

## **Repertoires of Cultural Practices for Enacting Play and Learning in a Playgroup**

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### **Abstract**

Variations in cultural practices between families and schools have emerged as central to many studies (Rogoff, 2003) and these dynamic variations have been named as *repertoires* of cultural practice (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Emerging from this literature has been a recognition of the dynamic tension between the cultural practices of Western education and the cultural practices of communities who have a different cultural heritage. This tension and its resolution have been captured through the concept of *third space* (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997). Going beyond a third space theorization, this paper draws upon the cultural-historical concepts of *demands* and *motives* (Hedegaard, 2012) in order to understand the development of new repertoires of practices evident in an Australian playgroup where traditional early childhood practices are used by Indigenous families. Nineteen families were video recorded interacting together at a local playgroup (20h). The findings show how participation structures for learning supported by the families, and the demands they placed upon children's day-to-day interaction, highlight new understandings of playgroup practices which go beyond the dominant Western early childhood education cultural repertoires of practice.

### **Keywords**

Cultural-historical theory, Third Space, Early Childhood, Repertoires of cultural practice

### **Introduction**

Research which has examined participation structures in learning has focused on the participation of children in everyday routines (see Rogoff, et al., 2003). These research studies have identified the dynamic nature of cultural practices within and across learning communities (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), such as those found in schools, homes and communities. What is evident in the literature is the variations in cultural practices between families and schools (Rogoff, 2003) and these dynamic variations have been named as *repertoires* of cultural practice (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Central here has been the way in which children are part of, rather than excluded from, all community activities and family events, where participation takes the form of keen attention to ongoing events, and learning by observing and eavesdropping. These studies, particularly those from North and Central America (Paradise & Rogoff 2009; Rogoff, Moore Najafi Dexter Correa-Chavez, & Solis, 2007), have conceptualized these cultural repertoires of practice in the context of education, as learning through *intent community participation* (Rogoff, 2011).

The North and Central American research has also identified that the cultural repertoires observed as part of family interactions change in relation to the number of years of schooling of the mothers. The suggestion here is that the practice of schooling impacts on traditional family practices. This research foregrounds the special cultural relation or dynamic between the *repertoires* of cultural practices of the home and the cultural practice of Western schooling. Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez

and Turner (1997) capture this dynamic through the concept of *third space*. Here third space means not the cultural practice of the school or the cultural practice of the home/community, but rather the zone in which these two cultural practices interact, morph or colonise each other. The research of Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez and Turner (1997) examines how these 'third spaces come into existence in classrooms' and 'what sparks and sustains robust cycles of learning' including examining 'what gets appropriated, created, and rejected by individuals and collectives' (Gutierrez, 2005, p. 10). Drawing on the concept of third space, these studies provide important directions for understanding the cultural relations between homes and schools. However, what is missing from this research is an understanding of how the cultural dynamic begins in early childhood settings where families and children first experience Western schooling.

Going beyond a third space theorization, this paper draws upon the work of Hedegaard (2012), who has examined the relations between the institution of the family and school in the context of societal, institutional and personal motives, values and cultural traditions. Hedegaard's (2012) cultural-historical concepts of demands and motives are used to analyse the development of new repertoires of practice evident in an Australian Indigenous playgroup where traditional early childhood resources and structures were used by Indigenous families for running their playgroup.

As with the North and Central American research, this study found that the families in the playgroup supported the *repertoires* of cultural practices of exhibited simultaneous attention management, non-verbal modeling participation structures supported by ongoing dialogue, with limited question-answer pattern, and an embedded collective orientation which maintained the autonomy of individuals, particularly the youngest children in the group. As was expected, the study also found that families enacted cultural practices within the activity settings they set up that were different to the expected cultural Western early education practices.

It is acknowledged that across and within the broad range of Indigenous communities within Australia that diversity rather than similarity will exist. It has been the intention of this study to capture both diversity and cultural regularities, in order to better understand how families make demands upon their children in playgroups for supporting their children's development in the context of the demands and motives associated with the cultural practice of Western early childhood education. Here we use Hedegaard's (2002) cultural-historical concept of motives. Motive is defined as the personal goals that come to characterize someone's actions. Motives are not biologically determined or inherent in the child. But rather, communities develop or orient children in particular ways, and through these social interactions children develop a motive orientation. We begin this paper with a detailed discussion of demands and motives. This is followed by a brief overview of the study design, and the relevant literature into the cultural *repertoires* of practice in the context of the findings. How the motives of the children and the demands of the cultural *repertoires* of practice support, or otherwise, a range of participation structures for learning in playgroups, was central to the overall analysis of the data.

