



How Untrained Practitioners In ECE Centres Understood Play And Learning In Childhood

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to find out how the children's play was understood by untrained practitioners in childcare centres in Malaysia. Research on infants' and toddlers' play in ECE centres shows many benefits for children's development including enabling children to learn about the social world of peer interactions (Aureli & Colecchia, 1996; Elkind, 2007). Moreover, peer interactions during play is important for developing the children's social competence as mentioned in the Social Competence Prism (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). This study uses Super and Harkness' (1986) notion of the psychology of the caretakers as an essential component of the child's developmental niche. By considering the practitioners' perceptions of children's interactions through the lens of Super and Harkness's concept, it becomes possible to see that the practitioners' perceptions can have an influence on children's peer interactions. This study sits within a social constructivist worldview and uses a case-study approach. In collecting the data, this study uses interviews, observations, video-stimulated recall and focus group discussions. Ethical concerns were outlined and approved by the Human Ethics Committee. The findings of the study shows that the complexity of children's experiences remained hidden to the practitioners until they took part in the video-stimulated recall interviews. It provided the practitioners to deepen their thinking about children's peer interactions and to begin seeing them as linked with learning through play. The practitioners perceived that (i) sharing resources; (ii) communicating with peers; and (iii) understanding peers' intentions, needs and emotions constituted important learning for children during playtime. Trainings should be considered to the practitioners.

Keywords: Early childhood education, ECE practitioners, peer interactions, play and learning, practitioners' perceptions.