communities organise and define children’s learning environment, their learning activities and the nature of the involvement of child and adult.

In most individualist cultural communities, the adult plays a major role in defining the context of learning, mostly in age-segregated settings (i.e., classrooms). Teachers "take responsi-
bility for organising children’s involvement by managing their motivation and by instructing through the provision of... play and conversation as peers with toddlers” (Rogoff et al., 1993, p. 151).

The adults in high quality educational settings in individualist societies are expected to accommodate themselves to children’s abilities and needs by adapting the physical environment to children, by selecting appropriate play and learning materials, and by simplifying their talk with the children. They do not expect children to adapt themselves to adult activity (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). They are not only expected to respond sensitively to children but also to value play and encourage egalitarian social relationships between children and adults. They are also expected to initiate play with children and join them in their activity providing props and suggestions. In contrast, it was found that Korean-American educators practicing in ECEC settings in the US, as well

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Valued Educational Practice</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Collectivism</th>
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| **Children’s Learning Environment** | - Learning takes place mostly in age segregated settings adapted to children’s size and ability  
- Learning materials, furniture and facilities are designed and organised to encourage independent use by children  
- Play area and learning materials are organised to encourage free play, exploration and children’s autonomous choice of activity  
- “Private spaces” are arranged to meet children’s need to be alone  
- Learning occurs through activities planned for instruction  
- Adult instruction is adapted to children’s ability and interest  
- Schedules of activities are planned but flexible  
- Activities provide frequent individual interactions of child with teacher  
- Free play provides ample opportunity for learning through exploration, independent problem solving, questioning and critical thinking  
- Activities encourage children to draw on knowledge from books, radio, TV, and computers  
- Activities are planned to enhance personal success and achievement, competition, and self confidence  
- Social activities are planned to strengthen child’s social competence | - Learning occurs mostly through participation in activity of adults and more capable peers  
- Learning materials, furniture and facilities are designed and organised to draw children’s attention to the learning task  
- Space, play and learning materials are organised to facilitate the structured learning planned by the teacher  
- Space is planned for group activity only  
- Learning occurs through apprenticeship and imitation  
- Adults and peers provide guidance and encouragement  
- Schedules of activities are planned and not flexible  
- Activities provide frequent interactions with other children in a group  
- Structured learning activities provide opportunity for rote learning, observation and imitation of teacher. Free play is seen as “fun”, not learning  
- Activities encourage children to draw on knowledge from oral tradition & authority figures  
- Activities are planned to enhance group cohesion, mutual dependence and involvement  
- Social activities are planned to strengthen children’s sense of belonging to the group |

**TABLE 2: Valued educational practice in cultural context**
as the Korean-American parents of children in these settings, valued the practice of memorisation, task persistence and hard work over play activities. The Anglo-American practice of educators playing with children was considered culturally inappropriate for educators in the Korean-American community (Farver et al., 1995).

Unlike individualist societies, many collectivist cultural communities attribute to children the responsibility for learning. Children’s active efforts to seek knowledge and behave maturely are perceived as being more important than adult-initiated instruction. It is assumed that children can manage their own learning, through keen observation and participation in the daily activities of the culture. Assumptions of this kind foster social conditions in which children spend more time in peer group interaction than in adult-child interaction. Children in some of these cultural communities observe and participate in ongoing cultural activities with little or no instruction, but with the guidance and encouragement of various caregivers and companions (e.g., Nsamenang & Lamb, 1995; Serpell, 1996; Rogoff et al., 1993).

Other collectivist societies have adopted age-segregated contexts of early childhood education and care that take place outside the realm of everyday adult activity, while still maintaining in these settings many collectivist valued practices. Table 2 describes these practices, based on research carried out in ECEC settings in Japan, China and the former USSR (Ispa, 1994; Tobin et al., 1989).