### **Theoretical Focus**

Hedegaard (2012) put forward a theory of learning and development that features the perspectives of the society, the institution, and the child. She argued that the transition between institutions, such as preschool and homes creates new demands upon children and affords new possibilities for children's development (Hedegaard, 2009). Central to the child's transition from one institution to another, as occurs when children enter into Western education system, is how new demands are successfully resolved. Hedegaard (2012) argues that the 'dialectic between the child's orientation

within an activity setting and the demands from the setting and other persons influence the child's activities within the child's zone of proximal development' (Hedegaard, 2012, p. 127). That is, development occurs when the demands and support within the concrete situation, and demands and actions from the child her/himself, lead to a new motive orientation. In the context of early childhood, we see development when the child's motive for play transitions into a learning motive and becomes the child's new leading activity within the particular activity setting. Here leading activity captures the particular motive orientation of the child (e.g. play motive, a learning motive). In the context of playgroups we see resources and expected practices that follow Western beliefs about the nature of play and learning. How children and families deal with the new demands of learning in a playgroup setting determines the possibilities for their children's development. When children's leading activity is play (Vygotsky, 1966), the early childhood curriculum practices create new demands and possibilities for children to develop from play to learning. Hedegaard and Fleer (2013) argue that development occurs 'When children's motive orientation and engagement in different activity settings change qualitatively' so that their leading motive changes (i.e. from play to Learning) (p. 183). Learning is defined as a change in the child's 'relation to another person and activities in specific settings' (Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013, p. 183).

In the context of playgroups where resources and suggested activities follow that of Western constructions of an early childhood curriculum and a particular set of pedagogical practices, families are charged with the responsibility for supporting a particular kind of development and learning. What this means for a range of cultural traditions is not well understood, particularly in the context of Australian playgroups.

In order to understand how the demands of the institution are being met, in the context of the child's motives and competences, the analytical concept of the child's perspective is needed. As previously introduced, motives are not internally developed but are culturally shaped as result of a child's participation in everyday life. Hedegaard (2002) argues that we know very little about how institutional goals become children's personal motives. As children enter an institution, such as a playgroup, often 'the motive that lies behind the school [or Western early childhood education] activity is hidden from the child' (p. 61). The motive a playgroup leader has for the particular activity setting s/he creates and the child participates in, may be very different to the motive the child has for entering into that particular activity setting. The playgroup leaders may create a motivating situation in order to engage the child in the activity setting, hoping that through the child's participation the child will appropriate learning or a play motive. Hedegaard (2002) argues that "Already appropriated motives develop and change in connection with the developments and changes in the child's awareness and cognitive capacity, as well as with the introduction of new activities" (p. 64). Significant here is being aware of the motives the child brings to the activity setting. That is, play may be the dominating motive when children begin playgroup. For the playgroup leader to support the transition from a play to a learning motive as part of the child's development, s/he must not only be aware of the child's actual motive, but must keep in mind the ideal motive that 'should develop through the school [playgroup] activity' (Hedegaard, 2002, p. 66). The ideal motive and how this is enacted by the playgroup leader is shaped by the cultural practices of the educator and the expectations of society for what should occur within the institution of the playgroup. Hedegaard's (2012) model of societal, institutional and personal values, motives and demands, also foregrounds the possibility of different cultural values shaping institutional practices. How these different cultural values and practices are realized in practice in playgroups has yet to be researched.

## Study Design

We know very little about how institutional goals associated with Western education in Australia become families' personal motives for learning in playgroups. Similarly, the demands these goals place upon families in playgroups run by Indigenous families is also not well understood. This study sought to examine the organization of children's participation within everyday playgroup routines in one Indigenous community within rural Victoria.

### *Community and Family Background:*

The Indigenous community is located within a Western rural region of Victoria. All the children attending the playgroup are from the same Indigenous group. The playgroup leaders are also from the same Indigenous community. The playgroup ran each day within a purpose built preschool building. Only the playgroup used the building. The community expressed interest to the researchers about undertaking a study of their playgroup.

### *Procedure:*

All families who attend the particular community playgroup were invited to participate in this study. Families were informed about the project through the playgroup leaders and through a barbecue lunch where the researchers met the families.

