## THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF YOUNG CHILDREN

This book is based on lengthy observations of three-year-olds in the United States, Russia, Estonia, Finland, Korea, Kenya, and Brazil. The focus is on how children spend their time, and who they are with, at an age when they are learning what it means to be a part of their culture. The book provides unique insight into variations in young children's lives in different societies and from different social-class groups. This book also has a clear theoretical rationale and illustrates how the observational methods were based on the theory.

Jonathan Tudge is a professor of human development and family studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and has been a visiting professor at the Institute of Psychology, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and at the University of Tartu, Estonia. He completed his undergraduate and master's degrees in England, at Lancaster and Oxford, respectively, and his Ph.D. in human development and family studies at Cornell University in the United States. Before becoming a professor, he worked as a teacher of young children in England, Russia, and the United States. His research examines cultural–ecological aspects of young children's development both within and across a number of societies, particularly focusing on the years before and immediately following the entry to school. He has coauthored, with Michael Shanahan and Jaan Valsiner, another book published by Cambridge University Press, *Comparisons in Human Development: Understanding Time and Context*, and has also published more than 60 journal articles and book chapters.

# The Everyday Lives of Young Children

## *Child Rearing in Diverse Societies*

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*Dedicated to*

*Rosanne, about 30 months at the time, without whom the research may never have begun*

*and*

*Lia, without whose love and encouragement the book may never have ended*

# Contents

# Preface

I'm writing this on the last day of the year in 2006 and thinking back to some time in the autumn of 1989 when the idea for the research to be reported in this book was very new. It wasn't supposed to take so long, and I wasn't expecting that what began as an intended comparison of the everyday lives of young children in the United States and the Soviet Union would develop a life of its own. But my initial reasoning hasn't changed much. Then, as now, I felt that there was a real lack of knowledge about how young children spent their time, engaged in what sorts of activities, interacted with whom, and got involved in the myriad aspects of their lives. This was an important lack, because one of the ways in which we can understand how cultures influence children's developments and how, in turn, children influence their own development (and in so doing help change their cultural group) is by focusing on these types of typically occurring activities and interactions. It's not that we don't have any information about this topic, but most of the good observational work that we do have is restricted to the lives of children growing up in rural areas of countries often referred to as "Third World" or "developing," rather than to the lives of children in North America, Europe, or other parts of the industrialized world. For information about children's lives in these parts of the world, we have to rely largely on parents' reports of their children's activities or observations conducted under situations of constraint. Some of those constraints are rather subtle, such as observing periods of play or recording mother–child dialogue in the home (the only constraint being that the mother is at home with the child) or observing children in just one of the many settings in which they find themselves, such as a child-care center. However, others are more obvious, such as recording mealtime activities at home when all family members are required to be present and the television is not to be switched on or asking the mother and child to play with various objects in the confines of the psychology laboratory. My goal, however, was

to observe young children wherever they were to be found for long enough to get a sense of the typical activities and interactions in which they were involved, the only constraint being the presence of an observer. This, I think, was accomplished, as the pages of this book will testify. In so doing, I hope to have illustrated the ways in which culture and children's development are intimately connected.

A second goal was to conduct research in which the guiding theory was directly related to the methods of data collection and form of analysis. In this book, I've therefore laid out quite explicitly the metatheoretical assumptions of my work, showing how they are linked both to cultural–ecological theory and to the methods used in the Cultural Ecology of Young Children (CEYC) study, the name I gave to this project. The name was chosen partly to honor Urie Bronfenbrenner's 1979 book, *The Ecology of Human Development*, because his views, as they developed during the 1980s and 1990s, were clearly influential as my thinking evolved. However, I also wanted to stress the fact that human development is above all a cultural phenomenon – whether we treat culture at the level of an entire society or as a distinct group within any society. This, too, I hope, is well illustrated in the pages that follow.

The CEYC project is still continuing, as I write, more than 15 years from when it started. That's partly because the study is longitudinal, with data gathered not only when the children were three years of age (although the book's focus is on the activities and interactions of the three-year-olds) but also through their first years in school. The length of time is also a result of the fact that the data in the various countries were not all gathered at the same time but spread over about a decade. The last children to be included in the project, from southern Brazil, are ending their first year of formal schooling now. As you might imagine, there's a huge amount of data – each child in the study was observed for a total of 20 hours – and, at times, when trying to organize all the coded data and the field notes from the observations, I felt rather like George Eliot's character Mr. Casaubon, in *Middlemarch*, of whom she wrote: "He had assembled his voluminous notes, and had made that sort of reputation which precedes performance, – often the larger part of a man's fame" (1872/1988, p. 77). Fortunately, unlike poor Mr. Casaubon, I not only met and married my "Dorothea" but also wrote this book.

# Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank all of the families who gave so generously of their time. They allowed us into their homes, let us follow them wherever they went with their children, consented to be interviewed, completed questionnaires, and (although they must, at times, have wished that no one was there to see what was happening) did a remarkable job of appearing to behave quite naturally during the 20 hours or more that we were with each of them. The children, around three years of age during the observations, let themselves be equipped with small wireless microphones and allowed someone to observe them doing all sorts of things in all sorts of places. We are extremely grateful to all of them.

Second, this research could never have been done without a group of highly dedicated observers and collaborators who, because of the nature of this research, had to be from the cultural group they were observing. They first had to learn a complex coding scheme and then spent so many hours following the children around, writing the codes, writing field notes, filming for a while, and becoming, for a short while at least, a part of the families they were observing. Sometimes it was hard for both them and the children when it was time to leave a particular family and move on to the next one. Sarah Putnam and Judy Sidden deserve the greatest thanks of all. Not only did they collect the data from the European American families in Greensboro, but they were also involved from the inception of the project and spent almost two years of their graduate student lives helping to design and refine the coding scheme. We were considerably aided in this endeavor by Barbara Rogoff, Gilda Morelli, and Cathy Angelillo, for it was the six of us who worked together on the early versions of the coding scheme. All of the observers, without exception, are due many, many thanks: Fabienne Doucet and Nicole Talley (the African American families in Greensboro); Natalya Kulakova and Irina Snezhkova (the Russian families in Obninsk);

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