Differing Perspectives on Learning through Play

The Influence of Culture and Values

January 23, 2014
One adult may see play as an opportunity for individual involvement with the physical environments, as in self-motivated, solitary play. Another adult may regard play as an opportunity for learning to get along with others. If solitary play is valued, interruptions by others will be discouraged. If play is regarded primarily as socializations, the adult will encourage children to interact. (Gonzalez-Mena p.104)
Some cultures wish to promote calm, placid styles of interaction and temperament, so they prefer less stimulating environments.

Some cultures value activity; others value stillness.

Active cultures promote exploration and movement for infants in order to develop problem-solving skills.

However there is another view…
In some cultures being inactive is a valuable use of time where meditation can be a problem-solving method. Instead of actively engaging in the environment, answers to problems come from the collective unconscious in moments of silence.
People vs Object Orientation

* Standard early childhood practice emphasizes the importance of the physical environment.
* American programs compared with Japanese and Chinese programs have an abundance of toys, materials, and equipment. (Preschool in Three Cultures)
* African American families taught their children to pay more attention to person cues and emphasized the importance of focusing on people rather than objects.
Choice

* One reason for all of the “things” in the environment is our dominant culture’s value on choice.
* The emphasis on self-selection teaches children to be decision-makers who have power over their own lives and learn about freedom and choice in childhood.
* Other cultures see childhood as a time to adapt and take advantage of what they find in the adult environment allowing them to be part of the adult world.
Adult Role

* The adult in a child-centered environment is present as a facilitator who encourages children’s self-initiated explorations. The focus is on self-discovery.
* Another approach would have the adult take ideas from the children’s play and create “emergent curriculum” where learning comes from the child not the adult.
* Play-based curriculum may cause disagreement between families and educators when there is dissatisfaction about the lack of academic learning.
Emphasis on Words vs Nonverbal Communication

* “Low Context Cultures” use lots of words and expect children to learn to do the same
* “High Context Cultures” depend less on words than on other kinds of contextual messages
* Babies who are carried send messages nonverbally through changing body position or tensing up or relaxing muscles. They are encouraged to communicate this way in high context cultures.
Early Language Stimulation

* When people from high context cultures who don’t speak directly to babies come in contact with early childhood professionals, they may feel some pressure to change, even though their methods of nonverbal communication have been passed down from generation to generation and fit their culture well. A general view is that children must be spoken to from infancy on if they are to become good communicators. (Gonzalez-Mena p.115)
Babies who are taught to value language are encouraged to “turn take”, have face to face conversations, and play with language.

Low Context orientation adults pay attention to what children say and then clarify and interpret in their responses.

High Context orientation teaches children to watch and pick up appropriate behaviors from their caregivers.
Defusing A Cross-cultural Encounter

* When we meet someone who doesn’t fit under a standard that we expect them to, we are disappointed because we expect them to be like us.
* Both people encounter this as an unpleasant situation and their reaction to the discomfort can be self-protection and withdrawal.
* This can be a pattern of evasion, which means the two will learn less and less about each other.
Thinking about Power

- We each think our own cultures and our values are the right ones. If you are in a position of power and you have this attitude, it is imperative that you avoid seeing your job as remedial when you cross cultures.

- To become sensitive to cultural differences it is vital that you become aware of your own culture and how it influences the messages you send. No matter how much you know, there is always more to learn.