

Constructions of childhood in early childhood education policy debate in New Zealand ^[1]

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Abstract

What assumptions about children and childhood are held by government officials and organisation representatives who are influential in policy formation in early childhood education (ECE) in New Zealand? How are assumptions manifested in policy? This article draws on a study carried out from 2001 to 2003, a time of radical ECE policy change in New Zealand. It uses principles derived from social constructionist theory and values expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to analyse constructions of childhood in ECE policy debate during this time. Three dominant constructions about childhood were identified: a construction of the 'child as dependant within the family'; the 'child as learner within a community of learners'; and the 'child as citizen within a social community'. These constructions were associated with views about the purposes and outcomes of ECE; the roles of children, teachers, families, and government; and favoured policy approaches. It is argued that a construction of child as citizen within a social community is a new paradigm that places children's rights and agency to the forefront, and acknowledges the interdependence of care and education. As a basis for policy, it could cater better for societal change and support ECE services as participatory forums building social networks, support and cohesion.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

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