

NEGOTIATING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN AN AMERICAN EARLY EDUCATION  
CLASSROOM: THE CASE OF A BICULTURAL AND BILINGUAL TODDLER

by

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(Under the Direction of Mariana Souto-Manning)

ABSTRACT

Cultural contexts shape the identities of young bicultural and bilingual children. In this study, I looked at the development of a bicultural and bilingual 2-year-old's social interactions in an American educational setting using a sociocultural framework. Social interactions and the culture of the classroom were assessed through participant observations, teacher interviews, and parent questionnaires. Other supplemental data gathering techniques were implemented to further explore the world of this specific child. The results of this study give teachers insight into how the cultural practices in early education classrooms affect the identities that this bicultural and bilingual child performs in specific environmental contexts.

INDEX WORDS: Bicultural, Bilingual; Early Childhood Education; Sociocultural; Social Interactions; Case Study; Young Children; Toddler

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The current influx of adult immigrants into the United States has created an environment incorporated of many different ethnic and cultural identities, especially in the classroom (Espinosa, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2006b). Because such diversity exists in classrooms today, the contextual experiences children are exposed to are increasingly influential, particularly for bicultural and bilingual children navigating through diverse cultural contexts (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). Therefore, not only is the culture of the classroom integral to fully “examine the interplay of cultural influences in different contexts” (Wong & Rowley, 2001, p. 61), but the cultural experiences children bring into the classroom are as well. To understand the process of social interactions in young bicultural and bilingual children, researchers must investigate children’s interactions within contexts that exist in the classroom while addressing the influences their own culture may have (Miller & Manglesdorf, 2005; Rogoff, 2003). In this case, culture is broadly defined so as to incorporate any practices that occur at school or home that hold value for those actively participating in the environment.

The focus of this thesis is to explore how Jia (pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants), a 2-year-old bilingual Korean American girl, negotiates social interactions through varying contexts within an early education classroom. Early education is defined as infancy to preschool. Information regarding the Korean population will help inform the purpose, problem and implications of this study. In the 2000 Census, Koreans made up 10.6% of the 10,242,998 Asians who immigrated to the United States

(Barnes & Bennett, 2002), and in the state of Georgia, Koreans currently make up 2.8% of the Asian population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008a). While these percentages may seem small, Koreans are the fastest growing Asian immigrant population in the United States (Yu, Choe, & Han, 2002). Therefore, the lens is focused on a particular ethnic and cultural group, allowing for insight into specific aspects of the target bicultural and bilingual child's world.

Although research has been done involving Korean's lives in the United States, many questions still remain, particularly concerning the children of Korean born parents (Lee, 2002). Because the size of the Korean population in the United States is growing, more research should be focused on this cultural group (Yu, Choe, & Han, 2002). In particular, research involving the experiences of American born Korean children in the classroom should be conducted.

This paper attempts to understand how Jia, a bicultural and bilingual child, interacts socially based on contextual experiences and how the influences within those contexts can help inform the development of supportive early education classroom environments. In this way, children's social interactions may be fostered. Addressing the cultural nature of the classroom, as well as the cultural influences the child brings into the classroom will seek to provide insight for teachers in a culturally diverse early education classroom (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). Cultural diversity in the classroom is defined as any classroom that has children from multiple ethnicities, for the purposes of this study.

#### Statement of the Problem

Although research has been conducted on experiences affecting social interactions of older children of diverse cultural groups, little has been done with younger children. Haritos's (2003) study sought to understand how young children's linguistic identities in the classroom develop through social interaction, but the youngest child involved was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Other

studies have explored young children's identity processes, but few have addressed identity in regards to infants and toddlers social interactions (Nasir & Saxe, 2003; Nesdale & Flessler, 2001; Smith, Walker, Fields, Brookens, & Seay, 1999; Soto, 2002).

Previous studies have explored the culture of the classroom, in middle schools, and have found that too often children's cultures are incorporated into the classroom without consideration for the individually specific experiences that each child may have outside of the classroom (Spencer et al., 2001). Educators may not have the resources they need to bring those experiences into the classroom, stemming from a number of circumstances that include familial involvement and economic status (Ladson-Billings, 1999). As a result, the context of the children's cultures is forgotten, and the cultural concepts introduced in the classroom are unilaterally applied, scratching the surface of what culture means (Spencer et al., 2001). Cultures of children in the preschool and kindergarten classrooms are often not utilized in creating an educational environment that would otherwise be "the basis for academic learning and achievement" (Espinosa, 2005, p. 839). When this occurs, children receive conflicting cultural experiences that may influence their social interactions and the perception of themselves that develops as a result (Garcia, 1993 as cited in Espinosa, 2005; Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001).

How bicultural and bilingual children perceive themselves becomes contextually relevant because in the United States, "forty-seven million [people] speak a language other than English at home" (Capps, Passel, Perez-Lopez, & Fix, 2003). It is important to create a link between experiences at home and school for bicultural and bilingual children. Their two worlds can be linked together by using Bronfenbrenner's concept of the mesosystem that acts "as a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the developing person becomes an active

participant” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 209), specifically multisetting participation. This is an important developmental step for children that can either result in growth or regression (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The interrelations between school, home and communities facilitate interactions that allow children and educators to learn from one another through cultural tools, such as valued practices. Exploring these shared cultural experiences can lead to a deeper understanding of children’s developing identities (Rogoff, 2003).

### Purpose

In contemporary research today, the task of understanding interactions in culturally specific contexts has been difficult, especially when exploring young children (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). The concept of identity, rooted in social interactions, for a young child is difficult to determine, and thus understand, due to the complexities involved in such a dynamic, multi-faceted concept (Smith et al., 1999; Soto, 2002).

Although difficult, this thesis aims to provide insight into this subject by observing the interactions that one bicultural and bilingual child has while in an American monolingual English early education classroom. In attempting to understand the influence that the interactions have on the children, such influential features of the classroom will be exposed. The knowledge of how the child perceives the salience of certain behaviors in particular contextual situations will provide insight into what specific aspects of the classroom affect the child in specific ways (Miller & Mangelsdorf, 2005; Salmivalli & Issacs, 2005; Wong & Rowley, 2001).

To understand how the classroom culture impacts young bicultural and bilingual children, teacher interviews will provide insider perspectives as to which cultural practices in the classroom are perceived to impact this child. The parents’ perceptions of the child’s social interactions in different cultural contexts were sought to gain information from those close to the

child, but not directly involved in the inner-workings of the classroom. Using these exploratory techniques, this study provides insight into what goes on in the classroom, and aims to present a piece of the puzzle that is needed to understand what actions and experiences affect bicultural and bilingual children's social interactions in the classroom.

Research questions that address the aims of this study were:

1. In which ways do the social interactions of a 2-year-old old bicultural and bilingual Korean girl develop in the context of a monolingual American early education classroom?
  - a. In what ways does the cultural environment of the classroom affect her social interactions?
  - b. In what ways do the contexts in the classroom affect her social interactions?
2. In which ways does the heritage culture affect her social interactions?
  - a. What actions are taken by her parents to facilitate socialization into one or both of the cultures?

To accurately and appropriately answer these questions, a comprehensive review of the literature must be presented. The focus is on a bicultural and bilingual child, so the history of their experiences in American schools is central to recognizing the changes that have occurred over time. Because culture is integral in every child's life, the theory behind the sociocultural framework will be discussed as well. Identity development, culture of the classroom, and Korean culture literature will be examined to understand how the process of developing identities within an American early education classroom community occurs for a child immersed in a Korean home.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Historical Background

To recognize actions in the early education classroom of today that may affect bicultural and bilingual children's social interactions, I believe the historical practices that have existed in classrooms should be discussed. It is essential to understand the socio-historical aspects of diversity in the classroom before further steps can be made in determining the factors that influence the social interactions of bicultural and bilingual children. Examining the socio-historical context of the classroom for young children is crucial, as their sophisticated capacities for learning from the environment are becoming increasingly recognized (Pollard, 1990).

The American public school system began as informal instruction within the family and did not become compulsory until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. During this colonial period, schooling became a way for the community to formally socialize the children. Not only was this practice mandatory for local children, but the United States initially viewed it as a tool to civilize Native Americans so that they would assimilate into American society (Rogoff, 2003). The belief that children needed to be civilized informed the inferiority paradigm which stemmed from the belief that all people dissimilar to the non-White citizens were inferior solely because they were not White (Goodwin, Cheruvu & Genishi, 2008).

This view was loosely carried forward within the sociocultural context of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century migration of immigrants into the United States. Upon the school system's inception, the United States sought to "Americanize" immigrant students, but no formal policies existed. The students were assimilated due to the encouraged "Americanization" methods used in the school

system (Rand Corp., 2004). Because of this, the cultures of the children were more often than not recognized in the classroom, as educators took a reductionist, or deficit approach that failed to acknowledge the involvement of culture in the development of supportive environments. (Goodwin, Cheruvu, & Genishi, 2008; Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). This reductionist approach therefore affected the connections the children made about their cultures and themselves.

Other societal factors influenced not only the way the children perceived their own identities, but also influenced the way “American” others perceived the children in the classroom. The perceptions others held in relation to the immigrant children’s cultures played a significant role in the progressive development of how culture was viewed in the classroom. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a shift towards honoring culture with bilingual and dual-language programs was seen in the school system (Huntington, 2004). Slowly, educators were beginning to see bilingualism as a resource and as a positive element of diversity in the classroom (Adair & Tobin, 2008; Lee, 2008). Although controversies still exist around these methods, the move to integrating immigrants’ cultures in the classroom is occurring.

Exploring the past shows us that educating children in culturally diverse public school classrooms is not a new concept. However, many misconceptions still exist in the minds of educators regarding how culture is viewed in terms of bicultural and bilingual children, especially when it translates to early education classrooms (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). There is evidence to suggest that culture is thought of as static. This is recognized in Perez and Torres-Guzmán’s (2002) statement that the integration of popular cultural symbols, such as the piñata, is not representative of the evolving nature of culture as it exists in the outside world. Merely utilizing a symbol that has been brought into the mainstream culture does not relay

insider cultural experiences that could be more beneficial in the classroom as representations of that culture.

Other misconstrued assumptions deal with overgeneralizations of ethnic groups when appearances and languages are similar. Offering homogenous characterizations to differing cultural and ethnic groups is disrespectful to each culture, and it is therefore not honoring it within the classroom (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). Sweeping statements also provide evidence for the lack of knowledge or education that is provided. This could be related to the socio-political atmosphere that exists within the specific situational context or culture of the school.

An alternate way of approaching overgeneralizations addressing the idea that each child embodies all of the cultural characteristics that exist is to look at the cultural-historical context. Examining the environment in this way enables educators to look past the generalities and broad assumptions that may exist about other cultures, and delve deeper to better comprehend the “history and valued practices of cultural groups” (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 20). Educators’ familiarization of other cultures in diverse classrooms might then enable them to create an environment more supportive of cultural nuances.

Although recent, Vygotsky has influenced the way researchers think about the classroom for the past 30 to 40 years, specifically in relation to the influence that a supportive learning environment can provide (Pollard, 1990). An environment that supports children in their learning is successful through a Vygotskian lens because their experiences are “not independent of the social, historical, and cultural context” (Sanchez, 1999, p. 2). I believe that to separate these contexts from those of the classroom would be a disservice to educators and children.



Benefits of a supportive classroom that incorporates these contexts could diminish due to feelings educators have regarding their own culture in relation to others, or ethnocentrism (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Ethnocentrism is a critical concept to consider when addressing the historical context of culture in education. This involves “making judgments that another cultural community’s ways are immoral, unwise, or inappropriate based on one’s own cultural background without taking into account the meaning and circumstances of events in that community” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 15). Some educators may prescribe to this notion subconsciously when curriculums are implemented that use the mainstream culture as the model for the classroom (Liu, 1998; Zeichner, 1992). An example of this is when the ethnic or cultural minority in the classroom is thought to need enriching mainstream cultural experiences to make them more “American” (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002).

The mainstream culture in American society is composed of Western thoughts and ideals that are not always consistent with the beliefs of the various other cultures that make up the ethnic or culturally diverse pockets of society (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). Various cultures coexist within the United States, and most groups are guilty of ethnocentrism in some form because each of us bases our assumptions on what we know individually (Rogoff, 2003). Educating society that it is okay for people to live by a value system other than our own would be ideal, but we are not naïve to think that would be everyone’s belief (Rogoff, 2003; Souto-Manning, 2006b).

Ethnocentrism is a complex concept, and it is difficult to shed these thoughts because people may grow up thinking that their culture is the one that everyone shares. It is not until we grow up and we are exposed to various experiences that we realize other cultures exist and that people do things in different ways. Because this notion is so deeply rooted in our minds, it is

hard to imagine other possibilities. Ideally, subscription to beliefs concerning practices within the classroom should not be bound by the mainstream culture's ideals because educators can enrich the lives of the children by exposing them to the idea that one way is not the only way. It is in this way that children are introduced to respectful ways of inquiring about other cultural practices (Rogoff, 2003).

Informing educators of the notion of understanding and valuing other cultures is important, but that step rests in the broader context of the society they live in (Zeichner, 1992). Historically in the United States, culturally oriented controversies have clouded the atmosphere of diversified classrooms. The context surrounding the implemented practices stems from people in powerful positions. Lourdes Diaz Soto's (2002) study of thirteen 7 to 13 year-old bicultural and bilingual children examined the affect that society had on the perceptions that children created regarding their own situations. In that community, the superintendent of the school proclaimed himself to be the "bilingual education abolitionist" (Wall Street Journal as cited in Soto, 2002, p. 600). As a result, the bilingual program was replaced with an English-only curriculum, and the children's cultural voices were no longer supported in the classroom (Soto, 2002).

