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SUBJECT CHILD:

The everyday experiences of a group of small town
Aotearoa/New Zealand children.

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Jackie Sanders, 2004

Abstract

This thesis presents an ethnographic account of everyday life for eighteen healthy and safe, small town, Aotearoa/New Zealand children aged between ten and eleven years. It undertakes a social constructionist analysis of five domains of the children's lives; self and identity, their relationships with each other, their relationships with adults, time and space, and safety and risk. These domains reflect the intersection between the children's own lives and their wider contexts. The approach taken is consistent with the new social studies of childhood perspective that has been articulated over the past 15-20 years. This approach, developed in response to a perceived over-determinism in the developmental accounts of childhood, brings to the foreground the need to document more fully children's standpoints.

The children held a sense of themselves as good people and their thoughts about the future, relationships and themes of stability were prominent areas of self-development for them. Their friendships provided important social and emotional resources. Making and sustaining friendships involved delicate processes of positioning and while they provided emotional sustenance they could also be a source of confusion and anxiety. Intense friendships were important for both boys and girls. Relationships with adults were critical and time was an important component of good relationships.

The children thought about time in a variety of ways, but the linear progression of time from the present out to the future was not a strong component of this. Home was important place to the children, home as stability, as a place for time with parents and for free time were prominent themes. It was also a place of self-care for a number of the children. School time was experienced as time to play with friends and socialise, and schoolwork time. Social time was more prominent in the children's thinking than work time. Global discourses about risk and safety played a powerful role in influencing the ways in which the children spent their time, particularly the ways in which they utilised public spaces.

The children were keen to participate in the research and were insightful social commentators demonstrating a passionate interest in being able to express their views and to think about the way that different dimensions of their social worlds influenced the things they were able to do.

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