Early Childhood Pedagogical Practice Within A Cultural Kaleidoscope

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Abstract

Research strongly suggests that efforts to create effective classroom environments for young children from diverse cultural backgrounds should be based in part on knowledge about the role that culture plays in shaping children's learning opportunities and experiences. An equally important consideration in child development and learning is that of developmentally appropriate practice which recognizes that each child is unique and has individual personality characteristics, learning styles, experiences, and a particular family background, all of which impact the child's age-related emerging mental abilities and developmental milestones.

This research endeavour was a qualitative, ethnographic case study which explored issues of early childhood education and developmentally appropriate practice as well as the strategies that teachers used to promote cultural awareness and relevance. The study was based on a single instance in action, that of a specific senior kindergarten class at a private school in Trinidad and Tobago, consistent with the need to assess the scope and adequacy of early education in a culturally diverse population of children. The study focussed on data from in-depth interviews, unobtrusive observations and recorded field notes, studied reflections from a researcher diary, and items from 3 selected subscales of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Revised Edition).

The data consistently supported a teaching practice that encouraged self-reflection and cultural awareness, resulting in a holistic model of education which was both developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive. Further, the observed pedagogical practice suggested a fully inclusive, contemporary model of multicultural learning based on a common, shared understanding and profound knowledge of all the cultures.