




Undefended or undefined? The heterogeneity of young children's experiences in Kenya and Brazil

 Jonathan Tudge
Human Development and Family Studies
The University of North Carolina at
Greensboro


Conference on the Undefended
Childhood
Michigan State University
April 3, 2008





Presentation goals and background


- ✦ Why define the undefended?
 - ▣ Traditional research on children and child rearing in Kenya and Brazil, and Black-White comparisons in the US
 - ▣ Certain contexts taken as the "norm" for any given group
 - ▣ Great heterogeneity within any society; social class one source of heterogeneity
 - ▣ Variations in preschool experiences, and what counts as "quality"
- ✦ Comparison of everyday activities (the "natural laboratory" [Cole, 2005] to study culture's role in human development) in cultural groups that are not "maximally different"
- ✦ Focus on activities that may be relevant to school performance
- ✦ Comparisons, yes, but not a "single measuring stick"



Cultural-ecological theory


(a contextualist theory based on the theories of Lev Vygotsky and Urie Bronfenbrenner)

- ✦ The everyday activities and interactions in which individuals engage, that vary by aspects of:
 - ✦ The active individuals involved (age, gender, temperament, motivations, experiences, interests, values, beliefs, etc.)
 - ▣ Those who are the focus of attention
 - ▣ Those who interact with them on a regular basis
 - ✦ The context
 - ▣ The immediate setting (home, child care, workplace, etc.)
 - ▣ More distal settings, of which culture is the most important
 - ✦ Over time
 - ▣ Studying development over time
 - ▣ Situating the research in historical time



Putting the theory into practice. Everyday activities and interactions

- ✦ 18 hours of observations of each child
- ✦ Observations occurred in 2- or 4-hour blocks over the course of a week, in such a way as to "capture" every waking hour
- ✦ Real-time coding of 30-second "windows" every 6 minutes (i.e., a total of 90 minutes over the 18 hours)
- ✦ Coded children's activities, partners, roles, initiation of activities, etc.
- ✦ Observations at home, childcare, and wherever else the children were situated.



Focal activities

- ✦ Lessons (4 sub-categories)
 - ▣ **focus here on academic, interpersonal, and "world" lessons**
- ✦ Work (15 sub-categories)
- ✦ Play (including exploration and entertainment) (12 sub-categories)
 - ▣ **focus here on pretend play and play with academic objects**
- ✦ Conversation (3 sub-categories)
 - ▣ **focus here on conversation with adults**
- ✦ Other (non-focal activities) (6 sub-categories)

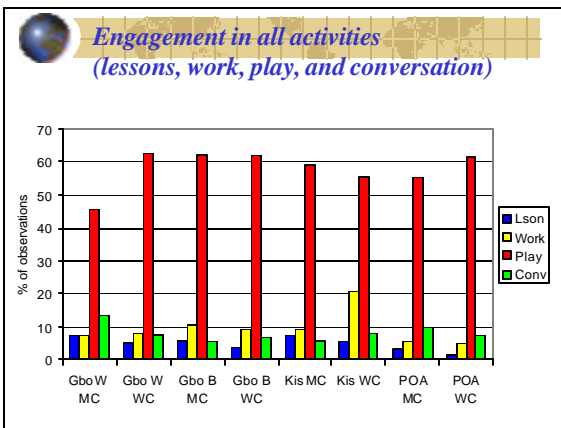


Participants

- ✦ 157 children from 28-45 months (at Time 1), and their parents.
 - ✓ 40 from **Greensboro**, NC, USA, half African American, half European American (Sarah Putnam, Judy Sidden, Fabienne Doucet, Nicole Talley)
 - ✓ 20 from **Kisumu**, Kenya (Dolphine Odero)
 - ✓ 25 from **Porto Alegre**, Brazil (Fernanda Martins, Rafael Spinelli, Giana Frizzo), part of the Porto Alegre Longitudinal Study (Piccinini, Tudge, Lopes, & Sperb, 1998)
 - ✓ 22 from Obninsk, Russia (Natasha Kulakova, Irina Snezhkova)
 - ✓ 20 from Tartu, Estonia (Marika Meltsas Peeter Tammeveski)
 - ✓ 18 from Oulu, Finland (Marikaissa Kontio, Johanna Matinmikko)
 - ✓ 12 from Suwon, Korea (Soeun Lee)
- Cities of medium size
- Half of the families in each city were middle class (by education and occupation), half working class

Participants				
	Gbo W	Gbo B	Kisumu	POA
MC age	36.6	38.3	39.3	37.0
MC SES	52.1	50.2	57.3	55.2
MC n (cc)	11 (9)	9 (2)	10 (6)	10 (8)
WC age	36.9	39.8	40.8	36.1
WC SES	28.9	28.6	21.6	24.6
WC n (cc)	9 (4)	10 (5)	10 (1)	10 (8)
N	20	19	20	20*

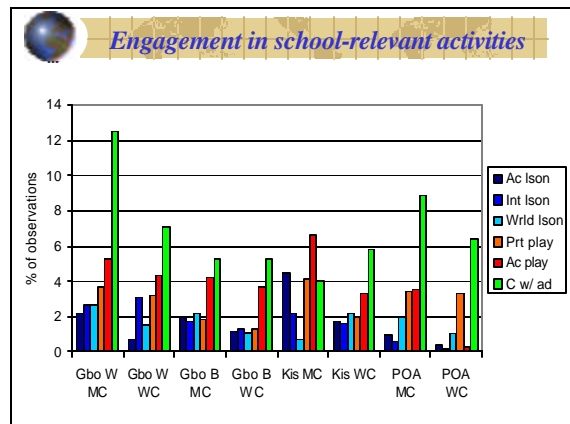
- ### How do they spend their time?
- They're 3 years old—most time spent in play
 - Greensboro middle class played less; slightly more conversation, more “other” (sleeping)
 - Kisumu working-class children engaged in much more work than did others
 - Porto Alegre children, particularly from working-class families, engaged in very few lessons



Work in a working-class family in Kisumu

- Brendah is watching one of her older sisters chopping vegetables to prepare a meal. Brendah asks if she can help, and is given a blunt bread-knife so that she can participate in the chopping. Later on Brendah is watching her mother clean the house when the latter asks Brendah if she would like to help, and sends her to get the dirty clothes, which Brendah first rinses and then brings to her mother for them to be hung (Field Note 1402).