The amount of support that children receive in a classroom is also related to the historical and present nature of the relationship that exists between the United States and other nations (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). Some propose that bicultural children perceive the relationship that exists between society and their cultural group. Ogbu (1987) believes that elementary school children internalize these perceptions gained from society, as well as the information they receive from within their own cultural group. Therefore, the historical nature of relationships between society and cultural groups are important. Children in kindergarten have been found to

use that information to determine the salience of certain representations of their identity through interactions in the classroom (Wright & Taylor, 1995). Children in Soto's (2002) study perceived hostility between their society and cultural group. Today, the political relationship is strained between the United States and many nations (Cronin, 2001, Daalder, 2001). Due to this situation, the perceptions that people have and the assumptions they make about other cultures are influenced by their exposure to these strained relationships vis-à-vis the media (Villani, 2001).

In this regard, the socio-political and socio-historical nature of the way cultures are viewed in this country affect the importance that is placed in honoring children's cultures in the classroom (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Ogbu, 1990; Rogoff, 2003, Sanchez, 1999). The community's stance "regarding the validation of its own culture and the learning of a new one" (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002, p. 10) influences the children's degree of involvement in the classroom. The extent to the investments that the school has in promoting diverse cultures depends on their response to the diversity in the community (Pollard, 1990). The school's commitment to providing a supportive environment that is respectful of the children's' cultures is integral to engaging the children and their families because when children are engaged in the classroom, they can develop as active participants within the classroom community (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002; Rogoff, 2003).

### Sociocultural Theoretical Framework

Approaching social interactions in young bicultural and bilingual children from a developmental perspective is useful. However, it does not allow for further exploration of how that child performs their identities in the classroom once influenced by the culture that surrounds

them, specifically in Jia's case. To understand the experiences that influence Jia's social interactions, I believe the cultural nature of the child should be explored.

This child brings social and cultural experiences into the classroom (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). However, some of those experiences may not be relevant within the context of her classroom. Therefore, the experiences in the classroom may possibly contradict the valued cultural practices outside of the school environment. Some valued cultural practices in the American classroom can take on different meanings within that sociocultural context for the child. Educators can create smoother transitions between conflicting cultural contexts by understanding the role that the child's culture has in her meaning making from her lived experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Honoring Jia's Korean culture creates a multilayered culture in the classroom that exposes the children to other social and cultural contexts (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). Using Vygotsky's idea that the social and historical contexts shape children's experiences, the social interactions that occur in the classroom represent an "interpsychological (interpersonal) activity and then within the child as an intrapsychological (intrapersonal) activity" (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 163 as cited in Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004, p. 7). This idea supports the sociocultural view that the experiences that she receives in the early education classroom, as a result of the mediating influence of the teachers, affects development as she develops as a participant in the cultural community of the classroom (Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004; Rogoff, 2003).

Sociocultural theory focuses on the fact that culture plays a significant role in the lives of individuals. In particular, theorists look at the "complex relationship between culture and cognition" (Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004, p. 7). This concept is important because of the direct connection between cognition and developing a sense of self, or identity. Also, including the

culture and the contexts in the classroom using a sociocultural framework allows for the specific nature of the child's culture to be revealed. To better understand the influences that the social and cultural contexts have on Jia's social interactions, the classroom contexts should be explored, and she should be respected as a unique individual multiple cultural layers so her story is appropriately presented.

### Identity

To develop a sense of self, ongoing interactions with others and the environment is necessary (Miller & Mangelsdorf, 2005). Young children in early education classrooms are afforded the opportunity to interact in and with the environment (Souto-Manning, 2006b). The relationships that children form with those in the environment, as well as with the environment itself are important because the "self is the self only when it is connected with others and placed in a social field of relationships" (Markus & Kitayama, 2003, p. 279). The interactions children experience thus influence their meaning making regarding what aspects of their experiences they will incorporate into what they reference as their self (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990).

Socially, when children are developing a sense of self, or identity, they have the innate need to belong. Social identity theory explores this concept and proposes that the perceptions that children create develop from the need to belong. Children will perceive others similar to them as belonging to an in-group, and will place dissimilar peers in an out-group. For a child who is the cultural or ethnic minority in an elementary school classroom, the status of belonging to the in or out-group is important to their identity and self-esteem in the classroom (Nesdale & Flessler, 2001; Soto, 2002).

The idea of a sense of self, as with other concepts that have been shown to vary across cultural contexts, can be perceived differently cross-culturally (Spiro, 1993). For many Asians specifically, the idea of self is not individualized and incorporates others into the boundaries one creates around their identity (Markus & Kitayama, 1991 as cited in Spiro, 1993). To examine an Asian child in an American early education classroom, the notion of identity and representation of the self portrayed in the classroom needed to be recognized and considered for this study.

According to Markus and Kitayama (2003), place matters. The significance of an environment for children is completely dependent on the context within that environment, and the concept of self-esteem therefore varies between cultural contexts. The relevance of culturally grounded concepts, such as self and self-esteem, should constantly be questioned when examining the world of Jia, a Korean American child (Markus & Kitayama, 2003).

Although self-esteem can be an integral component when bicultural and bilingual children expose characteristics of their identities through interactions, the appropriateness of the construct should be discussed in the case of a non-Western child. Western constructs are often applied inappropriately to cultures in which they have no place (Rogoff, 2003). Recognizing that differences may exist between Western constructs and the way other cultures view them is important to respectfully represent children's identity processes (Markus & Kitayama, 2003).

The practices that are valued in the classroom construct the culture that exists in that environment (Gay, 2002). The interactions that occur as a result of the culture of the classroom shape the process of determining which behaviors children will utilize in contexts within the classroom (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990). The chosen cultural practices in the classroom are a result of the educators' attempt or willingness to challenge the "implicit American classroom culture" (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002, p. 12) and create an environment

that either creates learning opportunities or barriers for children. Children make sense of the cultural classroom experiences based on their perceptions of the more general societal context, and filter the experiences to arrive at the meaning they create (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002).

The classroom culture is important to children's social interactions, especially when the cultural context is dissimilar to the cultural experiences at home. Attempts to link the cultural practices will enable the child to navigate the culturally different environments. Linking cultural practices at school to those at home creates a bridge between the worlds, and this creates less confusion for children in deciding what aspects of their identities will be represented in which contexts (Cairney, 2000).

Bridging the two cultural contexts in which children interact is an "attempt to reconcile or unite two apparently different or opposing practices" (Souto-Manning & Dice, in press, p. 1). This process is called syncretism and it allows the child to merge cultural experiences together (Duranti & Ochs, 1997). The result is a product of the socialization practices utilized in the classroom and at home to expose children to the cultural practices valued in those contexts (Souto-Manning & Dice, in press). The respect for cultural diversity enables children to not view the cultural practices at home and school as conflicting (Hull & Schultz, 2002).

The syncretic practices that children may employ in an effort to merge the classroom and home culture are not a static process. It is not "a transient stage which will disappear" (Stewart, 1999, p. 41) because the cultures we are exposed to are constantly interacting, creating complex hybrid concepts of a sense of self (Said, 1993 as cited in Stewart, 1999). Children's formation of a blended cultural environment allows them to explore the cultural space in the classroom. Intertwining the cultures creates a third space for them to exist in, determining "why certain contexts of development become particularly meaningful" (Gutiérrez, 2005, p. 10). The third

space then allows children to become more aware of the behaviors appropriate to that environment (Souto-Manning & Dice, in press). Crossing the cultural boundaries of the classroom and at home can create shifts in identity salience in environments children navigate (Gutiérrez, 2005).

Children's awareness of culture in the classroom develops from the socialization practices educators implement. These socialization practices affect the formation of bicultural and bilingual children's identities in that context, and therefore their sense of self (Gay, 2002). Socialization involves the sharing of "values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors to the child" (Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar, 2006, p. 572). A study on the social adjustment of young Korean students in kindergarten found that the children sought to identify their concepts of self in the classroom, sometimes combining beliefs from their American classrooms and Korean homes to develop as competent members of society (Lee, 2003 as cited in Lee et al., 2006; Ryu, 2004).

Bicultural and bilingual children's concept of sense of self will continuously evolve throughout their lives depending on the contextual experiences they encounter. The fluid notion of identity allows children to continually reconstitute their perception of identity in different cultural contexts (Grice, 2005; Schwartz, 2001). Because bicultural and bilingual children may be exposed to very different cultural worlds, the facilitation of interactions that occur in the contextual environmental influences can become convoluted (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990).

When children actively participate in more than one culture and are able to adequately exist in both, it is labeled biculturalism (Phinney, 1990; LaFrombois et al., 1993 as cited in Friedlander, 1999). Children's educators and parents act as agents of socialization, ultimately



allowing them to become “competent [members of society] in two cultures” (Padilla, 2006, p. 492), and enabling them to create “two social persona and identities” (Padilla, 2006, p. 471). Determining which cultural practices are relevant in certain contexts can also create confusion for bicultural and bilingual children because the practices in the environment shape their perceptions of self (Soto, 2002). This cultural identity confusion can be eased through positive exposure and communication about their heritage culture at any age (Gibau, 2005).

Exposure to the heritage culture is helpful when it occurs in the classroom, but the process begins at home (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vetter, 2001). Parents apprentice their children with cultural information by sharing traditional customs, historical information, past experiences, or names belonging to the heritage culture (You, 2005). When this occurs, children are more likely to develop a positive perception of their heritage culture, which then influences the interaction behaviors that they perceive as appropriate in certain cultural contexts (Rumbaut, 1994).

Perceptions of children’s heritage culture are also shaped by names. Children’s names represent how others identify them, therefore creating a relationship between the name and the child’s identity (Souto-Manning, 2007). Young children respond to their names when spoken, and even children under the age of 4 have rudimentary knowledge about written names, making the connection between names and identity clearer (Treiman, Cohen, Mulqueeny, Kessler, & Schechtman, 2007). When children’s names, from any cultural background, are not honored in the classroom, their identities are changed, and the opportunity to provide cultural experiences is lost. Acknowledging that names may have meanings in children’s heritage cultures facilitates a learning environment where culture is valued (Souto-Manning, 2007).

Understanding and valuing bicultural and bilingual children as individuals in the classroom is the first step necessary to facilitate positive and supportive early education learning environments (Rumbaut, 1993). Ensuring that these children are experiencing positive interactions within and with their classroom is crucial to their developing identities. Educators should be aware of bicultural and bilingual children's needs to belong in an environment in which they represent the cultural minority population (Nesdale & Flesser, 2001). This can occur when the classroom honors cultures in an effort to provide children with the opportunity to begin understanding and valuing cultures other than their own (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). Allowing the involvement of children's families can create a syncretic bridge between home and the classroom so children may be less prone to confusion and conflict regarding the two cultural worlds in which they interact (Cairney, 2000; Duranti & Ochs, 1997; Soto, 2002; Stewart, 1999).

Honoring and supporting culture in the classroom needs to be recognized as a bidirectional process, both for the educator and children. Culture is not a transient concept because individuals are continuously exposed to new and different experiences that influence their perception of not only their own culture, but others as well (Stewart, 1999). Not only is culture constantly evolving, but so are children's identities (Grice, 2005; Schwartz, 2001). These changes are enabled by the socialization practices that occur within the classroom as teachers act as agents of change, exposing the children to the evolving "American" culture. Varying representations of culture that are brought in by the teacher allow children to react to the environmental contexts created in the classroom, influencing how they negotiate their social interactions.

## Culture of the Classroom

Creating an early education environment that is supportive of bicultural and bilingual children is imperative for their evolving identities. Although young children arrive with culturally constructed concepts of self, “their identities continue to be shaped in the time they spend” in the classroom (Long & Crafton, 2007, p. 1). Fostering interactions that honor that notion of self rooted in their heritage culture will create a space in which they can coexist (Gay, 2002).

For bicultural and bilingual Korean children in America, coexisting in culturally diverse settings can be challenging (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990). The experiences that the parents received as young children in Korea may vary from those their children are experiencing due to the emphasis placed on typical Western constructs such as self-esteem in American classrooms. These constructs may affect the expectations educators and parents have regarding their children’s education (Markus & Kitayama, 1992; Pyke, 2000).

Expectations in the classroom are derivations of cultural influences the educators bring into the environment. In most American early education classrooms, the practices and curriculum are created using developmentally appropriate practices. These practices however are (mono)cultural and do not often include practices that are culturally relevant to parents of bicultural and bilingual children in preschool. Culturally relevant classrooms incorporate children’s culture respectfully, allowing children the freedom to express themselves, as well as facilitating meaningful experiences (Adair & Tobin, 2008). Certain expectations regarding behaviors may be culturally specific and not realistic for bicultural and bilingual children whose heritage culture may not stress the same things. The nature of the cultural context could create an environment for children in the kindergarten classroom that is contradictory, causing

confusion about which behaviors are culturally appropriate (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001). How children adjust to the specific situation may affect the sense of self created within the contexts of the classroom.

The adjustment process in school for children and adolescents is “generally regarded as the primary sociocultural and developmental task for” (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001, p. 503). Developmentally, this adjustment affects children’s social interaction and language skills. Linguistically, studies show that bilingual children will be temporarily delayed in their ability to learn vocabulary in each language (Fennel, Byers-Heinlein, & Werker, 2007; Souto-Manning, 2006b). Bilingual children initially lag behind in literacy skills, such as reading comprehension involving syntax and the organization of stories (Ucelli & Paez, 2007). For Jia, materials in the classroom are in English, making it increasingly difficult to develop literacy skills because of the significant differences in both spoken and written language between Korean and English. The contextual interactions that occur in the classroom become important when specific cultural differences like these occur (Bowman, 1993). Differences may always exist in the classroom, but teachers can reconceptualize their idea of time that is related to the developmental milestones children are expected to meet, specifically linguistically and socially. Stires & Genishi (2008) use the term “panoptical time” (p. 64) to refer to constricted learning experiences some children receive due to the value placed on standardized measures that chart time specific elements of their development while disregarding other aspects of their identities and capabilities. In essence, children are unique and take different periods of time to develop cultural and linguistic competency across contexts.

