Chapter 13

Early Childhood Education Schools in Brazil: Play and Interculturality

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigates play and interculturality between Brazilian and Japanese children in early childhood education schools in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The research context is 27 schools in five cities with nursery and kindergarten. Three questions structure the article. The first deals with family motivations indicating Japanese education and culture as one of the reasons for choosing the schools. The second examines the objectives and educational practices, and the third explores the play and interculturality between Japanese and Brazilian children.

INTRODUCTION

This article investigates play and interculturality between Brazilian and Japanese children in early childhood education schools in the State of São Paulo, Brazil.

The study is justified because Brazil is the country with the highest concentration of Japanese ethnic groups outside of Japan—1.5 million individuals—and the State of São Paulo alone had 1 million Japanese descendants in 2008\(^1\). As a result, to meet the demand for education for these Japanese ethnic groups, especially in São Paulo, the number of Japanese-orientation schools is increasing. According to 2012 data, the State of São Paulo had 187 schools teaching the Japanese language.\(^2\) Twenty-seven schools on the list were identified in five cities as offering Early Childhood Education, as well as the Japanese language and culture in their nursery schools and preschools. As these are Brazilian schools registered at Municipal or State Secretariats, it is assumed that in addition to adopting the country’s curricular guidelines as principles for their pedagogical practices, they have added instruction in the Japanese language and culture as an intercultural modality.

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A fact that intrigued this researcher was that there was a high percentage of children from families with no Japanese ancestry who were enrolled in these Brazilian schools, as in addition to children from families that indicated that instruction in the Japanese language and culture offered by these Brazilian schools was one of the reasons for choosing the respective schools; this motivated investigating this subject. Other questions arose from the need to research objectives, educational practices, and play in those intercultural schools.

In view of such considerations, three questions structure this article: the first one deals with family motivations to enroll their children into these Brazilian schools, the second examines the objectives and educational practices of the surveyed schools, and the third investigates play in intercultural relations between Japanese and Brazilian children attending those schools.

BACKGROUND


The intercultural perspective adopted in this study comes from UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity that, beyond art and language, identifies distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and affective traits of a society or cultural group encompassing lifestyles, values, traditions, and beliefs.

The analysis of play follows Brougère’s (1998, 2005) conception of play culture as a social activity and a product of culture in which the child’s decision and the expression of cultural codes shared during the playing experience prevail.

THE RESEARCH

Parents’ Reasons for Choosing the School

The context of the research involved 27 private childhood early education schools with nursery (0–3 years) and preschool (4–5 years) for children aged 0-5 years in six cities in the State of São Paulo: São Paulo, Mogi das Cruzes, Santo André, Atibaia, Jundiaí and São Bernardo do Campo. The schools are attended by children of Brazilians with Japanese ancestry (Nikkei), others without Japanese ancestry (non-Nikkei), and Japanese children (born in Japan). The data on schools, families, and playthings were collected in 2015-2016 through questionnaires, phone calls, site analysis, photos, documents publicizing their proposals, and visits assisted by researcher Yoko Sumida Nakaema.
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