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A Contribution to Cross-Cultural Child Development Research. Review of Gustav Jahoda and I.M. Lewis (Eds.), *Acquiring Culture: Cross Cultural Studies in Child Development*


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A Contribution to Cross-Cultural Child Development Research. Review of Gustav Jahoda and I.M. Lewis (Eds.), *Acquiring Culture: Cross Cultural Studies in Child Development*

Abstract

The field now termed *cultural psychology* has begun to take on more importance in theories of child development and psychology as we have come to better understand the Eurocentric bias of Western science. However, cross-cultural studies that combine both psychological and anthropological methods are still rare. This book attempts to show the value of such a combined approach to research in child development.

Disciplines

Child Psychology | Cognitive Psychology | Comparative Psychology | Developmental Psychology | Early Childhood Education | Education | Educational Psychology

A Contribution to Cross-Cultural Child Development Research

Gustav Jahoda and I. M. Lewis (Eds.)
Acquiring Culture: Cross Cultural Studies in Child Development
London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall,
340 pp. ISBN 0-7099-4335-0. \$79.95;
\$104.00, Canada

Review by

Daniel A. Wagner and Laurel Puchner

Gustav Jahoda, professor emeritus of psychology at the University of Strathclyde (Scotland), is author of Psychology and Anthropology. ■ I. M. Lewis, professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics, is author of Social Anthropology in Perspective. ■ Daniel A. Wagner, professor of education and director of the Literacy Research Center at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), is editor of The Future of Literacy in a Changing World. ■ Laurel Puchner is a doctoral student in education at the University of Pennsylvania.

The field now termed *cultural psychology* has begun to take on more importance in theories of child development and psychology as we have come to better understand the Eurocentric bias of Western science. However, cross-cultural studies that combine both psychological and anthropological methods are still rare. This book attempts to show the value of such a combined approach to research in child development.

This edited volume came out of a 1982 workshop held at the London School of Economics, the goal of which was a better understanding of how children acquire the culture of the society in which they happen to be born. Following a lengthy introduction that outlines the history of cultural psychological studies and discusses features of anthropological and psychological methods, are nine chapters, each describing a cross-cultural study in child development. The chapters are geographically and culturally diverse, with the majority focused on Third World cultures. The book concludes with a rich annotated bibliography containing a list of recent studies of ethnography of childhood (compiled by Christina Toren).

As a whole, *Acquiring Culture* supports its contention that psychological and anthropological methods comple-

ment each other, even though only two of the chapters describe studies that fully combine both methodologies. One of these, written by Colwyn Trevarthen, shows how ethnographic evidence suggests a series of stages in early mother-child interactions. Trevarthen then compares Nigerian and Scottish mothers and babies in a laboratory situation to support his stage theory that certain principles of communication are universal. The study breaks new ground in an important developmental area, but his claim of universality is weakened by too great a reliance on Scottish and American subjects.

A second attempt (by Christina Toren) to combine the two methods considers the dual questions of hierarchy and gender in Fiji. By supplementing an examination of cultural representations and exchange relations of hierarchy and gender with a systematic analysis of drawings of schoolchildren, she is able to show how children's constructions of meaning about hierarchy and gender can contradict and complement evidence gathered by purely ethnographic means.

A major thrust of the workshop and book is that one must understand indigenous notions of psychology in order to understand the acquisition of culture. However, although several chapters provide some interesting descriptions of ways in which people in the various societies look at human development, they rarely go beyond mere description and anecdote. Of course, some description can be both interesting and valuable, such as Signe Howell's description of Che-wong (Malaysian) psychology. Joanna Overing's discussion of Piara society (in Venezuela), however, fails to show how indigenous thinking fits into the broader framework of cross-cultural psychology. The discussion by Katherine Platt of childrearing in the Kerkennah islands of Tunisia provides one of the few accounts we have of this topic in North Africa, yet little effort is made to make use of the available literature that attempts to link description to theory in the Muslim world (e.g., Davis, 1983).

A general weakness is a failure of the chapters to live up to claims made in their introductions. John Blacking and Angela Hobart, for instance, each begin their chapter with a lengthy theoretical discussion about certain aspects of child development. However, once they shift to the concrete cultural evidence, the discussions become disappointing. In the first example, the reader leaves unconvinced that the experience of dance and music among the Venda (in South Africa)

is as important a source of cultural transmission as Blacking claims. In the second example, the ethnographic evidence supplied fails to convince one that the nonverbal component of implicit cultural education in Bali is as critical as Hobart claims.

Although a number of the chapters have problems such as those noted above, the volume is a valuable and culturally diverse collection of information on child development. It is rich in ethnographic detail, creating vivid and occasionally fascinating accounts of life in the societies discussed. The chapters are nicely framed by the well-written introduction and by the annotated bibliography at the end. In their introduction, Jahoda and Lewis claim that the "case studies . . . illustrate the crucial importance of grounding studies of children's education in the local ethnographic context with as full an account as possible of indigenous psychological assumptions, general values, and cosmological beliefs" (p. 26). This volume does just that and therefore serves as an important contribution to cross-cultural child development research.

Reference

Davis, S. S. (1983). *Patience and power: Women's lives in a Moroccan village*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

The Fourth One's a Charm

Gerard Egan
The Skilled Helper: A Systematic Approach to Effective Helping (4th ed.)
Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1990.
445 pp. ISBN 0-534-12138-1. \$32.50

Review by

Suzette L. Speight

Gerard Egan, professor of psychology and organizational studies and program coordinator of the Center for Organizational Development at Loyola University of Chicago, is author of Face to Face: The Small Group Experience and Interpersonal Growth and of Change Agent Skills in Helping and Human Service Settings. ■ Suzette L. Speight is lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Ohio State University (Columbus).

Arguably, the primary objectives when training counselors involve a complex balance between the acquisition of skills,