Two research assistants filmed family interaction in the centre from the beginning of the playgroup session until it concluded (approximately 2.5-3 hours) over a period of five visits. Video recording sessions took place once per week over a period of five weeks. When possible, session set up time, where the playgroup leaders' children were already in attendance, were also recorded.

Video recordings of participating families were organised so that one camera tended to focus on the babies and toddlers and the other camera followed the preschool children. In most cases the two cameras were able to capture all the adult and child interactions occurring within the centre over the session times.

Table 1: Playgroup routine

10.30	Session set up time
11.00	Children and families arrive.
11.00-11.45	Free play in the centre. Table activities (when the full group is in attendance, 3 tables are set up; when only a small number are in attendance, one double table is set up).
11.45	Families pack up and clear and clean tables; lunch is prepared. Story is read to the children.
12.00 – 12.30	Lunch time at the tables.
12.30	Lunch is cleared and tables are cleaned, children and families go outside.
12.30-1.30	Outside play.

*Interpretations*

<b>Cultural-historical concepts</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Motives and demands	<i>Social relations:</i> Mother and father/teacher/pedagogues Siblings Friends/Visitor Conflicts/Problems Parents response to demands Children's response to demands

Analysis focused on *identifying regularities* in the participation structures for learning in Indigenous families, particularly those dimensions identified in previous research in other cultural communities in line with previous research (see Rogoff, et al., 1993). All video data were downloaded to a computer and two files were created. One data file was kept intact, and interpretations were generated from this material using the following categories, derived from Hedegaard (2010) as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Motives and Demands

<b>Cultural-historical concepts</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Motives and demands	<i>Social relations:</i> Mother and father/teacher/pedagogues Siblings Friends/Visitor Conflicts/Problems Parents response to demands Children's response to demands

The second data file was broken up into data clips of activities (Hedegaard & Flear, 2010). The activities that were generated into clips commenced and concluded around a particular theme, such as, being at the water trolley; being in the sandpit; eating lunch; story reading; playing with a toy/equipment, etc. The activities were based on either the planned routine organised by the playgroup leaders, or what the families and children generated from the available resources and spaces within the playgroup centre. These clips within the second data file were linked directly to the interpretations already made (see Table 2).

A further interpretation of these clips were then undertaken using the categories, derived directly from Rogoff et al. (1993) and shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Cultural repertoires for participation

<b>Cultural repertoires for participation</b>	<b>Interaction patterns</b>
Simultaneous or successive interactions:	child attends simultaneously child attends alternately child appears unaware of events caregiver attends simultaneously caregiver attends alternately caregiver appears unaware of events engagement embedded in group
Verbal and non-verbal communication	caregiver orients the child verbally caregiver orients the child non-verbally caregiver simplifies by adjustment of object or child's hands caregiver simplifies by gesture caregiver simplifies by gaze, touch, posture, or timing cues child seeks assistance verbally child seeks assistance with gestures child seeks assistance with gaze, touch, posture, or timing cues child seeks clarification with gaze
Explanation and demonstration	Extending to other situations Demonstration before child participates Demonstrations during child participation Directing attention to process Turning task over to child
Language	child vocabulary lessons child vocabulary lessons caregiver uses baby talk



Interactions	caregiver mock excitement caregiver poised ready to help caregiver overrules child caregiver acts as playmate adult converses with child as a peer child converses with adult as a peer caregiver praise
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### *Reliability*

As Hedegaard (2010) states 'In the classical experimental tradition which is based on the natural science research tradition, researchers obtain reliability and achieve a truthful description independent of the describer, through the elimination of the researcher's influence by specifically using devices which will not influence participants' view on the phenomena being studied' (p. 56). In contrast, cultural-historical theory considers reliability of the data as being dependent upon capturing both the conditions and how the child participates in the activities. These conditions and the child's participation are gauged through checking the role the researcher is taking. That is, the researcher is a member of the group, being observed by the children and the adults. Although the researcher is conceptualised and positioned as a 'researcher in that context' they are still a partner in the activities. In this study, the research assistants were focused on capturing the everyday interactions of children and families, and through this they were in close proximity, being called upon for assistance, or being used as an audience for particular child performances on the equipment. Other times they were simply ignored. However, their presence was keenly observed, and this was coded for in the interpretations. Although the researchers did not solicit interactions, they did maintain a relationship with the children and the families as is expected in many Indigenous communities (see Fler & Williams-Kennedy, 2002). However, they were always positioned as researchers, and in the analysis of the video data it is possible to distinguish their motives and intentions in the research context.