Many contexts share space in an early education classroom. Each context represents certain situations and influences bicultural and bilingual children in various ways (Bowman,

1993; Cairney, 2000). The culture of the classroom implicitly “pervade[s] individuals’ and communities”, and that implicit nature of culture exists as common sense in a classroom created by educators who share certain cultural ideals (Rogoff, 2003, p. 195). These ideals facilitate the interactions that then become shared cultural experiences for children (Gay, 2002).

Exposure to an explicit idea of culture can be communicated through a collaborative classroom. A non-collaborative classroom is one-sided, mostly allowing for the children to act as information receivers. However, collaborative classrooms sometimes incorporate diverse perspectives on culture through the use of “cultural artifacts from the students’ homes and communities” (Tinzmann, Jones, Fennimore, Bakker, Fine, & Pierce, 1990, p. 3). In this way, information is now shared between the teachers and children, creating a more culturally stimulating learning environment (Tinzmann et al., 1990).

Social interactions with teachers, parents, and peers provide the stimulus for children to understand other cultures (Souto-Manning, 2006b). A study found that adolescent peer interactions reflect a view of children that others in the classroom share (Spira, Grossman, & Wolff-Bensdorf, 2002). If adolescents see themselves negatively reflected in other’s perceptions, the concept of self in that context is influenced (Salmivalli & Issacs, 2005). This may occur if the other children in the classroom have not previously been exposed to children of varying cultural backgrounds, especially when the bicultural and bilingual children’s appearances are unique in the classroom (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001; Spencer et al., 2001; Tinzmann et al., 1990; Wong & Rowley, 2001). Receiving negative messages from peers “concerning the nature of the self as an individual and as a member of a particular cultural unit” (Spencer et al., 2001, p. 23) can influence further interactions within that context.

Contextual situations where children experience difficulties interacting with other children in the classroom provide the opportunity for educators to act as buffering agents (Tinzmann et al., 1990). Encouraging or discouraging interactions between children is significant and educators should be aware of cultural norms. One study found that Korean American children accept other children's initiations of play more willingly than their American counterparts (Rogoff, 2003). Facilitating interactions also provides an opportunity for educators to mediate through the introduction of other cultural norms (Souto-Manning, 2006b).

However, educators are also reinforcing interactions between themselves and the children. This step is important for bicultural and bilingual children because they learn to interact with adults other than their parents, who are most often of different cultural, linguistic, or ethnic backgrounds (Zeichner, 1992). Linguistically, the children are able to develop their vocabularies, especially if school is the only place in which they speak their non-heritage language (Chiappe, Siegel, & Gottardo, 2002). The interactions between the teachers and bilingual children are thus influential and play a major role in facilitating exploration of one's sense of self (Espinosa, 2005).

School attitudes are important to explore to identify what support is given to bicultural and bilingual children developing social selves in the classroom. Support can be offered through educators' attempts to involve both the children and family in the classroom. Successful facilitation of the "participation of young children" (SRCD, 2005, p. 2) and their families begins by lowering existing barriers and honoring and respecting various cultures and ethnicities in early education settings. Prioritizing parental involvement ensures that the family knows the school is committed to their child and can reduce confusion children may feel due to the perception they have of their biculturalism (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001; Soto, 2002;

Takanishi, 2004). Supportive environments nurture any behaviors children feel are salient in culturally specific contexts by facilitating communication about shared meanings and beliefs that may ultimately result in cultural balance that is then perceived by them (Dagenais, Day, & Toohey, 2006).

To achieve a classroom culture that is supportive of a bicultural and bilingual child's evolving social identities, educators must recognize and address their own assumptions and expectations of cultural knowledge, biases, and expectations (Grice, 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Schwartz, 2001). In particular, the appropriateness of measuring certain developmental milestones should be questioned as the suggested developmentally appropriate practices that are implemented in classrooms are (mono)cultural due to the fact that the practices were derived from tests conducted on white, middle class families (Goodwin, Cheruvu, & Genishi, 2008; Rogoff, 2003). This is important because the classroom is a significant sociocultural task for young children, especially for bicultural and bilingual children (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). Teacher's perceptions of children's culture and the reliability of using appropriate practices validated in mono(cultural) settings can be an obstacle in achieving an environment that facilitates cultural balance. Assessing those views will allow educators to be more aware and understanding of certain behaviors children may perform related to their heritage culture, specifically if the behaviors conflict with those expected in the classroom (Tinzmann et al, 1990).

Operationalizing the classroom as a macro environment that encompasses many micro contexts may enable teachers to better support children's exploration of their own identities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 2003). Each context in the classroom enables varying interactions that each influences the behaviors that children display (Bowman, 1993).

Recognizing when to encourage or interrupt interactions with the environment and peers is useful for creating positive supportive space. Facilitating positive interactions within all of the contexts can also be done through a collaborative classroom that links cultural experiences the child may only see at home, and allows them to be a part of the classroom culture as well (Tinzmann et al., 1990). Teachers acting as secondary cultural agents of the child's heritage culture facilitate a relationship between the child and the teacher so the child is exposed to an adult influence other than their parents. Valuing multiple cultures allows teachers to learn from the children and build upon their strengths. In doing so, a relationship between the teacher and the family is formed because the family feels connected and welcomed into the classroom culture (Dagenais, Day, & Toohey, 2006; Takanishi, 2004).

#### Korean Culture

Understanding the intricacies of the cultural contexts children experiences at home is a fundamental step in honoring culture in the classroom (Cairney, 2000). Educators can strike a balance between cultures in the classroom through the recognition of children as individuals. Labeling children's cultures based on conclusions they have arrived at through overgeneralizations is not an accurate representation of individual experiences (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002).

Cultural representations regarding children's heritage culture may be influenced by numerous factors. A significant influential factor is language (Lee, 2002; You, 2005). Heritage language practices reflect children's perceptions of their culture's status, and that language becomes "one of the main markers of belonging to a particular ethnic group" (You, 2005, p. 713). Identifying with a particular group that subscribes to similar customs, values, and beliefs forms an ethnic identity (You, 2005).



The cultural influences children carry into the classroom develop into ethnic identities and affect the roles and behaviors that they interpret as salient during interactions (Cairney, 2000). These identities continue to develop as the complexities of sense of self and notion of specific group belonging are understood (Lee, 2002). Until children reach adolescence, their ethnic identity development “tends to mirror the perceptions of their parents' (and especially their mother's) own ethnic self-identities, as if they were reflections in an ethnic looking-glass” (Rumbaut, 1994, p. 790).

Parental emphasis on the use of the heritage language in or outside of the home for the young children influences their ethnic identity processes (Spira, Grossman, & Wolff-Bensdorf, 2002; Spotti, 2007). Many Korean parents are invested in the ability to maintain the heritage language for their children (You, 2005). Parents may also support their children's development by providing “academically enriching home environments” (Ryu, 2004, p. 169) in attempt to assert their will to have bilingual children, balanced in both cultures. Continuing to provide children with environments that support bilingualism can be challenging when schools use a deficit perspective, a belief that sees children's abilities to speak two languages negatively effects their learning abilities (Souto-Manning, 2006a; Souto-Manning, 2006b).

Creating a supportive home environment for Korean children may vary from the experiences American children may have. Korean culture applies Confucius based values that say young children act “as members of families and communities [and] are expected to follow adults' opinions rather than exercise their own will” (Ryu, 2004, p. 169). By controlling behaviors, children learn to respect adults and learn that adults exist to guide them through life. Through this role, the family's welfare is protected (Rogoff, 2003). A Western perspective may perceive overseeing “aspects of their young children's lives, such as eating, sleeping, and

clothing” (Ryu, 2004, p. 169) as inappropriate because of the stress that Western cultures place on independence.

Guidance increases as children enter classrooms and expectations regarding advanced maturity and skills are important. Many Asian Americans highly regard education and perceive it as significant responsibility of parenting. Parents constantly compare their children’s achievement to children in Korea and expect comparable results (Ryu, 2004).

As young children navigate between the different cultural contexts they operate in, divergence of each belief system can occur. Developing a sense of self in an American classroom that emphasizes social skills through play rather than education is complex due to the contrasting emphasis placed on those values at home. Constant parental supervision at home in all aspects of children’s lives may also create confusion due to the limited amount of direct supervision that may occur during play in the classroom. The conflicting nature of these cultural contexts can result in educators’ apprehension in response to behaviors that may occur in the classroom (Ryu, 2004).

In the classroom, significant emotional divergence may occur when discovering the concept of self because a chasm exists between mainstream culture that stresses individualism and independence versus Korean culture that stresses “mutual responsibility in a collective” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 210; Yoon & Nussenbaum, 1987 as cited in Ryu, 2004). The extensive amount of time that Korean children normally spend in an early education setting adds to the complexities that arise in defining a sense of self. Educators can lessen confusion by being receptive and accommodating towards cultural conflicts children may experience (Ryu, 2004).

There are other influential aspects of family’s lives that impact the ability to achieve and maintain a cultural balance. Children’s place of birth may influence the amount of heritage

language the parents stress (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). Parents may emphasize Korean and English equally if children were born in America, as they have operated in both cultures simultaneously all of their lives, whereas Korean born children may experience more emphasis on maintaining the heritage culture and language (Ryu, 2004).

Cultural exposure in the home is also influenced by the parents' education and social status. Koreans "show the highest proportions of college graduates among mothers and fathers" (Rumbaut, 1994, p. 766) than other non-Asian immigrants. This status, as well as how long their family has resided in the United States may impact parents' language and acculturation expectations. Socialization to the mainstream culture is more likely to occur as the length of time is extended, as the parents have operated in both cultural contexts. However, extended periods of time in a new country may lead to more confusion because the parents are becoming more bicultural, therefore experiencing more internal conflict (Farver & Lee-Shin, 2000; Rumbaut, 1994).

Valued cultural practices outside of the home are other avenues through which socialization occurs, and children's exposure to these valued cultural practices in the heritage culture are also influenced by parental expectations of acculturation (Farver & Lee-Shin, 2000). Operating within Korean contexts can be achieved by attending community schools where Korean teachers facilitate cultural lessons through engaging classes (You, 2005; Shin, 2005).

Community schools sometimes operate within Korean churches, which are an integral part of families' lives. Approximately 75% of Korean families in America are affiliated with churches (Sandra & Wong, 2000). Church attendance among Koreans is higher than that of other Asians with the exception of Filipinos (Kim, 1978 as cited in Huhr & Kim, 1990). However, in Korea church affiliation is significantly lower. This could be attributed to the

function of the church as a social gathering place where Koreans can nurture their language and culture. Traditional cultural education to American born Korean children also serves as a function of the church (Choy, 1979 as cited in Huhr & Kim, 1990; Min, 1992).

Extended familial relationships are facilitated through church attendance to provide needed emotional support to families experiencing distress as a result of conflicting cultural experiences (Kim, 1981; Min 1989 as cited in Huhr & Kim, 1990). Although the social function of the church is evident in some cases, this choice is made independently of the “Americanization” that may have occurred over the duration of their time in the United States. Socialization into the mainstream culture is not mutually exclusive in identifying ethnically with the Korean group, as the two cultures influence one another (Huhr & Kim, 1990).

Recognizing that there are deeper cultural meanings behind identity characteristics and behaviors that children who experience multiple cultures and not just basing cultural assertions in generalizations is important (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). Also, knowing that heritage language is an integral part of children’s ethnic identities will allow both parents and educators to provide them with the information and support necessary to enable children to navigate within, across, and between the two worlds (Lee, 2002; Ryu, 2004; You, 2005).

Ensuring that children experience as little confusion and conflict as possible between the two cultural contexts is something parents can help ease by recognizing that their children’s developing social identities is influenced by the input they receive from them regarding the heritage culture (Farver & Lee-Shin, 2000; Ryu, 2004). This includes the daily interactions children experience with the parents in regards to Korean parents’ tendencies to be a part of every aspect of their children’s lives. Because Korean parents emphasize education, educators need to be aware of this part of the culture in order to support children during classroom

experiences where they may not receive as much supervision and interaction directly with adults (Ryu, 2004).

The experiences that bicultural and bilingual children receive in school are also influenced by their birth place and their parents' goals in the United States (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). These things also lead to factors outside of the home where children are exposed to the heritage culture through community schools or church (You, 2005). In whatever ways children are socialized into one or both of the cultures, the "American" and Korean cultures will influence one another, enabling children to create and develop identities that will influence the way they interact in various cultural contexts (Rogoff, 2003; Rumbaut, 1994).

Developing a sense of self can be challenging for bicultural and bilingual children trying to negotiate a predominantly monolingual American early education classroom (Ryu, 2004). Through observation and "kidwatching" (Owocki & Goodman, 2002), we can better grasp the importance of providing a supportive environment in which children feel protected and safe. If this occurs, then the process of discovering what behaviors are appropriate in the different contexts of the classroom may be eased for them. Allowing children to investigate aspects of their behavior in the classroom may allow them to feel comfortable in embracing both cultures to create hybrid identities (Stires & Genishi, 2008).

The identity process is dependent on the contexts within the classroom environment, and therefore, also on the interactions that take place in and with it (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Creating a supportive space for children's cultures will show them that a positive relationship exists between both cultures, and that they do not necessarily have to conflict (Tinzmann et al, 1990). Lessening the amount of confusion and conflict is important to the discovery of a sense of self and social identity for children (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001).

