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Doing and undoing gender in the nursery: a video analysis of the interactions of early childhood educators with children in free play activities

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Abstract

Within the national research programme on gender and equality, this research project on doing and undoing gender in the nursery examines how gender is made relevant in day-to-day practices of nurseries. The presentation focuses on interactions between childcare workers and children during free play. The study draws on findings on gender in early childhood (MacNaughton, 2006; Brandes et al., 2013). Interactions in nurseries are analysed using the concept of doing and undoing gender (Deutsch, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In addition, dramatisation (Goffman, 1994; Faulstich-Wieland; Weber & Willems; 2004) and de-thematisation (Hirschauer, 2001) is taken into account. Four Swiss nurseries were visited for an ethnographic, video-based study during four days each in order to examine how gender is made relevant in the day-to-day practices of early childhood educators. The entire video data of 50 hours was fully categorized using atlas.ti software, applying an event sampling approach. For the analysis presented here, all sequences with interactions whereby a childcare worker responds to a child's behaviour within free play are analysed (119 sequences). Approval for video-based participant observation was sought. The results indicate that early childhood educators enhance the behaviour of the children. Reactions seeking to enhance gender equality and challenging doing gender are however rare. Differences in relation to organisational culture can be found between nurseries. Many children experience nurseries as the first institutional, educational setting. We suggest that organisational development and professional education may foster gender equality and also the quality of the play and learning environment.

Keywords

gender, daily practices, interaction, play, video analysis

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