### *Validity*

Hedegaard (2010) has argued that 'Validity is not the operationalisation of the child's reactions in relation to different inputs, as is common in classic experimental designs. Rather, the focus of a dialectical-interactive approach is the practices, activity settings and activities.' (p. 55). How children participate in activities and their relation to the practice traditions in the playgroup and in the family culture becomes the focus of attention in cultural-historical research. For instance, 'in this type of research the validity is connected to how well the researcher can explicate the historical tradition of the practice and the preconditions that are anchored in the values that integrate and specify different perspectives' (Hedegaard, 2010, p. 56). Having categories which explicitly feature activities, motives, relations to particular participants, including the researcher, become important dimensions of ensuring that the interpretations and coding are valid. In dialectical research, all dimensions of the coding are relational. It is not possible to understand the participation structures for learning if the activity is not foregrounded, or the motives, interest and values are not considered as the child enters the activity. In this study, the unit of analysis was the activity

where the relations between the motives, goals, interests of the interacting participants was always coded, ensuring that validity was optimised.

### **Findings and discussion**

The dynamic tension between the cultural practices of Western education and the cultural practices within the Indigenous community were highlighted in this study. The findings present different cultural regularities for how learning was framed for the Indigenous children. These cultural structures for participation in learning were particularly evident in the context of a traditional Western early childhood education centre where particular interactional practices would be expected. For instance, one of the consistent practices of the adults for orienting children to an activity was to sit down at the table and simply begin the activity. This was augmented with a verbal invitation to the children to 'Make something for mum' or a statement such as 'You want to play ball' (no inflection at the end of the sentence).

Adults sit at the collage table, and say "Come on Bubba. Make mum a robot".  
The preschooler immediately goes over to the table. (GP V1T1CL)

In each of the playgroup sessions observed, the adults continued to work together with the children constructing things or undertaking tasks. The adults were physically active and would participate in all the activities. In the context of the adults performing the task, the adults would show the children how to use equipment, such as a stapler or glue brush, or show them techniques for joining, such as how to glue patty pans or match sticks to a box. The demands made on the children for participating in the full performance of the task, created the social conditions for engaging in craft activities as a valued form of activity for adults and children, as is shown below when the adults also participate in and demonstrate how to walk on a balancing beam:

The adult has put out a series of balancing beams, forming a long line of approximately 10m. She walks towards the beams and says "Can you balance Janalie?" Janalie responds by saying "No". The carer says "You can't. I am going to see if I can. Do you think I can balance and swing this (hoop) at the same time?". She looks to all those around, including the adults. She then balances and says "That's hard". Janalie becomes engaged and says "Can you change it over for me?". Janalie and the adult change the balancing beam into a U shape, and continue to balance on the beam. Later the adult changes the shape again and invites one of the other preschool children to balance with her. (GP V1T3CL)

The amount of verbal communication that accompanied the modeling actions varied across adults. Some adults tended to rely more on non-verbal communication, as was evident in the interactions between a child and his mum when at the play dough table:

The mother suggests that they make a snake with forked teeth. This is explained visually with the fingers held close to the face, simulating a fierce snake tongue, the child responds by making the exact same gesture and hissing sound. Later a non-Indigenous adult early childhood advisor to the centre is told that they are making snakes and he asks if they can make a snake as long as or longer than the one



hanging from the ceiling. The child looks at the 10m snake and smiles in disbelief.  
(GP V2T1CL)

Keen observation of the adults by the children is expected, generating different kinds of demands upon children than when just listening to adults speak. Support for paying keen attention was noted through the common feature of family interactional pattern related to tapping fingers to orient children to points of interest. Tapping was often accompanied with a brief statement, such as “Mummy will show you”. This has also been noted in research by Rogoff et al. (1993) who showed San Pedro caregivers were twice as likely to direct children’s attention to critical aspects of the process than Salt Lake City caregivers. However, some adults also provided a great deal of verbal communication with their physical demonstrations, as the following transcript shows.

A group of children are seated at the collage table with an adult. The adult has just invited a new arrival (child) to sit down and make a robot from the boxes and collage materials. The child does not speak, but the adult provides a series of statements as she works together with the child gluing materials on to a box:  
Would you like to stick them on there? Where the glue is.

They are the same colour as your jumper.

Good boy. Beautiful. That’s it, stick on there. Good boy.

