

The questions asked about preschools in this book are: What are the preschools in Japan, China, and the United States meant to be and to do? How do they try to do so? What do parents, teachers, and specialists think about their own school and, by comparison, those in the other two countries? Preschool is organized in five chapters: an introduction, three lengthy chapters about each school, and a comparative chapter. The authors describe a typical day at each school and country, based on ethnographic study and a videotape made at each school. They then showed the tapes to teachers and specialists in their own school, and summarize their views expressed while seeing the tapes. They also present teachers', parents' and others' comments made after viewing the tapes of the other countries' preschools. The authors then present their own analyses of the relationships of preschools to family change, the economics of schools and the teaching profession, the roles of women and men, social class, and other characteristics in each country. The authors also asked 2-300 teachers, parents, and other specialists in each country to say why society should have preschools, what children should learn, and what good preschool teachers are like. These data, and the authors own conclusions, are presented in the final chapter.

Each country's views on the others reveals a great deal about both observers and observed. Americans watch the Chinese school video and say, "...so much regimentation. It looks more like the army than a preschool." (p. 92). Many are appalled at the Chinese practice of "boarding schools" for such young children, and at the scenes of scheduled group toilet visits. Chinese watch the American schools and are upset by the "selfishness" of children who think "the whole world revolves around" them. On the wall of a Chinese boarding school is a slogan evoking the explicit goal of the Chinese school to make children respectful, compliant citizens: "Teachers are even better than parents." (p. 209). Meanwhile, many American preschool teachers speak of the great neediness, loneliness, and desperation they sense in many parents' lives." (p. 210), and describe the American teachers' ideal role as "...nurturant, supportive, even therapeutic rather than subservient or adversarial. A Japanese mother observes what she sees as the small class size in the American school in Honolulu (about 11 - although the American teacher worries it is twice as big as ideal!), and the intense teacher involvement with individual students that small ratios permits, and suggests that the American children will become too dependent on the teacher always being there to organize play or settle disputes.

Japanese parents and teachers said that "sympathy/empathy/concern" was the most important thing to learn in preschool, and said that skills in listening (rather than talking) were most important. While over half the American respondents and 67% of the Chinese said that preschools should give their child a good academic start, only 2% of Japanese did. Because of the worry about later fierce academic competition, Japanese preschool is seen as an early haven, although at the same time parents struggle to put children into high status schools. The Japanese preschools, in the eyes of its teachers, provide the truly fundamental abilities needed in school: "perseverance, concentration, and the ability to function

in a group." (p. 192).

The authors attend to what the specialists in each country raised as their own cultural concerns. In China, the issue was the consequences of the one-child policy, and concerns over rearing a generation of "spoiled" children, who would not be appropriately imbued with a sense of control, order, and calmness, and an understanding of their obligation to the State. In the United States, the issues were of working women and sex roles; in Japan, social class and status, and providing children with group social experience. Surprisingly, children's voices remain largely silent in this book. Data are not presented using children's own comments, nor were there test or questionnaire measures comparing children, across the three countries. This is the one glaring weakness in a book that strives for multivocality.

Although only one preschool was studied in each country, the local observers of the videos were quick to tell the authors about what was or was not typical for each school, thereby revealing important intracultural divisions, factions, and struggles. The authors provide a sense of place, historical development, family change, and social class and economic background for each society. The authors point out many common concerns and demographic pressures shared across these cultures, based on the work of LeVine and White, among others: the emergence of small families, pressures for intense investment in children early in life for educational and career success, work pressures on parents, and the low pay of preschool teachers, who are virtually all women.

This book vividly brings to life the everyday world of each school. It is written in a style accessible to students and the public as well as professionals. It offers an outstanding combination of local, national, and intercultural perspectives on what preschools mean to each cultural place. It should be on the list of "must read" books in education and human development, not only for specialists in preschools.-T. S. Weisner