

Play and Culture: Examining the role of play as a tool to promote cross cultural awareness and integration in young children

ABSTRACT

“Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is the child’s soul. It is the purest and most spiritual product of the child and at the same time it is a type and copy of human life at all stages and in all relations...for the one who has insight into human nature, the trend of the whole future life of the child is revealed in his freely chosen play.”

(Froebal, 1992)

The role of culture in learning and development has been an emerging theme in developmental research over the last number of years. As society has become increasingly multi-cultural, social scientists have become aware of the contributions that cross cultural research can make in our understanding of human development, (Robinson, 2007).

This paper will examine the relationship between play and cultural diversity, and how play can help promote awareness of cultural diversity in young children.

One of the most common elements of childhood across cultures is play. Cultural experience begins with creative living, first manifested in play (Winnicott, 1971) Play allows a child to try and learn about their world and is essential for healthy development. Studies have shown that play also reflects the social and cultural contexts in which children live, (Christie, et al 2002)

In terms of understanding children’s development of racial and cultural awareness, studies highlight the importance of early intervention in establishing positive feelings and attitudes toward racial and cultural issues.

There are several studies which discuss when children become aware of differences in other children, this research is important to a discussion on play and diversity because it gives an indication of when and how children play with each other.

Findings suggest that consistent with socio-cognitive theory, the development of cognitive ability, particularly the attainment of concrete operations, is a significant influence on the decline of children's negative attitudes from 6 years and onwards. At the same time, the findings suggest that other factors also exert an influence on whether these attitudes decline, stabilize or strengthen, (Neasdale, 2005).

The aim of this paper therefore is to develop an understanding of the relationship between play and cultural diversity, and how to promote cross-cultural awareness and integration in young children.

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