It should be noted that valued educational practice is related to valued educational and developmental goals. Thus, for example, individualist societies that value the goal of personal achievement expect adults to respond sensitively and adapt their behavior and interactions to the

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<tr>
<th>Valued Educational Practice</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Collectivism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Child Interaction</td>
<td>• Teachers frequently adapt their instruction to children’s ability</td>
<td>• Children frequently adapt themselves to adult activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers engage in frequent verbal interaction, enrich language skills. They ask “open” questions, and encourage children to express their thoughts and feelings</td>
<td>• Teacher uses verbal interaction to instruct children. She asks questions that require “correct” answers. She does not encourage expression of independent thought and feelings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher motivates children’s curiosity and willingness to explore their environment</td>
<td>• Teacher motivates children to work hard and be attentive to her teaching</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teacher responds sensitively to children’s individual bids for her attention attempting to meet the individual needs of every child</td>
<td>• Teacher ignores individual bids for her attention and encourages children to respond sensitively to each other’s needs</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Behaviour norms are stated clearly with an explanation of their rationale. Adherence to norm is flexible</td>
<td>• Behavioral norms are stated strictly. Violation of a norm is treated as “shameful” by the group. No flexibility is allowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher’s relationship with children is based on mutual respect, equality, and symmetry</td>
<td>• Teacher’s relationship with children is hierarchical and is based on children’s respect to teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• An authoritarian teacher is seen as disrespectful of children’s rights and autonomy</td>
<td>• An authoritarian teacher is seen as responsible, nurturing and concerned about children</td>
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TABLE 2: Valued educational practice in cultural context (continued)
needs and abilities of individual children. In a more collectivist society, like Japan, where traditionally many of the ECEC settings are expected to socialise children towards group solidarity, and self-discipline, the practice of emphasising the “role of student”, participation in group life and diverting bids for attention from the educator to the peer group is considered more valuable than individualised sensitive responsiveness by the educator. Likewise, in China, another collectivist society, one of the goals of ECEC is to offset the “spoiling” effect of the home-care provided to its only children. The educational practice in these settings emphasises hard work and discipline rather than sensitive responsiveness of the educators to bids for attention by individual children (Holloway, 2000; Tobin et al., 1989).

Goals, educational practice and structural aspects of ECEC

Differences in culturally valued educational goals and practices may have implications for the valued structural aspects of quality in ECEC settings. For example, group size, or adult-child ratio, may be of concern to individualist as well as collectivist ECEC programs, but the concerns are likely to be quite different. While small groups and high adult-child ratios are valued in individualist societies such as the US because they foster the intimate, sensitive and individualised adult-child interactions that are considered good quality practice in Anglo-American settings, more collectivist societies such as Japan, China or the former Soviet Union, prefer large groups with fewer adults because they encourage mutual dependency and foster socialisation to group cohesiveness. In fact, the small classes cherished by many Western educators are perceived by many Japanese educators as “sad and creating a narrow world for children”, while American teachers are horrified by the size of class and teacher-child ratios in Japan (Tobin et al., 1989).

Regardless of the goals and specific practices, the educator, or guiding adult, in any cultural community should be competent in providing the learning experiences that will enable children to become responsible participants in the practices of their communities. It seems, however, that teacher training is especially valued when learning takes place in age-segregated ECEC settings outside the daily activity context of adults in the community.

The structural aspects of an ECEC setting may either facilitate or hinder educators’ ability to provide the kind of practice valued by the society. They do not, however, absolutely determine this ability. By way of illustration, it is interesting to note that a study comparing structurally similar Korean-American and Anglo-American preschool settings (each serving its own cultural community), found significant variations in the organisation of educational activities and play behavior. These differences are explained by the variations among the adults in each cultural community as to what children need to become productive and successful members of their society, and not by the setting’s structural characteristics per se (Farver et al, 1995).

Conclusion

All societies strive to educate their young towards adaptive and successful membership in their cultural communities. Given that human existence is essentially social in nature, all societies have to define their goal of successful membership in the community in reference to the relationship between the individual and the social group. This relationship may be characterised by various “modes” of social relations, some are more individualist and others more collectivist oriented (Kim, 1994). The culturally valued relationship between the individual and the social group is reflected in the valued educational goals and practices of any given cultural community. It, therefore, determines the definition of “quality” of ECEC by parents and educators in any given cultural community.

