Mothering by the book: constructions of mature student mothers' identities in the context of mothering and study practices and Mother/Child relationships

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ABSTRACT: This project investigates the development of mature student mothers' identities in the dual contexts of constructions of the women's at-home study practices and of their 'responsibilities' for their children's development. Interviews were conducted with 23 women – all 'new university' students – and with their school-aged children. I used discourse analysis focussing on language as performative and constitutive in order to understand positioning of, and by the women. I also drew upon critical developmental psychological theory and the concepts of discourse, intersubjectivity and dialogicality as epistemological resources in order to understand the women's and children's accounts. The methodology yielded a diversity of constructions of the women, these drawing upon a variety of discourses. The first empirical chapter addresses constructions of mature student mothers, the second, constructions of child development and the third, constructions of 'influence'. The organisation of the empirical chapters reflects not only the importance I accorded to particular themes, but also the idea that separating mothers' concerns and those of their children can be less fruitful in examinations of identity construction than addressing these together. The key issues that are a thread connecting the empirical chapters are time (requiring 'balancing' of social positions); change (in mothering practices and confidence); perceived 'influence' on children's development, and relationships (including the ways in which identities are constructed in the 'space in the middle'). Participants addressed these issues in different ways with some women positioning not spending 'quality' time with their children as meeting children's developmental needs (addressed in Chapter Seven). Other important themes were mothering constructed as mundane and undervalued (in Chapter Five), children's constructions of 'roles' as helpers (in Chapter Six) and perceived intersubjectivity in mother/child interactions (examined in Chapter Seven). In the concluding chapter I discuss the implications of the findings in terms of the contribution of the research to theoretical debates about motherhood, mothering and child development. I also reflect on my position as a mature student mother, examining my involvement in the research process and finally, suggest applications for the findings reported in the thesis.

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Single Mothers in an International Context: Mothers or Workers? edited by Simon Duncan and Rosalind Edwards. London: UCL Press, 1997, ix, 285pp., pbk 13.95. Who Will Mind the Baby? Child care is becoming increasingly significant in the light of the increasing responsibility being placed on the home to care for its members and the rising numbers of mothers within the formal labour market. This is particularly significant given the relative lack of child care facilities. Who Will Mind the Baby?