

Early childhood national educational frameworks and teachers' beliefs about creativity: A comparative study of Australia and Iran

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, NOVA, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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ACRONYMS

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACEQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority
AEDI	Australian Early Development Index
CDC	Curriculum Development Council
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECT	Early Childhood Teacher
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework
EYLF	Early Years Learning Frameworks
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
ID	Identification
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IEPF	Iranian Education Preschool Frameworks
MCYS	Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sport
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry Of Education
MOHW	Ministry of Health and Welfare
NACCCE	National Advisory Committee on creative and Cultural Education
NEL	Nurturing Early Learners
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standard
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
<i>UNCRC</i>	<i>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>
US	United States of America
WB	World Bank
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an in-depth investigation of cross-cultural differences evident in early childhood education policy and teaching beliefs as they relate to creativity. An initial review of eight national policy documents drawn from Eastern (Iran, Hong Kong, Korea and Singapore) and Western countries (Australia, New Zealand, France and UK) provided a context with regard to similarities and differences between Eastern and Western cultures' conceptualisation of creativity. For a deeper understanding of these policies and to trace the cultural influences evident in them, the policy documents and a sample of early childhood teachers in Iran (Eastern culture) and Australia (Western culture) were studied.

This qualitative research framed within an interpretivist/constructivist paradigm aims to better understand the world of human experience. Understanding creativity in these two diverse cultures was informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural theories, since creativity is related to human social life and it is impossible to develop children's creativity without considering social and cultural influences.

In reviewing the literature for this study, the three interlocking themes of 'early childhood', 'culture' and 'creativity' were explored. The literature demonstrated that the themes of 'culture' and 'creativity' are complex concepts and researchers view each from a range of perspectives. Of these perspectives, this research selected Hofstede's cultural model for comparing and contrasting Iranian and Australian cultures. With reference to creativity, the literature combined with this study's research focus, indicated that four perspectives (psychology, education, sociocultural and art) would best explore the concept in the two countries.

To examine how creativity is conceptualised in the early childhood education environment in the sociocultural contexts of Iran and Australia, this study utilised the two methods of document analysis and semi-structured interview. The results revealed that, in both countries, early childhood education policy documents and teachers mostly share a common concept of creativity; that is, they conceptualise creativity as a thinking process that is represented through creativity dispositions. However, there were very clear, culturally influenced differences between teacher practices in the two countries; namely, Iranian teachers mostly used a teacher-directed approach to teaching creativity focused on collective creations of children, while Australian teachers utilised a child-centred approach focused on creativity as the individual work of each child.

This study and its findings present an opportunity to examine new approaches in early childhood education, including policies and the role of teachers in developing creativity in the early childhood years. A significant implication of this study is its call for policy makers and teachers to factor in cultural differences in developing children's creativity.

The study contributes to the knowledge on developing creativity in the early childhood environment through showing that cultural differences are important considerations in this endeavour for policy makers, educational providers and teachers in the early childhood environment.