

A Secular Advent: A Video-Ethnographic Study of the Preparations for Christmas in Swedish Preschools

Authors : Tunde Puskas, Anita Andersson

Abstract : In Swedish early childhood education research, the issues related to religious identifications and practices have often been marginalized or relegated either to the realm of diversity and multiculturalism or to the realm of national traditions. This paper is part of a research project about whether religion is considered as part of Swedish cultural heritage in Swedish preschools. Our aim in this paper is to explore how a Swedish preschool balance between keeping the education non-confessional and at the same time introducing the traditions associated with advent and Christmas. Christmas was chosen because of the religious background of the holiday and because it is a tradition widely celebrated in Swedish preschools. In Swedish education system, the concept of freedom of religion is understood in the sense that education is declared to be non-confessional. Nevertheless, as the major state holidays in Sweden are tied to Lutheran Christian traditions, and according to the curriculum preschool educators, are given the task to pass on a cultural heritage, defined in terms of values, traditions, history, language, and knowledge, it is the preschool teams or individual preschool teachers who determine whether and to what extent religious considerations are/ought to be seen as part of the cultural heritage the preschool passes on. The data consists of ten video taped observations from two preschools. The video data was transcribed and the transcripts were thereafter analysed through content analysis. In the analysis, we draw on the concept of banal religiosity that has helped us to draw attention to the workings of religious considerations that are so familiar that they rarely are noticed as religious and on Ninian Smart's theory on the dimensions of religion. The analysis shows that what the adults actually do with religion fulfils six of seven dimensions common to religious traditions as outlined by Smart. At the same time, Christmas is performed as a lived tradition within which the commercial and religious rituals intersect and result in a banal, national religiosity.

Keywords : secular advent, banal religiosity, dimensions of religion, rites

Conference Title : ICRS 2018 : International Conference on Religion in Society

Conference Location : Amsterdam, Netherlands

Conference Dates : February 12-13, 2018