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Realisation of culture and cultural diversity in ecce daily practice: a case study of teachers in two Polokwane early childhood care and education centres

Lebopa, Maikanya Nicholas

2022
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/34765

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ABSTRACT

Children from diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa are now afforded the opportunity to attend institutions of learning with each other. This implies that the ECD population will be diverse, coming from different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups and this calls for new understandings and insight into cultural values and practices. The study seeks to understand the impact of culture and cultural diversity in the day-to-day activities in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) centres and how these are attended to by practitioners in their teachings/activities. The study is thus underpinned by the Bioecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner (1994) as well as Vygotsky's Socio- Cultural Theory. Vygotsky's Socio- Cultural Theory promotes the construction of knowledge through a socio-cultural lens where both the child and the teacher actively co-construct knowledge. Qualitative research design and a Case study approach were employed as modes of enquiry in this study, while constructivism/interpretivism was used as philosophical paradigm. Using a qualitative research design enabled me to obtain in-depth information from the teachers in their natural setting. Group focus interviews were used with teachers and semi- structured interviews used with the one principal from the centre B. In addition, observations and document analysis were used to collect data. The study comprised eight ECCE teachers including one principal who were chosen using purposive sampling drawn from two ECCE centres in Polokwane. Data was analysed using thematic content analysis. The findings reveal that teachers are comfortable in their multicultural settings and this sense of comfort comes from the fact that they follow a 'good enough' early learning programmes (one that is based on recognised developmentally appropriate principles). Issues related to the children's cultural heritage and to the management of diversity had not been considered. Difference was negated and dealt with in a uniform way. This approach to cultural diversity was not done with malicious intent. There was no attempt to exclude children from diverse cultural groups or to marginalise children who were not competent in the LOLT. because of a lack of knowledge about how to manage diversity successfully, teachers genuinely felt they were doing their best for all the children.