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Stakeholder Perspectives of Play-based Learning in the First Year of Primary School: A Case Study in Aotearoa New Zealand

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Educational Psychology

at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand.

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2017
Abstract

This qualitative research study explored key stakeholders’ perspectives of a play-based learning (Pb-L) approach in the first year of primary school. A case-study design was used to gather information about the perceived value, challenges, and characteristics of a Pb-L environment in an Auckland-based primary school. The children’s perspectives of the role of play were explored in six focus group interviews, while an online survey was used to collect parent or caregiver’s experiences of the current Pb-L approach. Lastly, two separate interviews were conducted with a classroom teacher and school leader to capture their experiences of implementing a play-based approach. The findings of the study indicated that children perceived self-initiated, hands-on exploration that was based on their interests, and social interaction with peers, as important in their play and learning activities. Overall, the parents, teacher, and school leader demonstrated a shared understanding of the value of a Pb-L approach, particularly in relation to the importance of child well-being and children’s social and emotional development. The study outlines the adults’ perspectives of the benefits and challenges of a play pedagogy and highlights the implications for schools/teaching practice, including potential opportunities for future research. It is proposed that a Pb-L pedagogy provides an approach to development and learning that embraces the natural playfulness with which children enter school to support meaningful early learning experiences that promote lifelong learning.
Acknowledgements

My sincerest thanks and appreciation to my supervisors, Dr Karyn Aspden and Dr Jayne Jackson. Your support and guidance throughout the project has been of constant encouragement to me, and has made the experience a truly memorable one. Thank you for all the time and effort you put into giving me constructive feedback, it has enriched my learning throughout the year and importantly, helped to shape this final and completed thesis.

The allocation of a Graduate Research Fund has contributed significantly towards the cost of this research project and I am sincerely grateful to Massey University’s Graduate Research Fund Committee.

To the children, parents, teacher, and school leader that were involved in the study I extend my deepest gratitude. Without your involvement and support, I would not have been able to complete this research. My hope is that I have represented your experiences and perspectives well.

My amazing family and friends never doubted in my ability to complete this undertaking. In word and action, they did whatever they could to support me and I will always be incredibly grateful. Thank you to my husband, Aaron, who inspired me with his positive encouragement, and took care of our boys when I needed to work. To my incredible mum, thank you for everything you did to support me. Lastly, but most importantly, to God who supplied me with everything I needed to begin and finish this work, with my whole heart, thank you.
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