Creating a bridge between the cultures also allows children to create a third space where they can exist (Cairney, 2000; Duranti & Ochs, 1997; Gutiérrez, 2005; Souto-Manning & Dice, in press). This syncretic force allows them to be influenced by both cultures, thus discovering what aspects of each culture are salient in particular contextual situations (Dagenais, Day, & Toohey, 2006). Valuing the practices of each culture enables the child to constantly receive new information that will influence their social interactions within the classroom (Gay, 2002; Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002).

Early education classrooms impact the lives of bicultural and bilingual children by creating experiences that impact and shape the interactions within the classroom context. For Korean toddlers, these classrooms are made more meaningful when they are supportive of their heritage culture. However, these are ideas that have been conceptualized from a Western perspective. Therefore, in this thesis I explore how one Korean child's identities develop within the classroom using a Western lens while respectfully honoring her culture.

## CHAPTER THREE

NEGOTIATING SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN AN AMERICAN EARLY EDUCATION  
CLASSROOM: THE CASE OF A BICULTURAL <sup>1</sup>AND BILINGUAL TODDLER

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<sup>1</sup> To be submitted to Bilingual Research Journal, or Early Childhood Education Journal, or Journal of Research in Childhood Education

Before I reached the door, sounds of laughter and crying inundated my ears. I smiled broadly as I wondered what adventures I was in for. I wrapped my hands awkwardly around the doorknob, and I thought...these bulky covers do their jobs. There may as well be a neon flashing sign that says “No adults allowed, children at work.” As I held and turned just at the right angle, the door slowly eased open... (Reflection of Reflective Journal Entry)

As the rates of immigration rise in the United States, so does the likelihood that diversity exists in early education classroom settings (Espinosa, 2005; Souto-Manning, 2006b). For the children of immigrants, the process of navigating between potentially conflicting cultural environments is influenced in part by their identities, specifically the social interactions in the classroom (Espinosa, 2005). Their identities are influenced by the contextual events and practices they experience in the classroom. Such experiences are based on the classroom culture that is created by bicultural and bilingual children’s teachers and peers. However, the culture of the classroom is also influenced by cultural practices that are brought into the classroom via children or their families (Wong & Rowley, 2001). Embracing children’s heritage in the classroom while investigating the child’s interactions within various classroom contexts will lead to a better understanding of how young bicultural and bilingual children develop their social identities in an early education classroom (Miller & Manglesdorf, 2005; Rogoff, 2003).

This paper focuses on Jia (pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all participants), a 2-year-old Korean American girl, and how she negotiates various situated contexts through social interactions within a monolingual American early education classroom. Understanding Jia’s social interactions with teachers, peers, and the environment facilitates knowledge of how she reacts to her environment. This knowledge will provide insight for



teachers and parents to recognize the need for classrooms that create nurturing and supportive environments for children that come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

### Literature Review

In the past, early education classrooms have not honored the multitude of cultures young children bring into the classroom. Historically, the process of socializing and educating young children of immigrant families focused on assimilation into American culture (Rogoff, 2003). Although formal policies were not enacted, the ethnocentric ideals held by educators encouraged such methods of “Americanization” because it was believed that immigrants were inherently inferior (Goodwin, Cheruvu, & Genishi, 2008; Rand Corp., 2004). The failure to honor or recognize these children’s heritage cultures led to non-supportive environments in which the children failed to make connections between their heritage culture and the American culture to which they also actively participated (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). It is important to realize how the past methods of involving culture in the classroom affected children’s social interactions, and use that knowledge to move forward. Not only integrating, but honoring children’s heritage cultures through a diversity perspective is an important step in ensuring that these children feel supported to define themselves in ways that incorporate both their heritage and American cultures (Stires & Genishi, 2008; Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002).

Understanding how contextually situated interactions affect the salience of behaviors in young children is difficult (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). However, the discovery of which influential classroom experiences do impact bicultural and bilingual children’s developing identities will provide insight into creating supportive and nurturing cultural environments for those children to thrive (Miller & Mangelsdorf, 2005; Salmivalli & Issacs, 2005; Wong & Rowley, 2001). This paper discusses the process of a young Korean

American bicultural and bilingual child's developing identities through social interactions that occur within the contexts of the classroom. The concept of identity, relevant to the experiences the child encounters in the classroom, is discussed to understand the various influences affecting this process for the child. Influences in the classroom will be addressed by looking at the culture that is created by teachers and peers, each influencing the actions and experiences that occur. To further understand the influence that culture has in the classroom, the child's Korean culture will be explored in order to ascertain the impact that it has on the child's negotiation of identities in the early education classroom.

### *Identity*

Early education classrooms enable children to interact in and with the environment (Souto-Manning, 2006b). Children form relationships as a result of those ongoing interactions, and as a result, children begin to create and develop their identities in connection with their environment and social relationships that are forming (Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Miller & Manglesdorf, 2005). Nesdale and Flessner (2001) state that children have an innate need to belong in a community of peers, and their notion of their social self is thus deeply rooted in the perception of others in the classroom. Discovering who they are as individuals is influenced by this placement into an in or out-group and is especially influential when the child is a cultural and/or ethnic minority in that environment (Nesdale & Flessner, 2001).

For young children, place matters, and the child takes cues from the classroom to make meaning about their own social identities. Meaning making is an integral step for children who are active participants in more than one culture. Bicultural and bilingual children can create "two social persona and identities" (Padilla, 2006, p. 471) from the meanings they make. As such, culturally grounded concepts like self and identity are perceived differently cross-

culturally, specifically between American and Korean cultures for this study. Recognition of the self is not an individualized concept for Koreans as it is for Americans, so the notion of identity and representation of the self is important to address in the classroom context (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Spiro 1993). Recognizing that differences may exist between cultures is important to respectfully aid children in navigating the process of discovering which culturally based behaviors are appropriate depending on the cultural atmosphere in the classroom (Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Rogoff, 2003).

The cultural atmosphere is created through valued practices that are constructed in the environment and is often the result of the teachers' willingness to challenge "Americanization" and instead create a classroom that embraces and honors cultural learning opportunities without barriers (Gay, 2002; Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). If the cultural practices in the classroom are different than those children experiences at home, then links should be established to bridge their two worlds, attempting to lessen the strain and confusion that could arise for children in discovering which characteristics of their identities they will expose during interactions in which environment (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001).

Bridging, instead of separating aspects of identity, is a syncretic practice that attempts to merge apparently conflicting or opposite cultural practices (Duranti & Ochs, 1997). As a result, socialization practices in the classroom include some of the valued cultural practices children experience at home and decreases the chance for conflict (Hull & Schultz, 2002). The ongoing interaction between the two cultures creates a blended cultural environment children feel free and supported to explore. Through this exploration, they create a third space to exist in and become aware of the appropriateness of behaviors in social interactions. This occurs because encouraging children to cross boundaries and embrace co-existing identities in the classroom in

more over ways can create shifts in social identity salience within environments that they child actively participates (Gutiérrez , 2005; Souto-Manning & Dice, in press).

### *Classroom Culture*

Although children do arrive in the classroom with culturally constructed concepts of self, the nature of their experiences will evolve as they navigate across cultural contexts. This evolution allows them to negotiate who they are in the classroom overtime (Grice, 2005, Schwartz, 2001). Honoring and supporting cultures in the classroom is a process, both for the teachers and children. If children's heritage culture is continuously recognized and honored in the classroom through incorporating cultural information such as language, customs, or names, in integral and authentic ways then they are more likely to develop a positive perception of their heritage culture. This then reinforces the behaviors that they perceive as appropriate to display in certain cultural contexts (Rumbaut, 1994; You, 2005).

For children, knowing when to incorporate pieces of their identity grounded in their heritage culture is challenging, especially if teachers and parents have varying and sometimes conflicting expectations (Markus & Kitayama, 1992; Pyke, 2000). Teachers have certain expectations that may be culturally specific and not realistic or important for bicultural and bilingual children whose heritage culture may not stress the same things (Adair & Tobin, 2008). How children are allowed to adjust and react to potentially conflicting expectations may affect their sense of self created within the contexts of the classroom.

Adjustment to the classroom is "generally regarded as the primary socio-cultural and developmental task for children" (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001, p. 503). The interactions that bicultural and bilingual children participate in during this time are important to their social and linguistic development. For them, these interactions are pivotal because studies

show that they will initially lag behind in language and literacy skills (Fennel, Byers-Heinlein, & Werker, 2007 ; Souto-Manning, 2006b; Ucelli & Paez, 2007). It is difficult to develop literacy and language skills when children's heritage language is fundamentally different from English, so interactions with teachers and peers become important (Bowman, 1993).

Within a classroom, there are many different contexts in which interactions can take place, and each can provide different experiences that influence bicultural and bilingual children in different ways (Bowman, 1993; Cairney, 2000). Facilitation of positive cultural interactions within those contexts can stem from collaborative classrooms that openly incorporate and share diverse cultural perspectives. This creates shared cultural space that is stimulating and supportive for all children (Tinzmann, Jones, Fennimore, Bakker, Fine, & Pierce, 1990). All children benefit because everyone has an opportunity to learn and understand about other cultures through the social interactions provided in the classroom (Souto-Manning, 2006b). The benefits they receive are knowledge of other cultures, genuine appreciation of diversities, and how to value the choices people make and/or their perspectives. Through this process, children learn "shared ways of perceiving, thinking, and storing possible responses to adaptive challenges and and changing conditions" (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001, p. 47). As children learn about diversity , their social development is affected (Bowman, 1993). For the children who are not negotiating multiple cultures themselves, understanding other cultures is important because their perceptions of bicultural and bilingual children affect those children's concept of self, especially if there is a negative reaction from other children. Perceiving negative reactions also influences the interactions that take place in the classroom (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001; Salmivalli & Issacs, 2005; Tinzmann, et al., 1990; Spencer et al., 2001; Wong & Rowley, 2001).

If difficulties between bicultural and bilingual children and other children arise, either from disputes during interactions or the lack of interactions, then the teachers act as buffering agents (Tinzmann et al., 1990). Teachers should be aware of cultural norms, such as Korean American children's acceptance of other children's initiations of play more willingly than their American counterparts so they can facilitate interactions between children, learning in the process how to mediate other cultural norms (Rogoff, 2003; Souto-Manning, 2006b).

In mediating, teachers are also reinforcing interactions between bicultural and bilingual children and themselves. This is an important developmental step for children because school may be the only place where they have an opportunity to interact with adults other than their parents and in English (Chiappe, Siegel, & Gottardo, 2002; Zeichner, 1992). The experiences children receive as a result of the interactions with the teachers are influential in the exploration of their identities (Espinosa, 2005).

Successful classrooms that facilitate positive interactions begin with the assumptions and attitudes the teachers bring into the classroom. In order to ensure that children feel supported in the created culture of the classroom, the family must also be involved. When families are directly involved with the valued practices their children experiences, children in turn perceive the commitment that the teacher has to the family. Communication is also facilitated between the teacher and the family to create connections that may ultimately result in a cultural balance that is perceived by children (Dagenais, Day, & Toohey, 2006; Takanishi, 2004).

### *Korean Culture*

Achieving a cultural balance in the classroom must first begin with the understanding of the nuances without labeling Korean culture based on overgeneralizations (Cairney, 2000; Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). There are many factors that influence children's abilities to bring

their own culture into the classroom, such as language, customs, values, and beliefs. These influences enable children to develop an ethnic identity that affects the roles and behaviors, or identity, that they feel is appropriate in situated contexts (Cairney, 2000; You, 2005). It is through these influences and behaviors that the teachers are better equipped to recognize children as individuals who carry important cultural information. Because each child is an individual, their cultural experiences will influence them in distinct ways, particularly regarding the degree of heritage cultural experiences at home.

This child is immersed in Korean culture at home, and the emphasis that parents place on certain aspects of the culture affect the ethnic identity development process for their child (Spira, Grossman, & Wolff-Bensdorf, 2002; Spotti, 2007). Language is an integral part of culture, and many Korean parents are invested in their ability to maintain their native language for their children (You, 2005). Maintaining Korean language provides the parents with an opportunity to assert their will to have a balanced, bilingual child, knowing English will be the only language spoken in school (Ryu, 2004). This view reflects the influence that the cultural nature of school practices, environments, and expectations have on children's experiences.

Asserting parents' will over children is a Korean value based on teachings of Confucius that stress the need for children to follow the will of their parents. Parents exist to guide their children through life, teaching them to act as respectful members of their community (Ryu, 2004). Parents also supervise everything the child does, and although it may seem overbearing from a Western perspective, it is crucial to recognize that parents do this to protect their family's welfare (Rogoff, 2003; Ryu, 2004).

Parents continue to closely monitor their children's lives as they reach school age, as education is highly regarded and Korean parents constantly compare their children to the

achievement of children in Korea, expecting comparable results (Ryu, 2004). The divergence of these beliefs with those that exist in an American early education classroom can become complex for bicultural and bilingual children trying to navigate within, across, and between the cultural contexts (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001). Emphasizing development through play practices in the classroom can conflict with the practices at home. Although the play is developmentally appropriate in the early education classroom context, the concept was derived from a Western perspective and is (mono)cultural (Goodwin, Cheruvu, & Genishi, 2008). The limited amount of individual attention in the classroom can also result in distress for Korean children who have always experienced constant hands-on supervision at home (Rogoff, 2003). If teachers are unaware of the cultural practices at home, they may react to the children's attempts to gain attention negatively and in an unsupportive and non-accommodating manner (Ryu, 2004).

Other aspects of family life influence the Korean cultural practices children are exposed to, such as the birth place of the children and parental education and socioeconomic status (Weisskirch & Alva, 2002). These factors influence the emphasis that parents place on socialization practices in either one or both the heritage and mainstream culture. Cultural practices outside of the home also play a role in children's exposure to Korean culture and can occur through churches (Shin, 2005; You, 2005). Approximately 75% of Korean families in America are affiliated with churches that provide a social gathering place where they can nurture their culture and language (Sandra & Wong, 2000). The church also facilitates relationships with other members who can provide emotional support to those experiencing stress as a result of conflicting cultural experiences (Kim, 1981; Min 1989 as cited in Huhr & Kim, 1990).



