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Play as seen by children and pre-school teachers in Turkey

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Abstract

This study extends upon previous research conducted by Howard (2002) and aims to understand the perceptions of play from the perspective of both children and their teachers within Turkish culture. This current study was carried out at two private kindergarten schools in Kusadası, Aydın, Turkey. Sixty-one children aged between 3 and 6 years, and ten kindergarten teachers were recruited for this study. A modified 'Activity Apperception Story Procedure' (AASP) task was used to investigate the perceptions of play. Results suggest that both teachers and children have very similar perceptions of play, and that in children, these perceptions are primarily developed as a result of their experiences, a finding consistent with Howard (2002). Results also suggest age differences in the perceptions of play, with the younger children (aged 3-4 years) making more 'play' judgements when presented with the AASP task than the older children (aged 5 to 6 years). Finally, results also show that the location of the activity depicted (on a table or on the floor) significantly influences the perception of play in both children and adults, with increased 'play' judgements for activities taking place on the floor.

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1. Introduction

Play is defined across disciplines in terms of its importance for children's social, emotional and cognitive development (Muys, Rodger, & Bundy, 2006). However given these extremely broad definitions, few, if any of these disciplines are able to offer explanations of play that can truly fully encompass it (Hughes, 1991 cited in Bennett et al, 1997). Taking the overall aims of this paper into consideration, appropriate definitions of play would

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be those offered by Sheridan (1977), Krasnor and Pepler (1980), and Groos, (1901). Sheridan (1977) defines play as the “eager engagement in pleasurable physical and mental effort to obtain emotional satisfaction”, while Krasnor and Pepler (1980) discussed similar features of play such as gaining pleasure and having fun. In the pre-exercise theory (Groos, 1901), it is suggested that children learn through play by practicing those roles that they will likely undertake in their adult life. For example, Burris & Tsao, (2012) suggest that toys are symbolic representations of the real world, and that through using such representations, children make connections between their play and the real world.

However, with respect to the aims of this current research, there are important points at which each of these definitions fall short. Firstly, none of these definitions sees play from the perspective of both the child, and the adult (parents or teacher). Secondly, there are few definitions that detail how play is developed within social contexts and culture and how individuals within that culture understand play (Fromberg and Bergen, 1998). It is important to highlight that children’s experiences forms their perceptions of play and also leads to improvements in their skills based on the physical and emotional atmosphere around them.

As children grow, they spend their most important years at kindergartens, pre-schools, nurseries and other early years institutions. It is for this reason that the curriculum style& content, and the quality of teachers’ education is so important. Many curricula implementations suffer from a lack of clear understanding of the expectations of the curriculum, the lack of appropriately qualified teachers and a lack of available resource (for example, simple equipment such as pens and paper, to a shortage of classrooms). Professionals are often confused as to how to implement play, how much they need to use play in the classroom and what the benefits are for children’s development.

For this current research, the perceptions of play in early-years teachers and children in Turkey are investigated. Understanding a child’s own view of play will help to develop a better education for children’s learning (Howard, 2002). Once a more effective curriculum is developed, children will be more successful in learning (Howard, 2002). This study is a partial replication of both Howard, 2002; 2004 and of McInnes et al, 2009), both of which investigated the perceptions of play in both children and their teachers.

There are three main points to explore in this research; the characteristics children use to categorise play vs. non play activities, the characteristics teachers use to categorise play vs. non play activities, and finally, the value given by teachers to learning through play in Turkey.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Sixty-one nursery-school children were chosen from two nursery-schools in the Kuşadası region of Aydın in Turkey. The children’s ages ranged from three to six years old, with a mean age of 4.3 years. Thirty-two children were female and twenty-nine were male. Ten teachers participated in this study. Their ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-nine, with a mean age of twenty-two and with an average working experience of 3.6 years. Each teacher was working with children of specific ages.

2.2 Nurseries

Both nursery schools were located in the outskirts of Aydın and had large outdoor play areas for the children to play. Both nurseries were independent of any primary school, but their curriculum is maintained by the Turkish Ministry of Education, called the Pre-school Education program for children aged between 36-72 months of age (2002).

2.3 Ethical Procedure

All nursery staff were informed of the content of the study and procedures prior to commencement. All parents of those children chosen to participate were informed of the study one-week prior to the agreed study start date and were advised that they could withdraw their child from this study at any time before, during or following the study

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