Beautiful. Good boy. Muscles.

There you are. Eyes.

Nose. What can we use for his nose? (looks over the table)

Through there. Hold him.

There you go. Now stick it there.

There we go.

What do you think we can use for a mouth?

What about an icy pole stick?

You stick it on where you think his mouth should go.

Around there.

Good boy... (V1 C1T1CL)

For the participants of this study, talk was primarily used in the service of engaging in an activity rather than as a substitute for involvement. This is consistent with earlier research undertaken in Indigenous communities. For example, de Haan (1999) in her study found that observation is viewed not in isolation, or as a means for learning, but rather ‘as something that is related to *being apart* of the activity, *being involved* in it, *experiencing* it and to *developing the will and capacity to become involved* in the activity in more direct ways, that is, while taking up responsibilities or while exploring in different, more substantial ways’ (de Haan, 1999, p. 98). In this context ‘instructional talk’ is a part of normal work talk, rather than as something sitting outside of work activity, and therefore ‘individual children are not directed differently, nor are they treated differently from adults’ (de Haan, 1999, p. 105).

The findings of this study are also consistent with research by Mejia-Arauz et al. (2005) who showed that US Mexican heritage children from families with basic maternal schooling, were more likely to observe demonstrations without requesting additional directions when involved in craft activities of creating an origami frog. In this study, variations in verbal and non-verbal communication were also noted across the children, with a great deal of non-verbal communication evident. For instance, the following observation was commonly noted:

The playgroup centre has several large plastic vehicles which were used by the children throughout the entire indoor area. The space available for driving vehicles was not large, and had many obstacles, such as tables, baby play equipment on the floor, and walking/crawling babies and toddlers.

Thomas drives his car across the room and passes by the baby, who looks towards him and leans his arm gesturing to him. Thomas shakes his head giving a 'no' response, which is accepted by the baby. No words are spoken. (GP V2T2CL)

Non-verbal language was used extensively between children as a form of simultaneous attention management as is illustrated through the following example. In this observation two drivers are moving back and forth over the carpet area, the children regularly scan as they drive, and move their vehicles carefully around the obstacles on the floor or in the room. Their interactions with the babies are sensitive, always stopping and checking to see if they are touching or gesturing that they wish to participate.

Thomas stops when the 13 month old baby toddles near his car, and interacts non-verbally with the baby to determine her intentions.

Baby stands near Thomas, who is sitting in his toy car. The baby has signaled with her arm that she is interested in joining Thomas inside the car. He opens the door and moves his body over slightly. The baby looks in (and appears to believe there is not enough room for her) and then moves back, stumbles, and the mother says softly and kindly "Be careful of the little girl". Thomas looks to the mother and back to the baby. Once the baby looks away and becomes engaged in something else, Thomas closes the door and drives off. (GP V1T2GQ: 22)

The children's motive for play in the context of keen non-verbal attention to others, places great demands upon the children to thoughtfully move about the playgroup centre so as not to collide with the infants and toddlers. The mixed age context of playgroups places great demand upon the older children who are expected by their families to attend to non-verbal communication when interacting with the younger children. This finding is in line with research by Chavajay and Rogoff (2002) where the children's use of non-verbal language is central for successfully engaging in multidimensional ways during simultaneous attention interactions.

In contrast with studies that have focused on everyday situations where the intention is not necessarily for instruction (see Rogoff, 2003), this study took place in an institution designed specifically for learning but within a Western designed centre. However, the findings actually parallel the outcomes of studies in everyday situation for guided participation in Indigenous communities. What was intriguing about the findings of this study, was that even in the centre

where learning tasks had been set up at the tables, the adults predominantly displayed cultural regularities unlike those of formal preschooling. That is, the adults introduced the learning experiences to the children by simply sitting down and beginning work themselves on a project or they would invite participation by suggesting a project to a child. The adults continued to work with children, helping each child complete the project or would work alongside of children on a project of their own (like parallel work), such as making name cards for the children. This finding is consistent with research undertaken in many Indigenous communities in Australia where groups of people, including children, participate together to perform or complete a project. For instance, Fler (2006), Fler and Williams-Kennedy (2002) and Williams-Kennedy (2001) have shown that valued cultural knowledge included a focus on 'observational learning' rather than reliance on talk. This was particularly pronounced in communities where children participated in ongoing cultural activities, such as learning the 'crow dance'. Demonstration within the context of mature adult performance was important. Children joined in and performed aspects of the dance, whilst adults monitored their performance, stepping in occasionally and demonstrating particular steps, but only within the context of the full dance (see Fler & Williams-Kennedy, 2002).