Understanding what culture means to bicultural and bilingual children is imperative so that a deeper understanding of the behaviors or identity characteristics, children performs in the classroom is gained. If teachers know where possible cultural conflicts may arise in the classroom, then they can attempt to ease any isolation or confusion children may experience as a result (Farver & Lee-Shin, 2000). Culturally relevant early education practices encourage communication between the teachers and parents can facilitate a classroom environment that is supportive for children, providing them with the information necessary to navigate within, across, and between the two worlds (Dagenais, Day, & Toohey, 2006; Takanishi, 2004). The communication facilitates a continuous dialogue that allows teachers and parents to co-construct knowledge, with both parties bringing their own knowledge of the child and situation into the equation (Adair & Tobin, 2008; Lee, 2008).

Negotiating within across, and between cultural worlds while developing through interactions is difficult for young bicultural and bilingual children, but if we look at their world from their perspective, then we can identify characteristics of an environment that is safe and supportive of all cultures (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001). Allowing and encouraging all children to freely represent themselves through interactions linked to their cultural experiences will ease the stress of attempting to separate them all together, and instead create a third space where both cultures can co-exist. In doing so, teachers are able to view bicultural and bilingual children “as interesting people with interesting things to share” (Dyson, 1990 as cited in Stires & Genishi, 2008, p. 56). The teachers then create a space that is appreciative of the information and experiences children bring into the classroom, and therefore also create experiences that become more meaningful (Stires & Genishi, 2008).

Meaningful classroom environments enable children to investigate aspects of their behavior in the classroom that may allow them to feel comfortable in embracing both cultures as a part of their social identities. In these environments, teachers can also show children the importance of resisting complete assimilation into “American” culture by maintaining their heritage culture and language (Stires & Genishi, 2008). The identity process is dependent on the contexts within the classroom environment, and therefore, also on the interactions that take place in and with it. Linking the classroom culture to the Korean culture creates a syncretic force that enables children to discover what aspects of each culture are salient in situated contexts in the classroom.

### Theoretical Framework

A sociocultural theoretical framework allows me to explore the social and cultural nature of a bicultural and bilingual toddler’s development as she negotiates social interactions within an early education setting. This perspective frames the case study of Jia in a way that allows for the understanding of which social and cultural influences affect the social interactions that may be tied to specific contexts in the classroom. Looking closely at the child from this theoretical orientation frames this study in such a way as to provide insight to teachers and parents of bicultural and bilingual children so that they can create supportive and collaborative environments for all children to negotiate multiple identities through interaction.

To begin the case study of Jia, the relationship between biculturalism and social interactions was analyzed from a sociocultural perspective. I collected data on Jia’s social interactions in two primary environments, school and church. As Jia negotiated these opposing cultural and linguistic contexts, she allowed me to learn about her across settings as she was exposed to the heritage culture of the native language spoken at home while simultaneously

being exposed to the culture of the second language spoken at school. The negotiation of interactions and social practices across contexts led to her active participation in two different contexts, enabling Jia to effectively exist in both environments making her bicultural (Phinney, 1990; LaFrombois et al., 1993 as cited in Friedlander, 1999).

From Jia, I learned that navigating between two different social and cultural worlds can be confusing for young children because they are simultaneously being socialized into cultures that may either create conflict or cooperation (Gibau, 2005; Soto, 2002). For example, how a child reacts in each environment affects the behaviors and identity characteristics they perform socially (Gutiérrez, 2005). Because socialization affects the development of identity, the consistent exposure to social and cultural experiences that the child receives continues to impact the child. In this study, identity is used as a fluid concept, recognizing that the child's experiences in and out of the classroom will enable the child to continue developing a sense of self (Grice, 2005; Schwartz, 2001).

Understanding how a bicultural and bilingual toddler defines their sense of self is difficult because they have a limited capacity to explain who they are, and we are also not able to understand them as well (Gibau, 2005; Soto, 2002). However, toddlers are amazing playmates, and observing their interactions in an early education setting provides a plethora of information into the developing social identity of such a young child (Perez & Torres-Guzmán, 2002). Sociocultural theory posits that the child would not be understood without acknowledging and including the cultural experiences she carries with her as she navigate different cultural contexts. An early education environment provides many social experiences through interactions or tangible contact with materials. Actively participating in these experiences creates a culture within the classroom, and in this case, one different than the one the child is exposed to at home.

Employing a sociocultural framework, I learned that excluding the social and cultural nature of Jia was impossible as these shaped her very development. In addition, if possible, would do her a disservice by not recognizing that the identity she creates is dependent on many experiences, and that her culture influences her meaning making in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Focusing the lens on the sociocultural aspects of Jia's development enables those influences within the classroom to be analyzed more clearly. The emerging culture of the classroom thus affects the sense of self that develops in the classroom as she begins to unveil her social identity as a result of her active participation in the cultural community of the classroom (Rogoff, 2003).

### *Research Questions*

This research study aimed to address and answer the following questions:

(1) In which ways do the social interactions of a 2-year-old bilingual Korean girl develop in the context of a monolingual American early education classroom?

(a) In what ways does the cultural environment of the classroom affect her social interactions?

(b) In what ways do the contexts in the classroom affect her social interactions?

(2) In which ways does her Korean culture affect her social interactions?

(a) What actions are taken by her parents to facilitate socialization into one or both of the cultures?

These questions informed the qualitative, case study methods used in this study that allowed me to provide detailed information regarding the environments in and across which Jia navigated daily (Creswell, 2001). Because identity is an abstract concept, providing this detailed information facilitated a deeper understanding of Jia's experiences in and out of an early

education classroom. The process of qualitative research affects the role of the researcher, and so the observations, interactions, and data analysis are all shaped by my past experiences and subjective ideas.

### Methods

In September of 2007, I entered an early education classroom to conduct a qualitative case study and learn more about and from Jia's experiences. Throughout the following 9 months, I situated myself in her classroom as a participant observer to establish rapport with her, her teachers, and her peers (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Using my observations from the classroom and church, teacher interviews, and parent questionnaires, I was able to show how Jia navigated across cultural contexts to negotiate her social interactions in an American early education classroom.

#### *Data Collection*

Data were collected using ethnographic research methods that included participant observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The young toddler classroom, at the child development lab school in Southeastern United States was the primary location for the study. The classroom had 12 children in it, 10 European Americans and 2 Asian Americans. Participant observations took place there between October 2007 and June 2008 for an average of three times per week and an average of 60 minutes each time. By utilizing observer as participant techniques, rapport between the researcher and the target child, as well as the teachers, was facilitated (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). The observations were focused on the behavior and interactions that occurred within the classroom, both between the child and the environment, the child and her teachers, and between the child and other children. I took brief field notes while in the classroom, and once the observation had ended for a specific time period,

detailed observations were written down subsequent to leaving the classroom. The field notes and journaling of observations were the primary source of data collection.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted twice with each of the three teachers. I met with them individually, once in May 2008 and again from July to August 2008. The interviews served as a secondary source of data to supplement the data from my participant observations in the classroom. The interviews took place between May and August and averaged 45 minutes. Each interview was transcribed word for word as it was conducted.

For triangulation purposes, informal conversations and questionnaires with the parents, Eun-soon and Jin, were included to ensure that the data from observations and teacher interviews were representative of Jia. Informal conversations were documented through journaling and occurred sporadically from December 2007 to June 2008. Questionnaires were emailed, at the parents' request, in May 2008. The parents were asked to describe their lives, characteristics of Jia's social identity at home, and their perception of Jia's social identity at school using the questionnaire I gave them.

To further supplement the data received from the parents, participant observations also took place at the family's church from the end of April to June. Jia's interactions with her family, peers, and environment were observed and recorded through field notes. The church observations allowed me to gain closer access to Jia and her family, building a rapport that enabled me to maintain a dialogue with her parents as the study continued. I believe that the invitation to attend church with them created a common space for their family to interact with me due to the diverse environment. As a European American researcher with a Western perspective, Jia's parents were initially apprehensive to open their lives to me. However, our shared

experiences at church placed us all on common ground, allowing them to feel more comfortable sharing private information about their family.

### *The Child Development Lab*

This research study took place at a university affiliated Child Development Lab located in the Southeastern United States. This lab school was founded in 1928 and has classrooms for children from infancy to pre-kindergarten age, with a total of 91 children. The school bases its curriculum on the idea that each child is an individual with unique needs and developmental trajectories, and it embraces the idea of inclusion. The lab school also stresses the importance of the teachers in the children's lives, specifically in their role of shaping the identities of each unique child. As individuals, the children are given developmentally appropriate opportunities and experiences in the classroom that build positive self-concepts within each child. The school's mission statement says that this self-concept leads to the fulfillment of their potential.

The children's potential is also reached through play focused learning activities, with many opportunities given to them to explore various environments and materials. The play oriented creative curriculum that is implemented could serve as a point of conflict for Jia, due to influences from her heritage culture (Ryu, 2004). Although potentially conflicting, the teachers strive to nurture and support each child. Nurturing and support occurs in the lab school through both hands-on teacher directed activities or through teacher supported individual choices that leads to active participation "in the co-construction of knowledge" (The University of Georgia, 2008).

### *The Classroom Context*

The demographics of the specific classroom where the research took place are representative of the university community: white, middle class, English speaking families. The

community outside of the university, specifically the county, is comprised of 68.6% European American, 26% African American, and 5.4% Hispanic, Asian, or Other. There were two Asian children in the classroom, representative of the 3.5% of Asians in the county (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008b). However, the other Asian child was adopted by an English speaking American family early and is monolingual, making Jia the only Korean and bilingual student in the classroom. The children that are enrolled in the lab school are primarily from families that are affiliated with the university, such as faculty or graduate students.

### *The Church Context*

The church community that Jia and her family are members of is diverse, accepting many different cultures and ethnicities. This environment was one Jia's mother thought was beneficial because it *exposes her to American culture* (Mother questionnaire, line 7). This church community was founded during the 1980's by a European American pastor who wanted to serve the international community in the area through religious practices. Jia's family was invited to attend the church because her mother *got to know the director of the church program personally* (Mother questionnaire, line 3) during English lessons.

A larger church allows the pastor and his parishioners to use a room in their building for fellowship. The current population of this church community includes primarily Chinese immigrants, most of whom have at least one family member pursuing a graduate degree at the university. Other members are Japanese, Korean, Jamaican, and Romanian.

The fellowship is conducted through a bible study format, where the parishioners discuss scripture and sing religious songs. On many occasions, the songs are offered in multiple languages. Before, during, and after fellowship, everyone is free to move about the room. Coffee and snacks are always provided, and they share pot-luck lunches once every month.



During this time, the church members are encouraged to bring cuisine that is representative of their heritage cultures so everyone can share and learn about them.

During fellowship, members with children are given the opportunity to take them to a playroom that is provided by the home church, although it is a separate playroom that is specified for the children of these parishioners'. One of the home church's members, a European American woman in her sixties, volunteers her time to care for the children during Bible study. Although it is an option for the members, the parents are also encouraged to keep their children during fellowship time if they feel more comfortable. I included the church in the study because church is an important aspect of Korean culture, and I also wanted to build a rapport with the family to gain more insight into Jia's daily life outside of the classroom (Sandra & Wong, 2000).

### *Participants*

#### *The Teachers*

The lab school's website states that these teachers are important figures in the lives of each child, striving to provide environments where each child can develop and thrive as individuals. Because teachers are important in children's lives, Jia's teachers had to be included because they were highly valuable and influential in her development. The lab school requires their lead teachers to have Bachelor's degrees in early childhood or child development. The assistant teachers must have, or be working towards a Child Development Associate Degree (CDA) to maintain employment at the lab school, which was set by the National Association of the Education for Young Children Accreditation standards. Each of the teachers, one lead and two assistants, are in the classroom to provide a supportive space in which the children could learn. They are also there to aid in the *children's development, language and intellectual development; to help the kids develop grow emotionally, intellectually, and socially* (Miss Haley-

interview, line 1-3). The lead teacher, Miss Elsa, has over 20 years of teaching experience, and she was most involved with the children and their families because of parent-teacher conferences. Throughout the year, she acted as the children's supplementary link between classroom experiences and families, especially with Jia by attempting to bridge the gap between American and Korean culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

### *The Children*

All families of the children in the young toddler classroom were given consent forms to allow their children to participate in this study. Although most of the children in the classroom were not the focus of this study, they were participants due to their interactions and peer relationships with the target child. Only one child, Jia, was focused on in-depth because I wanted to explore a child's experiences in a classroom that represented a different culture and language from home to show the value in honoring diversity.

Because this is a case study, it is a specific representation of Jia's experiences in an early education classroom, and other similar children's situations "may look and sound different in different social and cultural circumstances" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 4). The specific nature of this case study will allow the exploration of the phenomenon of how Jia negotiates her social interactions within the classroom. Although the findings of this study are not generalizable, they may be used to provide insight into a very specific situation and enhance the knowledge of those who are directly involved with the child.

### *The Family*

Jia is a first generation Korean American, as both of her parents were born in Korea. They came to the United States in 2003 to attend the local university for a Ph.D. program. Jia is

an only child, born in November, 2005. When observations began she was 22 months old, and at the time of the last observation she was 31 months old.

Jia's family was asked to participate so their daughter's social interactions could be explored within the context of her classroom. The mother was primarily involved in the study, inviting me into Jia's life while at school and their family's life by attending church with them for approximately two months. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the mother several times over a 6 month period, lasting approximately 30 minutes each time. Informal conversations with both the mother and father were included in the data from church. Jia's mother also completed a questionnaire at the end of the study. The father was provided with a questionnaire to compare mother and father responses, but he chose not to complete it.

