

Early Years Curriculum: Funds of Knowledge as a Conceptual Framework for Children's Interests

Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan (2011)

Overview

A study in Aotearoa and New Zealand examined children's interests and teachers' engagement in curriculum interactions. The research addressed the ways in which teachers recognize and engage with children's interests in relation to children's experiences and funds of knowledge. It also looked at how teachers choose whose and which interests will be engaged with in building a sociocultural curriculum throughout planned and spontaneous teaching and learning interactions.

Literature Review

Research shows that when teachers are engaged in the student's interests, that student's motivation, effort, memory, and attention are improved. The strong influence of family, community, and culture is evident in establishing and stimulating a child's interests. Studies demonstrate that everyday experiences play a significant role as genuine learning experiences, further suggesting the importance of intertwining engagement in the child's interests not only in school but at home as well. Diversity of experiences and interests can be further explained through funds of knowledge, defined as the bodies of knowledge that underlie household functioning, development, and well-being, specifically through how one thinks and learns, their approach to learning, and through practical skills.

Methodology

Two theoretical constructs were used to explain the findings in this study, including: (1) funds of knowledge experienced in pedagogical relationships; and (2) key notions from a community of inquiry.

Findings

The study found that children's interests and inquiries were stimulated by their funds of knowledge which were constructed during participation in everyday life experiences. A great deal of importance was placed on the pedagogical relationships that children engaged in, including interaction with parents, grandparents, siblings, cousins, friends, teachers, and peers. It is stressed that play is the most important way for children to represent, express, and explore their interests.

Conclusion

Using funds of knowledge as a theoretical framework for understanding and engaging with children's interests allows for teachers to acknowledge the richness of children's lives, collaborate with parents in children's learning, and reduce the disjunction between homes and schools. This framework also allows for teachers to understand children's lives and the potential of their families, communities, and cultures in order to influence their interests, inquiries, and knowledge-building.

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