- ### How much did they engage in “school-relevant” activities?
- Middle-class White children in Greensboro most likely to engage in conversations with adults
 - Middle-class children in Kisumu most likely to engage in academic lessons and play with academic objects
 - Working-class children in Porto Alegre very unlikely to participate in academic lessons or play with academic objects
 - Middle-class children in general more likely to participate in academic lessons, pretend play, and play with academic objects



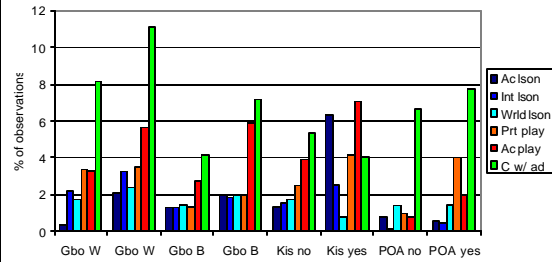


Does attending childcare make a difference?

- Yes, but its meaning varies in different cultures
- More interpersonal lessons and play with academic objects in childcare
- More academic lessons in Greensboro (White and Black) and Kisumu, but not in Porto Alegre
- More conversation in Greensboro (White and Black) and Porto Alegre, but not in Kisumu
- Childcare, in Kisumu, appears to be for academics



Engagement in school-relevant activities, by non-attendance or attendance in childcare



Informal childcare in Greensboro

- Andrea, a Black working-class child, spent a good deal of her time (almost half of the 18 hours that we observed her) in a child-minder's home, generally with her two-year-old sister and two or three other young children. The children spent most of their time playing with the blocks and other toys that were available, eating snacks, and watching the television, which was set to the daytime soap opera the first afternoon we observed Andrea and to cartoons the following morning. The main lessons that the children got were on the importance of sharing the toys and not hurting one another (Field Note 0405)



Formal childcare in Kisumu

- Fredah, a middle-class girl, is in her preschool class one Friday morning a little after 8. The teacher finishes writing some letters on the board, and gets the children to say their names. The alphabet gradually appears, and the children have to repeat it. Fredah does so, while playing with her fingers for a while, but also watching two other children playing with each other's hands, all the while going over the alphabet. The teacher continues with the lesson for almost an hour, occasionally admonishing the children for not sitting straight (Field Note 1304).



Formal childcare in Porto Alegre

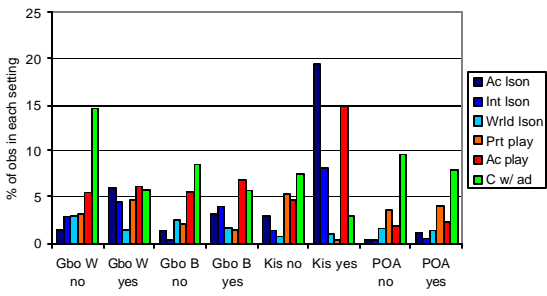
- At the start of the observational period one of her teachers is reading a story which the children are asked to illustrate as she reads. Mariana continues to do that for 10 minutes. However, her time is occupied during the remainder of the observation in dancing to music, playing outside on a slide, in a doll's house, on a spinning wheel with two other children, with a little stove, and in the sand, where she and another little girl pretend to be cooking. After using the toilet, Mariana plays with a toy telephone, pretending to call people, and then with some keys, as well as making bubbles with soapy water. She continues playing with these various things until she goes to the bathroom to wash her hands. Two other children are talking there, and she joins their conversation, while one of the teachers gives the children water to drink (Field Note 16106).



Focusing only on those who attend childcare

- Could it be the case that those who attend childcare are different from those who do not? Apparently not!
- A greater percentage of conversation outside childcare than inside (all cases)
- A greater % of academic and interpersonal lessons inside than out (but very few in POA)
- A greater percentage of play with academic objects inside than outside (but only striking in Kisumu)

Engagement in school-relevant activities, attenders only, outside or inside childcare



Conclusions

- Need to carefully consider the intersection of culture and class (particularly Kisumu and Greensboro)
 - ▣ Middle-class Luo engaged in no more work than did children from Greensboro
 - ▣ Middle-class Whites engaged in 2 times as many lessons and conversation as did working-class Blacks (and working-class Whites and middle-class Blacks)
 - ▣ The different roles played by child care in the four groups
 - Kisumu (preparation for school)
 - Porto Alegre (safe place to play)
 - Greensboro (functions varied by social class and race/ethnicity)
- We don't do justice to any cultural group by equating their children with those who most need defending

Thanks for your attention!

Questions???



- For more details, see: Tudge, J. (2008). *The everyday lives of young children: Culture, class, and child rearing in diverse societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Various papers can be downloaded from: www.uncg.edu/hdf/hdfs_faculty/jon_tudge/jt_papers.htm