#### Analysis and Findings

Analysis of the data is organized into contexts within the classroom involving Jia's interactions with the teachers and the children. The observational, interview, and questionnaire data were analyzed through an open coding process initially to find instances that represented those interactions. Axial coding was used to isolate the situations in which Jia's behaviors within interactions were consistent across environments. Codes were created to define the setting of the classroom, and the teacher interview data was analyzed to also get their definition of the situation, or understanding and perception of Jia's social identity within the contexts I was studying (Bogden & Biklen, 1992). The data from church observations was analyzed for commonalities or the lack thereof involving Jia's interactions with the same elements from the classroom. I implemented Bogdan and Bieklen's (1992) method of dividing the data into codes as way to think about people and objects in the church to understand the way they view other members, outsiders, and objects in that environment.

I peeked through a small crack, leaning my body carefully into the door in case little body parts were in the way. I pushed my way through the opening and was surrounded by chaos. Small bodies were crammed into a crowded rectangle, every inch of space covered. I was free in the doorway, the only space left exposed. I carefully maneuvered around the balls removed from their basket near the entrance and strewn across the floor to reach the children. As I placed a ball back in its place, I caught a glimpse of myself in the scratchy mirror placed on top of the shelf. I glimpsed my frizzy brown ponytail extending from the top of my head. My haphazard appearance, with a sweatshirt and crocs, was appropriate in that moment and I knew that I was ready to “work.” As I made my way to the floor, Chuy, the guinea pig, greeted me with squeaks from his cage, doing the best he could to welcome my arrival. Jia pulled on the fraying hem of my jeans as soon as I landed on the floor and handed me a tattered cardboard book...”We’re going on a Bear Hunt”...yes, today we will go on a bear hunt. Before I could attempt to sit comfortably on the floor, I felt a heavy thud in my lap (Reflection of Reflective Journal Entry).

To respectfully present the experiences that I observed within the classroom, I needed to include myself in the data. Before beginning this project, I acknowledge and addressed the assumptions that I held regarding culture in the classroom and learned about Korean culture. I acted as a participant in every environment that was observed and looked in from a close distance to ensure that I did not alter the situations. The narratives tell Jia’s story from my perspective, and each observation was chosen because it was representative of everyday experiences that Jia had in the early education classroom.

*Teacher Interactions: “I’m wondering if it’s not cultural”*

The sun was shining outside as little feet clumsily ran around the playground. Neil, too excited about a noticeably empty slide, did not see Jia sifting through the wood chips placed under the play-scape. As he tripped over her, he landed face first onto the ground surface. Unphased, he picked himself up off of the ground and continued towards the slide. Beside him, Jia was visibly shaken, but after small whimpers, she brought her focus back to her bug search in the wood chips. Having no luck, Jia stared at Miss Elsa, an older woman with silver hair that framed her friendly face. Jia was moving her tongue with an open mouth like she had something to say. As words failed to escape her mouth, she began running aimlessly in circles around the playground while babbling a song to herself and anyone else who would listen. “Ba-ba-ba-ba. Wh-wh-wh-wh.” As she approached her, the teacher said “Hi Jia,” but Jia pushed her away as she moved toward the front of the slide. “Wait for Olivia to go,” the teacher told Jia. Jia looked up at Miss Elsa, moving away from the front of the slide so Olivia could go down. “Okay Jia” Miss Elsa said to alert her that she could return back to the slide. This time, Jia climbed onto the play-scape, peering at Miss Elsa through the plexi-glass window. After a few minutes Jia took her shoes off, placing them near the window, and walked down the angled ramp to get off of the play-scape. Her bare feet walked over the wood chips and onto the concrete sidewalk. Some children had begun walking inside the classroom, but Jia was uninterested. “Are you ready to go in?” Miss Elsa asked Jia. “Noooooo, No, No” Jia said shaking her head adamantly back and forth. “Come on” Miss Elsa said as she took Jia’s

hand. Noticing that her feet were absent of shoes, Miss Elsa said “Go get your shoes.” Jia appeared to ignore her as she tried to remove her hand from Miss Elsa’s grasp and make her way inside. Miss Elsa gripped Jia’s hand once more and motioned her towards the play-scape. Jia lumbered up the ramp and grabbed her shoes. She carried them close to her body with her arms so they wouldn’t drop on the ground. “Got em?” Miss Elsa asks. “Yeah, yeah” Jia happily exclaimed, bounding into the classroom.

The teachers in the young toddler classroom range in age and experience, but they are all European American women, born and raised in America. Two of the teachers, Miss Elsa and Miss Colleen were with Jia for almost *two years from the infant to the young toddler room* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 5) at the time of observation. Each of the teachers was asked to reflect on their experiences with Jia in the classroom, characterizing her identity and describing her peer interactions. They were asked to discuss any difficulties she had in the classroom and whether or not any of them appeared to be the result of cultural conflicts.

Each teacher had fond memories of Jia, and all of them characterized her as *very happy and friendly* (Miss Haley-interview, line 7), *very loving and outgoing* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 8-9), and *sweet* (Miss Colleen-interview, line 14). Miss Haley also noted that *she’s a little bit slower to warm up in situations* (interview, line 7), noted here:

Jia and her mother were sitting on the ground reading books. The stack had already reached three as Jia held tightly to her mother each time she finished one. Slowly, Eun-soon rose from the floor, dislodging the fingers wrapped tightly around her arm. After a long hug, Jia let go and waved goodbye (Observation, November 14, 2007).

All of the teachers thought that this was a result of attachment issues that stemmed from their culture because

*they hold their child for the first few years. [They] would walk around with Jia in a contraption around the house. She liked to be held a lot, and the mother and child bond is really close for the first few years. And they just do everything with the child attached to them. That physical contact was really important. If she was out from being sick, she regressed and you had to bring her forward. She had come so far, and then you had to work with her all over again (Miss Elsa-interview, line 153-158).*

Miss Elsa's statement regarding Jia's cultural experiences at home is representative of the previous findings suggesting that Korean families tend to value close physical contact (Ryu, 2004).

Although the teachers recognized that *Jia had to be held a lot more than we would in our culture* (Miss Haley-interview, line 108), the interactions that occurred between the teachers and Jia suggested that they were either unsure of how to accommodate her in some situations, and that they just disagreed with her need to have constant contact. The Western perspective that the teachers have substantiates the idea that they believe the parents controlling behavior is overbearing (Rogoff, 2003). This observation presents Jia's resistance to being left alone in the classroom and frustration at not receiving the attention she was calling out for.

The room was oddly quiet and empty that morning. The door swung open unexpectedly, and Jia peered into the room, careful not to let go of her father's hand. In a sing song voice, he told her in Korean to come inside. Expecting the normal routine to occur, Jia let go and ran to the rest room to brush her teeth. On this morning, however, a child was still in the bathroom. Jia ran back quickly

and grappled for her father's hand again. Miss Colleen reached to hand Grace a crayon, and then peered up and extended her hand toward Jia. "Come on" she said, taking Jia's hand. Jia was hesitant to move, so Miss Colleen distracted her. "Can we take your necklace?" knowing that the delicate item might be damaged at school. "No!" Jia proclaimed. Her father whispered to her in Korean that she should, and so Jia walked with him to place it in her cubby for safe-keeping. Uninterested in the art, Jia followed her father to the plastic red slide in the middle of the classroom. Just as soon as she began to make her way to the top of it, she was distracted by the sight of Grace and Miss Haley playing with the squishy balls. She ran right up to both of them, grabbing a baby out of the window box on her way and immediately began running behind Grace. Although playing with the girls, Miss Haley did not utter a word and Jia attempted to get her attention by jumping in her lap. Finally, as she began to cry, Miss Haley looked down to ask "What happened?" (Observation, February 12, 2008).

A theme that was commonly stated among all of the teachers was that Jia was *manipulative to get what she wants* (Miss Colleen-interview, line 14), *but that she figured out it didn't work with the teachers* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 9), a statement supporting the idea that the teachers *just don't have enough time to satisfy her* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 13-14). For the teachers, time is a resource, and one that they don't have enough of to fully accommodate the individual needs of each child in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1999). The teachers expressed that they believed Jia was most *manipulative with her parents* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 9), implying that Jia's techniques were perceived negatively in their eyes. However, Jia's actions to gain something from her parents were concurrent with her experiences at home, as she was used



to her parents overseeing everything she did. Jia's attempts to get what she wanted, or as the teacher stated, manipulation, in the classroom represented her investigation into culturally appropriate practices in her American classroom. This observation shows an interaction typical of what Jia's teachers saw as manipulation of her parents in the classroom:

Jia entered the room hand-in-hand with her mother, Eun-soon. She listened as her mother spoke to her in English and hugged her ferociously. As she tried to leave, Jia whimpered, so she placed Jia into a chair, buckled her in and knelt beside her as she pointed to one of the ink pads and then picked up a stamp. "Try this" she said, "it makes a sun." "Dah!" Jia exclaimed pointing down at the image. As the teachers said it was time to clean up, Jia's mother asked her "Do you want to go outside?" Jia half listened to her and continued to stamp the paper. "Let's go outside," her mother said taking her hand. "Swing," Jia said, "swing." Eun-soon nodded and nudged her towards the back door, and said "Bye!" (Observation, October 30, 2007).

During her parent conferences with Eun-soon, Miss Elsa would often discuss this and other concerns. *Her parents always stayed until she said it was okay to go. And once she said okay, then they would go. Dad would definitely stay, and she knew what she was doing to get him to stay* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 33-34). The parent conferences enabled communication to occur between the teachers and Jia's parents as a way to mitigate questions or concerns that arose for either party. In the conversations between Miss Elsa and Eun-soon, the communication was made easier due to the knowledge that Miss Elsa had concerning Korean culture. In this way, topics like this were better understood (Dagenais, Day, & Toohey, 2006; Takanishi, 2004).

However, the conferences consisted of Miss Elsa voicing her concerns, and then Eun-soon would listen to how Miss Elsa was going to address those concerns in the classroom.

Upon further questioning involving Jia's manipulative ways, the teachers were asked if they had any prior knowledge about Korean culture. Miss Colleen said that she *didn't know anything about Korean culture before Jia. I just learned along the way from Miss Elsa. At first, I saw marks on her back that looked like bruises, but Miss Elsa said they were just birthmarks. Apparently all Korean children have them.* (Miss Colleen-interview, line 117-119). This statement is an overgeneralization that Miss Colleen made based on a brief conversation. They were also asked if they thought Jia's culture impacted her behaviors in the classroom (Miller & Manglesdorf, 2005; Salmivalli & Issacs, 2005). *You know, I'm wondering if it's not. They do for them much longer than we do* (Miss Elsa-interview, 109; 158). Miss Elsa used the knowledge she had about the parenting practices that occurred in the home and attributed it to the culture because she knew that Jia's parents oversaw much of her life.

Once they were seated in their chairs, Jia climbed onto Eun-soon's lap and sat contently. Her mother leaned forward to whisper in Jia's ear and they got up and walked over to the refreshments table. Eun-soon carefully picked strawberries and a little cake up in a napkin and took them back to her chair, holding Jia the entire time as she fed her morsel by morsel, not allowing her to feed herself.

Throughout the duration of the Bible study, Jia was very quiet. The only sounds that exited her mouth were whispers into her mother's ears (Observation, May 4, 2008).

The teachers thought of other cultural issues that might be influencing the events in the classroom, and Miss Haley said that she did not *know a lot about their discipline. But I think it*

*was pretty much if she was crying, they did everything in their power to stop her crying* (interview, line 123-124). Miss Haley was unaware of their discipline techniques at home, and was therefore unable to make an informed decision that might have been more meaningful to Jia in the classroom. All of the teachers perceived that Jia's manipulative ways, coupled with her parents cultural values of *basically letting her have her way*, affected her interactions in the classroom, especially when they tried to discipline her (Miss Colleen-interview, line 132-133); an idea supported during this observation that was typical of interactions between Jia and her teachers:

A pile of books are scattered in the corner, most covered with multi-colored pillows. Parts of little feet and other body parts can be seen peeking out from under the pillows as well. Laughter is audible, although muffled, because Jia and Grace's heads are still hiding beneath the pillows. In the midst of enjoying their seemingly private party involving books and pillows, Miss Elsa calls for Jia. Unwillingly, Jia was coaxed over to the changing table crying. "Stop crying" she tells her quite firmly. Jia continued to cry, and kept doing so during the entire changing process. Miss Elsa labouringly lifted Jia off of the changing table without saying a word and placed her on the floor. Leaving the area, Jia kept crying. She slowly made her way to the carpet, and stopped by Chuy's cage. Seven minutes went by as Jia stood frozen, without any attempts to calm her down. At this point, it was clean up time and Jia was oblivious. She was completely unwilling to help, ignoring the teachers' requests. "Here Jia" Miss Elsa said, handing her a tea cup. "Can you put it away?" Although Jia took the cup, she didn't move, still crying. After a few more minutes, the crying had

resided, but Jia now silently stood in the middle of the room as if time stood still for her while everyone else moved at a hurried pace. Dropping the cup, Jia walked to the back door, knowing that they were about to go outside. After repeatedly ignoring more requests to help clean, Jia was removed from the door, led back to the mess left in the room while her friends went outside to play (Observation, November 1, 2007).

Miss Elsa mentioned that she had also spoken to Jia's mother concerning this behavior, and in response to the questions: (a) How does Jia respond when she does not get what she wants? and (b) How do you respond to her in that situation? Eun-soon stated that *Jia cries, and then I tend to let her have what she wants, or sometimes I let her cry. It depends* (Mother-questionnaire, line 10-11).

