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A psychology of a Catholic education: A case study of a day primary school in Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an investigation of 13-14 year-old learners in Grade Five and Grade Six being taught and learning moral sociocultural values. The specific variables investigated are children's perspective of values, their beliefs, goals and motives implicit or explicit in the learning of sociocultural values.

The investigation uses the theoretical framework of Cultural Psychology in which Activity Theory is used to analyse and explain the school as an activity system. The working hypothesis is that activities are *embedded* into each other if they share a common *object* and envision a common *outcome*. The notion of *embedded* activities is developed based on the Engeströmian third generation Activity Theory model. The assumption is that if the school is the central activity system in a formal teaching and learning milieu, then other activities systems that support the teaching-learning processes constitute *embedded* activities. For instance, the classroom, a lesson, a morning assembly and any other project that contributes to the teaching-learning processes of sociocultural values.

The method used for this investigation was ethnography. Data were collected using participant observation, interviews, still photographs, videography, school records, documents, and children's artefacts. The data were analysed by Atlas.ti version 5.2 computer based qualitative data analysis software using strategies from Strauss and Corbin's 'microanalyses' and Maykut and Morehouse's 'interpretive-descriptive' strategy. The results showed that children at first learn sociocultural values from the culturally more able; in this way, values are taught through co-construction of knowledge. Children learn sociocultural values through what they do. This constitutes their activities: mental and practices as derived from their home ethos through to their school ethos. If this is missing, children will learn other values presuming these to be the best for their welfare, which may have undesirable outcomes and undesirable implications. Socio-cultural theory provides the way out that initially children need to be taught the art of living by the culturally more able as the necessary thing to do.

KEY WORDS

Activity Theory, Catholic Education, Cultural Psychology, Embedded Activities, Ethnography, Ethos, Mediation, Sociocultural Values, Leont'ev, Vygotsky