

Engaging with Children's Life Worlds: A Case Study of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in a Preschool Context

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There is urgent need for international research investigating culturally responsive pedagogies (CRP) in early childhood education (Durden et al, 2015). Australia's rich cultural diversity provides an opportunity to explore how CRP is enacted and experienced within early childhood contexts. Australia's increasing cultural and linguistic diversity is evident in early childhood centres across the nation, yet there are strong indications that many educators are struggling to respond skilfully to this demographic trend, and to build upon the richness of these children's lives. Superdiversity has become the term used to describe the increasing complexity of migration-related ethnic diversity, religious, gender, class, ability and social stratification (Vertovec, 2007). The superdiversity of contemporary early childhood sites therefore presents a policy and practice challenge that requires urgent attention. The Australian Early Years Learning Framework (2009) takes a cultural competence approach to diversity which has since been critiqued for failing to challenge socio-political inequalities at the structural, institutional and interpersonal levels, reinforcing stereotypes by presuming cultural homogeneity and promoting an image of victimhood rather than agency (Morrison et al, 2019).

This paper presents a qualitative case study of a preschool teaching team engaging in collaborative action research to critically reflect on their pedagogy and practice. In particular, the teaching team was interested in focusing on improving their practice in the areas of oral language and engaging in group learning experiences. Findings demonstrate how the teaching team's engagement with children's funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, et al, 2005), an important aspect of culturally responsive pedagogies, was significant to supporting children's engagement in learning. Findings highlight how teacher's commitment to "authentic" engagement with children's life worlds transformed teacher practice and inspired reciprocal relationships with families. Recommendations for policy and practice argue for culturally responsive pedagogies as an alternative to cultural competence approach.