Communication between the teachers and Jia's family was crucial. Although Miss Elsa *had a previous Korean student, [she learned] some of the cultural knowledge from Eun-soon along the way* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 113-114). This knowledge helped her become aware of the impact that Korean cultural values had on the behaviors that Jia chose to reveal as a part of her identity in the classroom (Wong & Rowley, 2001). Recognizing the importance of culture in the classroom, Miss Elsa contacted Eun-soon to bring Korean symbols into the classroom. These symbols were placed side-by-side with English labels for items in the classroom, such as door, mirror, ceiling, or blocks. The labels were not implemented in an authentic or meaningful way because Jia did not see these labels at home. The Korean labels were introduced in the classroom in April 2008. *It took a while to get that done. I had used that tactic in the past with other children from different cultures as a way to share culture in the classroom* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 136-137), and to let *the other kids could see what they (the words) would like in*

*Jia's language* (Miss Colleen-interview, line 138). Although the attempt to create a supportive cultural atmosphere, as well as a link between home and school, was made, Miss Haley *never saw Jia recognize or show any interest in them* (interview, line 135) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Eun-soon gave Miss Elsa the symbols, but Miss Haley's impression was that the family *kind of just flowed with what we had* in the classroom (interview, line 134). Although Eun-soon wanted her child to be bicultural, in order to *build her identity later on*, she sent Jia to an *American daycare to learn about American culture* (Mother-questionnaire, line 5-6). Eun-soon's reasoning behind sending Jia to an American daycare is consistent with her family's desire to facilitate biculturalism (You, 2005).

Throughout the school year, the need for attention in the classroom caused problems and distress for Jia. She revealed her herself through unsuccessful manipulation attempts towards her teachers in the forms of tantrums, as perceived by her teachers (Miss Colleen-interview, line 75). The teachers open minds were facilitated by the communication with Jia's family, and resulted in *Jia changing a lot, adjusting better and better* (Miss Haley-interview, line 4). Miss Elsa still wondered if it weren't due to the incredible amounts of attention that she received at home that led to attachments and close friendships with particular children. The attention that Jia received at home was conflicting with her experiences at school. The lack of individual attention when she felt she needed it resulted in her tantrums to not only gain her teachers' attention, but also to express her frustration at not being able to have access to what she wanted at any given moment.

Jia bounded off my lap, racing to the soft blocks resting beside the bookshelf. As she built a wall, Ava meandered around the shelves supporting Chuy's cage and holding various science toys, and right into Jia's masterpiece, pillow first. The purple pillow, being used as support for her baby was bigger than both of the

girls. It fell onto the blocks now lying on the floor, followed by the baby she carried from across the room. Jia, exasperated, emitted a high pitched scream. She picked the pillow up and removed it from her space-pushing Helen away (Reflection of Reflective Journal Entry).

*Children interactions: "Let's go do!"*

The room was full of giggles and laughter, particularly high pitched laughter coming from underneath the slide. I bent forward to look under it and I saw Jia and Olivia tickling one another. Jia reached towards Olivia, moving the tips of her fingers quickly. "Tickle, tickle, tickle" she said. Olivia burst out laughing, moving her body away from Jia's fingers. Olivia then moved towards Jia, moving her fingers in the same manner. "Tickle, tickle, tickle," Olivia said. Full belly laughs were certainly infectious, as Miss Colleen began laughing with them (Observation, March 13, 2008).

The young toddler classroom is full of energy. Each child brings something unique to the environment, and that can determine the relationships that are formed between children. In the classroom, Eun-soon perceived Jia to be *more out-going*, letting her *energetic, enthusiastic, inquisitive, thinking/thoughtful, and stubborn* personality shine through (Mother-questionnaire, line 10-18). Although friendly with everyone, Jia's stubbornness often led to conflict and distress because when she did not get what she wanted, she reacted. This reaction is also representative of her behaviors at home, and show how Jia brings the valued cultural practices at home into the classroom, developing in the classroom as she learns what behaviors are appropriate in that context. Although culture may influence her behaviors, Jia may be reacting this way because of temperament or personality. The teachers describe a typical peer interaction

as: *You have a toy I want, and I'm going to take it, if I don't get it, I'll cry so you'll give it back, and if she takes something from another child that she knew she took, she gets very upset. She gets upset very easily. It never took much to set her off* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 10-11; Miss Colleen-interview, line 14-16); supported by this observation:

Jia and Grace were sitting next to one another, each piecing their own puzzle together. Grace reached over to try and put one of Jia's puzzle pieces into the puzzle upside down. Jia got upset and grabbed for the piece while Grace tried to force it in. Jia grunted, making whining sounds. Still grabbing for the puzzle piece, she began to bawl. She flung her head down on the floor, covering her face. Hearing the cries, Miss Colleen approached the girls and lifted Jia up off of the ground, without saying a word. Looking into her eyes, Miss Colleen told her, "Use your words," but Jia was crying too hard to say anything. After 5 minutes, Jia returned to the puzzle and refused to talk when Grace handed her the puzzle piece that started it all (Observation, April 30, 2008).

During peer interactions, Jia was *between a follower and a leader; it depended on who she played with* (Miss Haley-interview, line 54). Jia initiated interactions with her peers *just because you (a peer) had it; she would want it and try to play to get it* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 29-30). However, as the year went by *she began to realize that she needed to wait until the other kids were done playing with it* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 30-31).

Jia remained inside with Miss Elsa as the other children went outside. Suddenly, little footsteps could be heard running down the sidewalk. "I went pee-pee in the potty!" Jia exclaimed. "Yeah!" all of the teachers proclaimed, clapping their hands. Jia then sat next to Grace on the sidewalk, watching her as she drew with

chalk. She moved closer to Clarke and tried to take one of his chalk pieces.

Clarke voiced his dislike. Miss Colleen came up behind Jia and moved her backward, away from Clarke. Immediately, Jia appeared upset, but she just got up and walked towards Grace (Observation, May 7, 2008).

The progression of Jia's reactions in these situations shows how she developed throughout the year in the classroom. In the beginning, she used techniques that were relevant to her experiences at home, both perceived by myself and the teachers. But, she eventually moved towards utilizing techniques that she was socialized into the classroom, techniques that were culturally appropriate in that context. Jia's progress, although it could be related to Korean culture, can also be associated with her social/emotional development.

Although Jia had some *high-maintenance moments* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 14) with Grace, *she and Grace were like two peas in a pod, Jia always played with Grace so much!* (Miss Colleen-interview, line 22; 34). She would *typically play with other children*, but she *played more with Grace because Grace demanded it, and Jia would say no if she didn't want to* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 19-20; 38). However, *she usually just did whatever Grace said and was happy while she was chasing her around* (Miss Haley-interview, line 26-27).

*She and Grace had play interactions. They would talk to each other and leave and come back to each other, but they had more than she and anyone else. "Let's go do" a lot of times Grace would say* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 51-53), observed here:

Holding onto the railings of the ramp, Grace bounded up the play-scape with Jia quick on her heels. Grace looked to make sure Jia was there and then continued towards the monkey bars. She reached up with her hands and lifted her feet off of the floor. "Feet on the floor," Jia told her. Grace placed her feet back on the



ground and began jumping. Jia followed suit, happily jumping around the play-scape (Observation, March 17, 2008).

Jia's teachers believed that the close bond that formed between Jia and Grace was due in part to the *physical contact* and support that she needed to maintain. (Miss Colleen-interview, line 156). An idea that they felt was related to the continuity of physical contact she received at home. Grace offered Jia constant attention and comfort, both of which she was accustomed to receiving at home, and which has been found to be consistent in Korean culture (Ryu, 2004). *Jia wasn't too much of a loner unless she was angry and needed to cry. She would never isolate herself, and she always played in pretty close proximity to or parallel with other students* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 24-26). This is an interaction representative of Jia's reaction to an initiation of contact or interaction with a student whom she was uninterested:

Sounds of rice being dropped from the air into a plastic bin could be heard from the slide. After her laughing fit was over, Jia walked over to the sensory table and stood next to Grace. She put her fingers inside of the bin and picked up a handful of rice. "Eww, eww!" she said, "I want it out." She quickly brushed her hands together, trying to get all of the rice off. "All done," she told Grace, and she walked back under the slide and lay on the floor. Simon tried to crawl under the slide with her, but she pushed him away and said, "No!" The she looked over her shoulder to make sure Grace was still there. "Night, night" she said in Grace's direction; "I go night night."(Observation, March 13, 2008).

Miss Colleen suspected that Jia's lack of response to some students was because *she can sense something about someone and if she'll feel comfortable with that person or not. If she was uncomfortable with someone*, she would choose to disregard their attempts at interaction

(Interview, lines 37-38). This shyness was noted by Eun-soon as well, and I believe it can be explained by the potential lack of support that Jia felt in the classroom when she was exposed to elders or peers that made her feel uncomfortable. The lack of interest in interacting with her peers was much more evident at church, as seen here:

A small window located at the top of a door is the only way to see inside of the small playroom. The perimeter wall space was covered with bookshelves and various table-top toys to provide stimulation for the children. A slightly fragile looking woman ran her hand through her short gray hair, appearing quite frazzled at the prospect of supervising a handful of children, ages 15 months to 8 years. Jia was glued to her mother's side. Eun-soon left, the first day she ever left her alone. Miss Helen offered a toy to Jia. Unresponsive to the woman's attempts at play, Jia remained silent. All alone in a corner of the playroom, Jia remained aware of the other children playing nearby, as well as Miss Helen's whereabouts in the room. Her eyes followed every move the woman made, and Jia moved with her, remaining at a close distance (Church observation, May 4, 2008).

In this situation, Jia displayed various behavioral and personality characteristics that her teachers at her normal school spoke about, such as being slow to warm up, cautious of new surroundings, and uninterested in initiations of play with unfamiliar people. These characteristics were all observed in Jia's interactions primarily in cases where she was left alone without her parents' constant contact and supervision.

*Language in the classroom: "She used English at school."*

Language was an important factor in this family's life. The primary language used for communication in their home and at church was Korean. In certain situations at home involving

pretend play, Eun-soon stated that Jia spoke in both “*English and Korean*” (Mother Interview-line, 15). An observation from the church presents a representative snapshot of the interaction between Jia and her parents:

As I waited at the bottom of the stairs that led up to Jia’s family’s apartment, I wondered how the day would be. Fortunately, Eun-soon and Jin, carrying Jia, approached me with broad smiles across their faces. “Hi” they said warmly. They then spoke to Jia in Korean, motioning towards me. “We’ll meet you there, you can follow us,” Eun-soon told me as they climbed into their car. When we got to the church, they carried her in, and I followed behind them. They only spoke Korean to one another, but addressed everyone else in English. Jia hung onto to her father silently (Church Observation, May 4, 2008).

This observation shows how Jia’s parents switched between languages so that communication with Jia was maintained in Korean. This communication style was not carried into the classroom, as “*she used English at school*” with her parents unless Eun-soon “*initiated Korean*” towards Jia (Miss Elsa-interview, line 56, 80). This is presented through an observation here with an interaction between Jia and her grandmother:

At the end of hectic day, Jia was lovingly playing with the baby dolls. Her grandmother arrived in the doorway, staring at Jia, motioning for her to come. Jia did not respond when her grandmother spoke to her in Korean and continued to play. Eventually, Jia walked over to her and said “No.” Clearly, she understood what was said, but refused to put the jacket on that her grandmother was holding up for her. After a few minutes, she put the jacket on and said “bye” to her classmates (Observation, November 26, 2007).

As this interaction shows, Jia knew English was spoken in the classroom and reflects the commitment that Eun-soon had in regards to speaking English with Jia in school. This supports Eun-soon's desire for Jia to be socialized into "American" culture "*because that's the culture that she will live with as long as she lives in America*" (Mother Questionnaire, line 10).

Jia's ability to speak English in the classroom was "*very advanced*" and "*she could say anything she wanted*" (Miss Colleen-interview, line 62; Miss Haley-interview, line 55). Jia's linguistic skills are shown here:

As soon as Jin had left the room, Jia looked down at her shirt, pointed, and said, "My shirt has doggy on it." Grace greeted her, looked at her shirt, and then they both walked over to me. Grace began playing with my earrings, and Jia said, "We don't touch earrings." "Gentle touches are okay," I said. Jia seemed satisfied and began playing with the other earring (Observation, April 30, 2008).

Although Jia constantly "used her words" (Miss Colleen-interview, line 76) in the classroom, towards the end of the school year, Miss Elsa began to notice that

*"If you asked in context conversation where she needed a sentence, she would hold her head down and she would get a voice low and you couldn't understand her. I feel she was unclear of the words to use. Eun-soon was going to start a little bit of English with her because she felt like she wasn't getting all of the words she needed"* (Miss Elsa-interview, line, 57-60).

The difficulties that Jia began having with English in the classroom could be a result of the confusion that can occur because Jia is navigating between two worlds in which she negotiates different social interactions that I believe may be attributed to both culture and development.

In the lab school classroom, Jia was *strong-willed* (Miss Elsa-interview, line 15). She revealed her social identity through peer interactions that were perceived by her teachers to be associated with her Korean culture, in particular with her reactions towards conflict. Cultural practices at home thus may have influenced the behaviors connected with her developing social identity in the classroom context (Wong & Rowley, 2001). However, any child with any cultural background could interact in similar ways to Jia. Korean culture was explored further in this study because Jia was Korean, but she could have just as easily been Italian, Czech, Kenyan, or from another immigrant background.

Chaos ensued as adults and children shared the same spaces, squeezing past one another in an attempt to place toys in their proper places in record time. Children began to line up at the back door, and some still couldn't quite stop playing, opening and closing the refrigerator door within an arm's length away. Ava led the way as the door flew open and ecstatic screaming followed her out. As the last child exited, and the door slowly closed, I let out a sigh. I had fun, but being a kid was tough (Reflection of Reflective Journal Entry).

