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## **An Ethnographic Analysis of Time Use in Two Preschools in the Dominican Republic**

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Introduction: Barbara Whiting argued that in order to understand the effects of culture on individuals, it is necessary to examine the contexts in which development occurs, in part through careful analysis of children's early learning environments (Whiting & Whiting, 1975). Preschools constitute one of the first contexts in which cultural means and meanings are learned (Serpell & Hatano, 1997) and acceptable social patterns are practiced. Preschools reflect and transmit cultural values of the societies in which they exist through adult and child interactions (Bigner, 1994).

Objective: The purpose of this study was to explore daily activities in two preschools in the Dominican Republic to understand how culture is reflected and transmitted in the context of the preschool environment.

Method: There were 20 children in preschool I from lower middle class families; the school was subsidized by the Roman Catholic Church. Nine children attended preschool II, a private preschool that served upper class families. The preschool classes were observed for two weeks; one full day's activities was videotaped in each classroom. Analysis of data involved the identification of activities and settings, with an analysis of time engaged in these activities and settings. Reliability was established by reviewing the videos with school administrators and interview with classroom teachers regarding the meaning of activities. Categories were revised to achieve  $\geq 90\%$  agreement.

Results: While numerous similarities were noted in daily activities between the classrooms (time spent in play, religious, and physical activity), several areas of difference were identified, including time engaged in academic tasks, non-directed social tasks, tasks related to habit formation (particularly etiquette and courtesy), inter-child communication, and behaviors of the children during work activities.

Conclusions: Both similarities and differences in activity settings appeared to be related to cultural dimensions, including features such as collectivism, power distance, and reliance upon the traditional.

Contribution to occupational therapy: Choices that people make about engagement in occupations reflect values and cultural beliefs (Bonder, Martin, & Miracle, 2004). Examination of preschool activity patterns provides a window into the cultural values and beliefs that influence occupational patterns.