In the present study, the greatest variation in verbal communication was noted across the families when working together on a task. For some, the non-verbal communication through modeling to children what to do was supported by ongoing dialogue. However, the interactions were more directive, and featured less question-answer interaction. The question-and-answer genre so prevalent in schools today, has been problematised in previous research. In some studies, questioning was deemed to represent a 'questioning of authority'. To ask a question, meant you were showing disrespect. The changing nature of participation structures for learning were also noted by Fler and Williams-Kennedy (2002). In addition, it has been shown that some families specifically teach their children to 'ask questions' so that they can succeed at school. For instance, 'you have to ask questions and you have to know the questions to ask' in order to engage effectively in Western schooling (Fler & Williams-Kennedy, 2002).

In a number of Australian studies of Indigenous cultural practices, researchers have noted the sense of community that is evident within a group of children who are interacting. At the same time, these researchers have also noted the strong sense of autonomy displayed by children, particularly young children. In this study, it was evident that there was a dialectical relationship between individual autonomy and an embedded collective orientation. Older children were responsive and respectful towards younger siblings and younger children. They looked out for each other, and they actively nurtured younger siblings and other younger children. In the centre, many of the older girls and boys actively helped the younger babies, even though no one had asked them to do this. The active caring was expanded also to modeling acceptable behaviour (i.e. kissing not hitting), and staying physically close if a younger baby required protection or help. Similarly, the older children also displayed behaviours similar to the adults, where they put out of sight or out of reach objects that needed to be looked after. However, if a baby was insistent, they did not persist, but let the younger child have what they wanted. This childrearing practice was also noted amongst all of the adults in the study, who extended this practice by trying again later to encourage the child to comply with the adult's wishes. This cultural regularity appeared to support a strong sense of collective community, whilst at the same time also respecting individual autonomy. However, this autonomy was framed within a strong sense of social responsibility to the group, and particularly to younger children. Younger children were given more freedom and discretion, and older children supported the adults with the childrearing of younger children. In previous research by Fler and Williams-Kennedy (2002), the importance of the interdependence of children

with each other and other members of the community was strongly foregrounded. For instance, homework was viewed as the responsibility of the whole family, not just the child who had been assigned the work (Fleer & Williams-Kennedy, 2002). Each member of the family took responsibility for those aspects of the homework that they were deemed proficient in, such as writing or drawing.

When taken together, these important cultural repertoires for learning as valued forms of cultural practice were visible within the playgroup located in an institutional context of a Western early childhood centre where different ways of interacting would usually be expected (e.g. question-answer genre; observing children work at the tables rather than children observing adults; successive rather than simultaneous attention management). The study drew upon the cultural-historical concepts of demands and motives (Hedegaard, 2012) in order to better understand the repertoires of practices evident in the playgroup where traditional early childhood resources were used by the Indigenous families.

### **Conclusion**

Through a systematic study of Indigenous Australian children and their families it was possible to examine the participation structures organised for learning within one particular community in Australia where the demands and motives of expected interactions were made visible. As noted by Fanshawe (1999), 'much of what has been written about appropriate learning environments for Aboriginal children and other minority groups tend to be rather general' (p. 44). This study gives a more detailed account of how learning is organised by some Indigenous families. The findings have the potential to help educators re-think Western pedagogical practices which have traditionally dominated their work. Fanshawe (1999) suggests in his review of the literature into effective teaching of Indigenous students, that much of the evidence available in Australia has been built on 'informed opinions, experience, or extrapolation from North American findings rather than empirical investigations conducted in Australia' (p. 45). Knowing more about the range of participation structures and the demands these place upon children during learning activities has the potential to provide new direction for early childhood education in acknowledging and building upon the existing cultural repertoires of practice associated with learning.

Early childhood education is a cultural practice, but what dominates is only one participation structure for framing learning (see Boulton-Lewis, Marton, Lewis, & Wilss, 2000). This study has identified patterns and variations rather than to make generalisations across populations. What is needed for Australian early childhood education is a broader perspective of pedagogical practices that goes beyond Western cultural repertoires of practice. The study outcomes add to this important and under researched area where the demands placed upon children in their day-to-day interaction, highlight new understandings of cultural practices within the activity setting of playgroups.

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