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Cultural diversity in center-based child care: differences and similarities in caregivers' cultural beliefs

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6. Appendix

Combining individualistic and collectivistic ideas

As the studies in this dissertation show, all caregivers' valued both individualistic as collectivistic sets of beliefs. On the work floor, in interaction with colleagues and children, caregivers experience new childrearing situations and meet other beliefs on children and their own role as educators, leading to a constant reconstruction of beliefs. Some of the 'new' ideas, often the official childrearing goals of the child care center, are possibly at odds with the beliefs of the cultural group the caregivers originate from. In this final section of the dissertation we would like to give insight into the difficulties some caregivers seem to experience in the process of beliefs reconstruction. To do so, we performed some additional qualitative analyses of the interview texts. Maxqda offers the possibility to retrieve text fragments in which several codes are overlapping. We selected interview paragraphs containing one train of thoughts on the nature of children or about socialization goals to which an individualistic as well as a collectivistic code was attached. Fragments in which caregivers referred to their ideas about best practices in childrearing were not selected for this analysis, as cultural differences in beliefs were more pronounced in general beliefs rather than in beliefs about best practices (Huijbregts et al., 2008; Huijbregts et al., in press).

In 47 text fragments combinations of individualistic with collectivistic codes were found. Caregivers of all backgrounds seemed to make these combinations, however, especially the immigrant caregivers made several combinations within one interview. Caregivers who combined individualistic and collectivistic codes seemed to work in the same child care centers; these were all culturally diverse centers, both among caregivers and children. Probably in these centers finding a balance between children's individual needs and the group needs are the order of the day.

Although the number of text fragments in which individualistic beliefs were combined with collectivistic ideas was small ($N = 47$), compared to the overall number of codes ($N = 2714$ for collectivistic beliefs, of which 1171 fragments on children's 'sociability' and $N = 1903$ for individualistic beliefs). Although this

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may seem a small sample, the retrieved segments are powerful in illustrating the sometimes difficult considerations caregivers made. Note that the interviews were transcribed verbally, and were literally translated to English, and are thus not always grammatically correct.

Combinations of the collectivistic notion of obedience with the individualistic childrearing goals of independence were found in 11 text fragments, next to four combinations of obedience with being strong-willed. Within these fragments, beliefs about children's individual needs seemed to collide with caregivers' ideas about children being obedient and respectful to adults. This is demonstrated in the interview excerpts below.

'We are very open here in this group; we talk freely with the children. Sure, they are allowed to have their own opinion. But, if they want something or say something, it has to be realistic [within reasonable limits of what is appropriate]. Consequently, whether they like it or not, they have to listen to us.' R. 76, Turkish-Dutch

Similarly, another Turkish-Dutch caregiver commented on children stating their opinions:

'On some topics children can definitely have their own opinion. But if I, as a caregiver, do not agree with what they say, I'll tell them 'no, that's not how it's going to happen'. So sometimes, they are not actually allowed to have their own opinion. They sometimes say very strange things too. Then I tell them 'you shouldn't talk like that, that's not appropriate'. R. 64, Turkish-Dutch caregiver

From these fragments, it becomes clear that the caregivers recognize that stating an opinion is important for children's development. This is considered an important socialization goal in Dutch childrearing (Deković & Pels, 2006) and thus in Dutch child care centers. Furthermore, it can be seen as an individualistic quality, attuned to socialization in the Dutch society. At the same time, however, caregivers feel that they as adults know best, and should have the final say. In the second fragment above, the caregiver emphasizes that what children say has to be neat and respectful. This theme was stressed by several immigrant-Dutch caregivers.

'The most important things I would like to teach them before they go to school are social skills and independence. Playing together is very impor-

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tant, here in the child care center, and in the future, at school. Verbal assertiveness and stating their own opinion are things I also find important for children. However, the way some of these children talk to their parents... Stating your opinion is one thing, but it has to be neat and polite; after all, a child has to be respectful to adults.' R. 48, Moroccan-Dutch

All these caregivers talk about verbal assertiveness and children having their own opinions in a social context, and refer to social norms. The following fragment is of a Dutch caregiver, who also speaks of assertiveness in a group setting, however, the emphasis she places is rather different from that in the fragments above.

'To stand up for oneself, to dare to state your own opinion, these are things I find very important. When they stand up for themselves, for instance, when an other child takes away a toy, that is good for their self-confidence. I think that is something they have to learn, especially in a group. You have to dare to offer resistance; otherwise you will have a problem in a group setting [as an individual]. It is very important that they [the children] learn to stand up for themselves, because they are in groups [here].' R. 37, Dutch caregiver

From the excerpt above it is quite remarkable that the Dutch caregiver seems to experience the group context as a possible threat to children's individuality. None of the immigrant caregivers mentioned the group with such negativity. On the contrary, they stressed the group context as offering children opportunities for learning important social skills as sharing toys, making friends and being sociable persons.

'I find it very important for the children to become independent persons. Independent [persons] with enough self-confidence, well-balanced. That they treat other people well, and take good care of themselves. And are nice to each other. Yes, their independence should be expressed in caring for themselves and for others. I mean in the group, we play together, we clear up together, and we have a shared responsibility that all goes well. That is most important to me, that we have a fine day together [here at the center].' R. 30, Surinamese-Dutch

Furthermore, the collectivistic theme of children's sociability was combined 22 times with the individualistic theme of children's independence. In addition, being sociable was combined six times with being strong willed, four times with

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children's self-confidence and two times with children's cognitive development. In these fragments, caregivers often spoke about individual children and their personal needs while being in a group setting. However, caregivers did not seem to consider situations where a balance has to be found between children's sociability and conformity on the one hand and individualistic themes as children's autonomy on the other as possibly conflicting. Children's sociability is an important socialization goals in all cultures, especially for toddlers, this may explain why none of the caregivers experienced this theme as conflicting to the more individualistic socialization goals. The three excerpts below illustrate this.

'It is important that they learn to share, not only sharing, but also knowing that others are allowed to play with the toys as well. That they should take turns. That's important. Some children are quiet, they think 'let it go', but we stimulate them to say 'now I want to have a go'. R. 65, Surinamese-Dutch

'I like it when the children go around well with each other, when they all play together and are nice to each other. Of course subgroups develop, individuals..., the older kids form a group as well as the younger ones. That's why we make the older kids help the young children, so they get into contact with each other'. R. 62, Moroccan-Dutch

'We are together here [in the group], we have a nice day together and everybody is included. Whether you're 8 months or 8 weeks and are in the playpen all day, or whether you're nearly four years old and ready to go to kindergarten. Everybody belongs, because we are all unique, but still they all belong to the group. Because they are with that group. That's important to me'. R 90, Dutch

The above presented interview lines served to illustrate the findings of this dissertation that caregivers' with different cultural backgrounds value both individualistic and collectivistic socialization goals, and that a specific emphasis on certain beliefs can be recognized for each cultural group (Greenfield et al., 2003; Valsiner & Litvinovic, 1996). The text fragments further fit the notion that caregivers' childrearing beliefs are adapting to the everyday experiences with childrearing in particular contexts, and become dynamically interwoven with the beliefs of a cultural community (Bornstein & Cote, 2003; Harkness & Super, 1999; Raeff, 2000; Valsiner & Litvinovic, 1996). They further illustrate that some situations can

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evoke quite contradicting emotions. Such inner conflict may lead to feelings of uncertainty and perhaps even to inconsistent childrearing, possibly lowering overall process quality. Therefore, findings like these deserve more attention in future research, as well as in the education and training of teachers.

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