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Learning through Participation in a Playcentre Routine

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Early Years) at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Paulene Heather Gibbons 2004
Abstract

This study investigated the organisational culture of two New Zealand Playcentres in order to explore the way in which the culture influenced the learning experiences of the children. The study focussed on the morning tea routine.

A qualitative case study approach was employed, drawing on ethnographic methods. Qualitative observations at two playcentres during the morning tea routine, focussing on the actions of children, birth to five years, and adults, were used to explore the children’s participation in the routine. Informal interviews and focus groups with adults, and field notes facilitated an exploration into the meanings the adults placed on the happenings during the routine of morning tea. The case studies were analysed using cultural models to consider the organisational culture of the centres. A further analysis of children’s learning employed Rogoff’s three-plane model of analysis.

The study of the routine of morning tea in these centres indicated that the physical environment and historical influences impacted on the practices in the centres, and the social, philosophical and pedagogical beliefs of the participants were evident in the interaction patterns between adults and children, and children and children. Both centres showed characteristics of being communities of learners with parental involvement as educators, and yet favoured an individualistic orientation. These characteristics influenced the way the centres operated, and thus the learning opportunities for children and their parents. Children were learning, in differing ways, what it meant to be a member of their playcentre during this routine.

It is argued that the organisational culture of the centre influences the participants’ views of learning, the social patterns in evidence in the centre, the structuring of the programme, and therefore the opportunities for children’s learning.
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