

# Perception of ‘Play’ and ‘Holistic Development’

**Dr. Karuppiah Nirmala**

National Institute of Education, Singapore

## **ABSTRACT**

In 2013, the Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the refreshed Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework to provide curriculum guidelines for pre-schools (childcare centres and kindergartens) in Singapore. Subsequently, the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) provided the pre-schools with intensive training and comprehensive resource materials to support the implementation of the NEL Framework (MOE, 2013). The key purpose of the NEL Framework was to ensure that all children will proceed from pre-school to primary school with a common set of knowledge, skills and dispositions. However, three years later, this is not the case, and many pre-schools are facing challenges in implementing the NEL Framework (Alfredo, Ng, Munez & Bull, 2016).

While parents want the ‘best’ for their children, they may not realise the importance of non-academic skills for the holistic development or well-being of young children. They may not realise that the non-academic, soft or 21st century skills are important not just for primary one (P1) but for future study, work and life (Bergen & Fromberg, 2010; Dockette & Perry, 2001, Fisher, 2008; etc.). Hence, it is important to probe, listen and ascertain exactly what their fears, anxieties and concerns are and why they have such fears, anxieties and concerns, in order to provide the necessary programs and initiatives to help parents understand, appreciate and support ‘play’ and ‘holistic development’ in the early years as well as the NEL Framework (MOE, 2013).

Hence, the key purpose of the study is to understand how Singaporean parents view the terms, ‘play’ and ‘holistic development’ in the early years, and what these terms mean to them.

30 parents were recruited through purposeful sampling and interviewed face-to-face individually once for about one hour at a pre-arranged time and place convenient to them. The interview was audio-recorded, and the audio-recordings will be transcribed verbatim and analysed using a thematic approach for the study.

The findings from this study will help preschools serve children and their parents through better communication about their programmes. The findings will also inform teacher education and parent education programmes.

**Keywords:** play, holistic development, parent’s perception