

Places and spaces: Environments and children's well-being ^[1]

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Excerpted from abstract

Early childhood education and care is a current interest in many countries. Many international studies have highlighted the importance of high-quality early education environments where learning and play are integrated. Studies show that these types of learning environments have a positive impact on children's future prospects and overall development. Critical curriculum steering documents from Finland and Brazil form the basis of this study and can similarly be shown to define the quality of these environments, as well as providing definitions of playful learning in these differing cultural contexts. A content analysis explores patterns of the cultural and pedagogical difference of definition. This descriptive comparison permitted similarities and differences between the countries with regard to play to emerge. In this article, the authors explore what these different cultural and pedagogical definitions of play and playful learning are and what they might mean. The article thus makes a methodological contribution to a broader discussion of comparative studies of national curricula in early childhood education with specific regard to children's engagement, learning and development in and through play. The theoretical conclusions are, however, more tentative, but the authors suggest some innovative ways to conceptualise cultural and pedagogical differences in play by making an analogy with Wittgenstein's analysis of games in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

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