### Conclusion

As a bicultural and bilingual child in an American early education classroom, Jia's experiences were primarily positive according to both her teachers and her mother. The instances in which Jia had difficulties negotiating the classroom environment were situations that could have included conflicting or opposing cultural practices, such as her need to maintain close contact and her requests to gain more individualized attention from her teachers. If not cultural, Jia's experiences could be attributed to her temperament, personality, or social/emotional development. The teachers felt that this call for attention was not viable in their classroom due

to their lack of resources, in this case specifically time. Although resources affected the interactions that occurred between Jia and her teachers, the Western perspective that the teachers held conflicted with the valued cultural practices that Jia experienced on a daily basis at home. Unable to receive the same kinds of experiences in the classroom, Jia's frustration and confusion were evidenced during interactions that occurred with both her teachers and peers. It is important to mention that all children are susceptible to experiencing the same difficulties in the classroom, regardless of their cultural background, due to typical development.

The teachers thought that opposing cultural practices were causing some of Jia's distress in the classroom, so attempts were made to communicate with her family about their culture, as well as to bring in Korean labels to ensure that the classroom environment was meaningful for Jia, trying to provide her with resources in the classroom that she attributed to home. By integrating part of Jia's world through the Korean symbols into the classroom, a new culture was created in the classroom that supported Jia by attempting to link her two apparently opposing and conflicting cultural worlds (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, Miss Colleen noted that Jia appeared to be unaware of the introduction of her native language into the classroom. This unawareness demonstrates the hybrid space that Jia created in the classroom, knowing that English was appropriate in that context only. Although she spoke Korean in the classroom when her parents initiated it, she would sometimes still reply in English. Further support comes from the interactions during church that were consistently only in Korean.

The teacher's efforts to link Jia's Korean cultural practices to the "American" classroom were facilitated through communication between Miss Elsa and Eun-soon. However, the assistant teachers were not present during those conversations, therefore inhibiting the cultural knowledge that could have been directly offered to Miss Colleen and Miss Haley. The

secondary information given to Miss Colleen and Miss Haley, although helpful, impacted the practices that they used in the classroom, especially when dealing with Jia's demands for attention. Had Miss Colleen and Miss Haley been a part of the conferences that built rapport and respect between Miss Elsa and Eun-soon, a continuous dialogue could have been established to create that experience for them as well. Providing the opportunity to create a dialogue between all of the teachers in the classroom and Jia's family is important to maintaining a culturally responsive early education classroom. The dialogue facilitates a co-construction of methods that can be used to accommodate Jia by supporting her behaviors instead of dismissing them because Western concepts of independence may not be appropriate for a Korean child.

Jia's frustration in the classroom shows how she navigated between her two cultural worlds, trying out practices in the classroom to see the type of reaction she would receive. As the year progressed, Jia's behavior began to represent the expectations and valued practices promoted in the classroom, not attempting behaviors that were appropriate only in contexts outside of the classroom. Jia's attempts at unveiling certain characteristics show the development that she experienced in negotiating social interactions in the classroom, and the ways in which the classroom culture affected that negotiation.

#### Implications

Future studies should continue to explore the idea of cultural sensitivity and how valuing diversity enriches the lives of children, especially very young children like Jia (Genishi & Goodwin, 2008). Exploring young bicultural and bilingual children's classrooms can improve the understanding of the processes that they go through in a classroom that may be culturally contradicting. Once a better grasp is obtained on how children negotiate this kind of classroom

environment, the characteristics of a classroom that is meaningful can be revealed to assist other teachers in diverse classrooms.

As children from diverse backgrounds enter the classroom, teachers must first assess their assumptions and biases. Recognizing the perspective that they bring into the classroom concerning bicultural and bilingual children is important because teacher's views shape the culture that is created in the classroom, and therefore the experiences that will inform the developing social identities of young children. Teachers should also ask themselves what biculturalism means to them, as well as how they could create a classroom that would be supportive for diverse children. In this way, teachers will recognize if they are coming from an inferior, deficit, or diversity paradigm, which will ultimately shape their classrooms and the children within them (Goodwin, Cheruvu, & Genishi, 2008). To fully assess their assumptions, teachers should communicate with the families.

Communication between all teachers and parents should be common practice, and an experience that facilitates open dialogue so culturally valuable and appropriate practices are discussed. This practice results in a culturally responsive room that is better equipped with the resources and information necessary to create a safe place for children to actively co-exist as they continue to navigate the boundaries between school and home. In order to create an environment that supports and encourages the development of children's social identities, all teachers should be included in the dialogue. Assistant teachers are not given enough opportunities to directly interact with the parents in order to learn more about them. Due to this, assistant teachers should be self-aware, and recognize when they may make overgeneralized blanket statements about culture. If all members of the classroom dialogue with one another,



then a comprehensive plan for children could be enacted, making the space that much more meaningful, as well as collaborative.

Communication between the teachers and parents will also enable them to work together to create a cooperative and collaborative discipline plan for the child. In doing so, the child's experiences in the classroom and at home will not seem as contradictory. This is helpful to create an environment that is culturally relevant because it facilitates teachers' understandings of valued practices at home, and how much variation exists within and across cultures (Rogoff, 2003). If teachers are able to truly treat each child as a unique individual, then they might feel more supported in the classroom, feeling comfortable to react in situations that may have been inappropriate before they became an active participant in the classroom community. Viewing each child as unique, teachers can request that parents bring in items from home that is particularly meaningful for the child. Teachers should be aware of hybrid, or third spaces that children create in the classroom as well in order to deduce how children create bridges between two apparently and opposing practices (Stires & Genishi, 2008; Souto-Manning & Dice, in press).

A school that openly facilitates communication with the family regarding cultural practices at home is the first step in creating supportive classroom environments for children navigating two worlds. I believe that early education settings that include bicultural and bilingual children should honor culture in the classroom by connecting with the families of those children. In doing so, teachers can gain knowledge about the child's culture, aiding them in facilitating a supportive and accommodating classroom environment that provides not only the teachers, but children with the necessary resources.

Resources that could enable teachers to create more supportive and accommodating classrooms could include planning times for lead and assistant teachers to collaborate with one another to plan culturally relevant activities. Additional conference times with families could also facilitate greater understanding of valued practices in each environment, thereby increasing the likelihood that children would navigate in, across, and between the culturally divergent environments more easily.

Early education teachers already have so many responsibilities to the children in their classrooms, whose identities they help shape. Honoring the heritage culture of bicultural and bilingual children in the classrooms is an important element in creating culturally supportive environments, and the process of implementing such a space should not take away from the curriculum and routines already in place, particularly if that curriculum already takes into account the idea that every child is unique and will adjust in some way (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). If simple conversations are facilitated with parents to ensure the culture of the classroom is nurturing, then the child will feel at ease in interacting within the many contexts of the classroom, and use the experiences to develop their social identities in a culturally supportive space.

Communication with the goal of dialogue and nurturing environments that provide culturally relevant practices represent ways to view children from an ecological perspective. This perspective takes into account the whole child and all of the environments and experiences and recognizes that each element influences the other (Sanchez, 1999). Viewing children in this manner allows their biculturalism and bilingualism to be seen as assets, pieces of their lives that enrich the classroom and provide them with opportunities to develop unique identities. This assets-based approach has implications that influence policies that are used to guide early

education programs, as well as programs that implement developmentally appropriate practices that are appropriate for diverse populations, and that represent the differences that exist within and across cultural groups.

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## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Early education classrooms are the primary source of socialization practices for children outside of their homes (Phinney, Romero, Nava, & Huang, 2001). In particular, classroom environments provide bicultural and bilingual children with an opportunity to be socialized into a culture most often initially unfamiliar (Gibau, 2005; Soto, 2002). Teachers in early education classrooms should begin to recognize the importance and impact that bicultural and bilingual children's heritage cultures have on their behaviors in the classroom. Children's perceptions of their teacher's reactions regarding culturally or contextually situated behaviors affect their developing identities within that classroom (Espinosa, 2005; Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001). As socializing agents, teachers have the responsibility to not only recognize, but honor culture in the classroom, supporting and accommodating bicultural and bilingual children's needs as they are presented (Padilla, 2006).

The purpose of this case study was to provide insight for early education teachers with diverse cultural classrooms by attempting to answer these questions: in which ways do the social interactions of a 2-year-old bicultural and bilingual Korean girl develop in the context of a monolingual American early education classroom? And, in which ways does the heritage culture affect her social interactions?

A deeper understanding of what cultural influences impact the interactions that occur in situated contexts within the classroom was gained by observing the interactions of a young bicultural and bilingual child in an early education setting. Exposing her behaviors during

interactions with her teachers and peers allowed the influential features and experiences within the classroom to become clear. Through these interactions, Jia's social identities were negotiated. Viewing the classroom community through her interactions provided the information needed to determine how important interactions are for bicultural and bilingual children navigating within, across, and between two different cultural contexts.

In this early education classroom, there was a lack of communication between Miss Elsa and Eun-soon regarding classroom expectations. Expectations for Jia's socialization into "American" culture was one of Eun-soon's primary reasons for placing Jia in an early education classroom, but cultural expectations regarding the degree to which she wanted Jia to maintain her heritage culture were not as prevalent. Although Miss Elsa did have a certain degree of knowledge about Korean culture, some of it stemmed from previous students. When Jia experienced difficulties in the classroom potentially related to culturally conflicted practices, although Miss Elsa had some idea of what Jia needed, Miss Haley and Miss Colleen did not. The assistant teachers reacted to Jia in ways that were not culturally appropriate or responsive ways because they did not have opportunities that Miss Elsa did to directly engage with the family.

A culturally responsive classroom setting could have been achieved had all of the teachers actively communicated with one another and especially with Eun-soon, allowing a continuous dialogue to occur. Dialogue here means that everyone involved listens to one another, acknowledges what each person brings to the situation, in the end co-constructing a plan together for the benefit of all, but especially for the benefit of the child (Friere, 1970). Through this dialogue, each individual could bring information and differing perspectives to the table in

order to co-construct knowledge that would facilitate a culturally responsive environment in which Jia's social identities could supportively develop.

Although the experiences Jia had were contextually situated in this specific early education classroom, implications for the community and society exist in terms of honoring all children in the classroom. This can be done by viewing children as unique individuals, each one bringing cultural experiences into the classroom. The population in the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, and viewing diversity as an asset is crucial to a sense of self and developing social identities, especially for very young children.

Future studies should continue exploring young bicultural and bilingual children's experiences in early education classrooms to continue gathering the information needed to ascertain what experiences in the classroom are most influential. An examination of culturally supportive classrooms could provide access to strategies already in practice, providing more resources for teachers trying to create culturally supportive environments. Policy makers have the ability to use the knowledge that culture and diversity are important to honor and support in early education classrooms, and inform legislation that would provide more resources for programs. This information can also inform programming guidelines, ensuring that they are developmentally appropriate and valid across culturally diverse populations.

My hope is that all children from diverse backgrounds perceive their diversity as an asset. Young bicultural and bilingual children should feel supported and safe in their environments, especially in an early education classroom that will begin to shape how they see themselves, and perceive their place in the classroom. I hope that early education teachers assess their perceptions honestly so that their classrooms are appropriately culturally responsive so that young children's identities are fostered in a positive manner. Teachers can develop the

characteristics and dispositions needed in culturally supportive classrooms by opening their minds and lives to the knowledge that they can receive from children and their families, learning from them and with them. They can also continue to learn about teaching practices through seminars addressing diversity and individuality, so that they are informing themselves with information that will benefit all children. Most of all, I hope that teachers continue to communicate with families to create an ongoing dialogue that will not only create a classroom where diverse children can co-exist, but in an environment that encourages diverse children to co-exist, and learn from each other in meaningful and authentic ways. This encouragement will thereby enable children to negotiate their social interactions with less frustration.

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## APPENDIX

## Teacher Questionnaire

1. How long have you been in the classroom with the child?
2. How would you describe the child; characterize her personality?
3. Does she tend to play alone, or does she interact with other children?
4. Can you describe a typical play interaction involving the child?
5. Are there certain students that she interacts with?
6. Can you describe a typical peer interaction involving the child?
7. How much English does the child use in the classroom?
8. Does she use her words? If not, what does she use?
9. Does she use her native language, Korean?
10. Do you remember when her grandmother was here? Was her interaction any different?
11. What language do her parents use with her in the classroom?
12. What is her favorite area of the room, or certain preferred materials?
13. What are your thoughts of the child's Korean culture; do you have any knowledge of it?
14. What knowledge do you have the experiences the child has at home?
15. What cultural issues are addressed in the classroom?
16. Did you discuss having Korean symbols in the classroom with her family?
17. Does this child have difficulty in the classroom? How?
18. How does the child respond when she doesn't get what she wants?
19. Do you think any of these problems are cultural?

## Parent Questionnaire

*Please complete this questionnaire and return it to me by email: [melli@uga.edu](mailto:melli@uga.edu)*

1. How long have you been in the United States and for what reason?
2. Culturally, what problems have you encountered in the U.S. as a family?
3. Why did you choose to attend your church?
4. How is your child exposed to your native culture?
5. Is it important to you that your child learn about Korean culture, Why?
6. Is there anything you think I should know about your culture that would help me understand your child?
7. How is your child exposed to 'American' culture?
8. Is it important to you that your child learns about 'American' culture, Why?
9. How would you characterize your child's personality at home?
10. How does she respond when she doesn't get what she wants?
11. How do you respond to her in that situation?
12. How does she play at home?
13. During pretend play what language does she speak?
14. What kinds of toys does she like?
15. What does she watch on tv?
16. Do you notice a difference in your child's personality between home and school, if so, how?
17. How would you characterize your child's personality in other social situations?
18. How is your child exposed to other children?
19. What is your perception of your child's interactions with other children?

20. Is there anything else you think I should know about your child that would help me understand her?

Additional Comments:

*THANK YOU!*