



Abstract Title: Thematic analysis of children’s health care play

Joan Claire Turner
Mount Saint Vincent University

Victoria Dempsey
IWK Health Centre

Introduction

This study documents ways that preschooler’s display health literacy during health care play. Health literacy begins with the child’s “capacity to acquire, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health (Nutbeam, 2009, p. 304).” Although the content and context of health literacy is different for adults than for children, attention is most often paid to the health literacy of proximal adults as a proxy for child health literacy (Nutbeam) with little time taken to pause and observe the unique qualities of children’s health-related interests (Almqvist et al., 2006). In preschool settings, the direct observation of ways in which children display knowledge, understanding and behaviors around health affords insight into developmental and health specific concepts necessary for health literacy.

Objectives

1. To document themes related to children’s health understanding, knowledge and behaviour;
2. To begin to explore connections among themes and the concept of children’s health literacy.

Methods

A 2-week participant-observation qualitative study in a preschool classroom (n=28) involved the introduction of health care materials for child-directed play (e.g., doctor kit, bandages, x-ray film). While remaining minimally intrusive, the play was documented using field notes, photographs and audio-recording. Thematic analysis was systematically applied to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

The global theme, health care play, was supported with six organizing themes: making a diagnosis, exploration, imaginary play, communication, providing care and varied use of materials. Children displayed their prior understanding and knowledge about health and health care during the health care play scenarios; for example, conducting a dental examination, prescribing a treatment and promoting good dental health care.

Conclusion

Observation of children’s health care play has yet to be recognized as a wellness-

focused innovation for the assessment of children's advancing health literacy. Interest in improving health literacy of children to become empowered with health-related knowledge and skills is growing and can be facilitated through collaboration of health and early childhood educators and researchers (Borzekowski, 2009).

References

- Almqvist, L., Hellnas, P., Steffanson, M., & Granlund, M. (2006). 'I can play!' Young children's perceptions of health. *Pediatric Rehabilitation, 9* (3), 275-284.
- Borzekowski, D. L. G. (2009). Considering children and health literacy: A theoretical approach. *Pediatrics, 124*, 282-288.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research Psychology, 3*, 77-101.
- Nutbeam, D. (2009). Defining and measuring health literacy: What can we learn from literacy studies? *International Journal of Public Health, 54*, 303-305.

Cite this document in APA:

Turner, J.C. & Dempsey, V. (2018, September). *Thematic analysis of children's health care play*. Paper presented at the Healthy Living, Healthy Life: Collaborative Health Conference on Research, Practice and Community Innovations Conference, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS. Retrieved from <https://ojs.library.dal.ca/HLHL/>

CC BY-NC-SA