Studies carried out in recent years indicate that the search for a universal model of quality Early Childhood Education and Care is both untenable and unhelpful. Yet one must also take care to avoid assuming an extreme position of cultural relativism. For although the concept of quality is related to culturally valued educational goals and practices, its definition is certainly not arbitrary.
The real challenge of any discussion of quality in Early Childhood Education and Care lies in the exploration of that which is universal, common to all cultural communities, and that which is culture specific.

Toward this end this paper proposes viewing valued educational goals and practices in ECEC in the context of the cultural scripts of a given society and its main cultural communities. It has been suggested that these scripts and their derivative valued educational goals and practices vary along the continuum ranging from Individualist, or Independence, oriented to Collectivist, or Interdependence, oriented. Most societies are comprised of a number of cultural communities that differ in religion, ethnicity, education, or social class. Each of these communities may have its own definition of valued educational goals and practices reflecting values closer to one end or another, one “mode” or another, of the Individualist-Collectivist dichotomy. Policy makers and designers of ECEC systems in any given society have to take these variations in valued goals and practices into consideration when designing educational policy rather than embrace, or enforce, a policy based on the values of a dominant cultural community in the society.

Furthermore, as has been noted, societies and cultures are not static entities, but are continuously undergoing change over time. Regardless of whether this change is due to modernisation, political changes (e.g., Glasnost), economic changes (e.g., globalisation) or demographic changes (e.g., immigration or military strife), it is likely to lead to shifts in the society’s value system. These shifts then lead to changes in society’s valued educational goals and practices, which in turn affect one’s understanding of what is “quality ECEC”.

Quality ECEC is a major concern to anyone involved in designing, or providing, educational services and programs for young children. It is also a major concern to parents. The different stakeholders in multicultural societies and in those undergoing eco-cultural changes are likely hold onto different cultural scripts and therefore, to differ in the educational goals and practices they value. It is therefore imperative that policy makers, early childhood professionals, and parents all articulate their valued educational goals and practices. Furthermore, the designers of ECEC systems must be aware of these changes and reconsider, or re-evaluate, their educational goals and valued practices accordingly.

In cases where mutual agreement cannot be reached among the different stakeholders, one should consider the implications for children’s development, and for society at large, of the conflicts that inevitably arise from discontinuity between the valued goals and practices of the education system and that of parents. For children to benefit from ECEC, such differences and disagreements should be openly discussed with the mutual intent of providing “quality ECEC” which meets most of the values of most of the ECEC stakeholders. Alternatively, when a society can tolerate a pluralistic approach, educational policy makers and other stakeholders may decide to provide different ECEC settings designed to achieve different educational goals, using different educational practices for each of the cultural communities coexisting within a society.

The ideas presented in this paper are proposed as a basis for discussion among the different stakeholders concerned with ECEC in any given society, but especially in multicultural societies and in those undergoing rapid socio-economic or cultural changes. It is especially meant as a basis for discussion among parents, educators, education system officials and policy makers. Such a discussion should acknowledge the fact that changes in valued educational goals and practices occur much slower than political and socio-economic changes (Holloway, 2000; Ispa, 1994; Roer-Strier & Rosenthal, 2001).

Socio-cultural diversity and change have implications to variations in the understanding of “quality” of ECEC settings in the various cultural communities comprising any given society. These ought to be reflected in the way educational systems and organisations utilise their power in designing educational programs and services for young children and their families.

FOOTNOTE

This paper is based on a keynote address to the Curricula, Policies & Practices in Early Childhood Education symposium, Malta, 2000.
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Correspondence about this paper should be addressed to:

Miriam K. Rosenthal
School of Social Work,
Hebrew University,
Jerusalem
Israel 91905