

Children Negotiating Cultural Difference in an Elite School

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Abstract:

This paper engages with street children's negotiations of cultural difference in an elite school in Delhi. It looks at the notion of 'street children' and their space in the education policy of the state, the politics of dominant discourse of economic stress on children themselves and the strong unwillingness and resistance of the private schools to admit these children and the rights based argument to admit them to private schools.

It is a story of one such girl – Simmi, in an elite private school. Using Simmi's narrative, the article talks about the negotiation strategies, over time, space and relational dimensions to reveal the struggle she and children like her have to undergo, due to their marginalised social grouping, in an elite private school.

The dimension of time in relation to the educational process shows how the marginalised children's past and present socio-cultural grouping restricts entry and access to opportunities that are available at school. The dimension of space shows the relationship of the homeless street child to the Home and the school space. The relational dimension reveals the crucial role of power within the institutions where all children become responsible for their success and failures, regardless of their socio-cultural identities.

The paper uncovers the layers of inequities within schooling to reflect structural boundaries of class. It argues problematisation of structural inequities within the school system to break away from the 'deprivation lens' thrust upon the marginalised street children in the school space and look for alternatives.

Key words: *street children, education of the deprived groups, education for the socially weaker groups, street children's right to education, negotiating cultural difference*

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