Cross Cultural Encounters in Playgroups
Spaces of belonging, support and identity

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Should playgroups be identity specific or open to all?

- Founded in the 1970s, playgroups were originally open to all in the local community, but now many are based around an aspect of cultural, linguistic or religious identity.
- When and why do people choose identity playgroups, or general playgroups?
- Should public policy encourage identity playgroups because new parents need supportive social spaces where they feel comfortable, or are they segregated spaces that erode democracy (Merry, 2013)?
- How do these micro publics welcome in the stranger, or contribute to a shared and functioning commons (Amin, 2012)?

Supportive cultural spaces build identity

- Identity playgroups provide a safe and nurturing social space where children’s identity can develop, particularly if an aspect of their identity is not well supported in mainstream culture.
- Identity playgroups can build belonging, language and cultural knowledge for children.
- Families with more than one cultural influence might choose general or identity playgroups.
- I interviewed 17 parents across four playgroups.

Exclusion operates through whiteness, language and heteronormativity

- I found that parents can feel excluded from general playgroups through assumptions made about their identity, or lack of English language fluency.
- The (cultureless) norm of white, English speaking, heteronormativity is pervasive in playgroups, as it is in most institutions (Rosaldo, 1989, Riggs, 2007).
- A different cultural influence might be invited in for craft or food.
- The white core govern the playgroup (Hage, 2000).

Moving forward?

- Adults at playgroup value respect, kindness, openness and friendliness.
- When people feel their identity is supported and respected they can engage better in meaningful encounter and dialogue across difference.
- Encounters in these micro publics are are mediated by people’s expectations and sense of place, an institutional narrative, and technology.

References


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