

*Children's, Parents' and Early Childhood
teachers', descriptive and illustrative beliefs
on play and learning*

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Literature Review

Children's Play

- ▶ Article 31 refers to children's right in play

(Lester & Russell, 2010)

- ▶ Play is a process where children can actively be involved in an activity of their own choosing

(Swarbrick, 2013)


- ▶ Characteristics of play
 - ▶ Active engagement
 - ▶ Positive affect
 - ▶ Intrinsic motivation
 - ▶ Freedom from external rules
 - ▶ Attention to process rather than product
 - ▶ Nonliterality

(Klein, Wirth & Linas, 2003; Smith & Vollstedt, 1985)

Play and Learning

- ▶ “Play and learning are dimensions that stimulate each other and could be seen as an indivisible entirety, which is a part of children’s experiencing, and which helps them create an understanding of their surrounding world in a life-long process.”

(Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006, p.62)

- ▶ Within play lays learning  An ideal environment for learning and understanding

(Avgitidou, 2001; Dau, 1999; Dickinson and Tabors 2001; Griffin et al. 2004; Levin, 1996; Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Wild, 2013)

- ▶ Vygotsky’s theory refers to play as a way for children’s development and learning
 - ▶ Zone of Proximal Development

(Avgitidou, 2001; Bergen, 2014; Bodrova, 2008)

- ▶ Teacher’s role as a facilitator and supporter in children’s learning

(Avgitidou, 2001; Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006; Smith, 2001; Swarbrick, 2013)

Research question

- ▶ How do parents, children and early childhood (EC) teachers define play, learning and how they comment on their potential relationship?

Methodology

Participants

- ▶ 19 early childhood in-service teachers
 - ▶ experience 2 months up to 24 years

- ▶ 41 children
 - ▶ 4-6 years old

- ▶ 23 parents
 - ▶ number of children 1-4 children (1- 21 years old)

- ▶ Consent forms were given to all participants

Data collection

▶ Semi-structured interviews

▶ Example

- ▶ What do you define as play? What do you consider as play in kindergarten?
- ▶ How do you define learning? What is learning in kindergarten?
- ▶ What is your role/ involvement in play?
- ▶ What is your role/ involvement in learning?
- ▶ Describe one play episode.
- ▶ Describe one episode which shows learning.
- ▶ What do children learn during play?

▶ Artifacts

- ▶ Drawings regarding play episode and learning event

Data analysis

- ▶ 2 researchers independently analyzed the data based on the research question and then compared their

- ▶ Categories/ themes

(Emerson , Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Grbich, 2007; Kyriazi, 2002)

- ▶ Common categories:

- ☐ play definition
- ☐ learning definition
- ☐ play and learning
- ☐ adult's role in play and learning

Findings

Play – Play definition

- ▶ Common characteristics in regards to play definition of parents (P), children (C) and EC teachers (T)

Play characteristics/features

Types of play, toys and
games

Movement

Cooperation

Expression of feelings

Fun, entertainment

Learning

- ▶ Consistency of these characteristics/elements in the play episodes and drawings
 - ▶ 4 EC teachers reported playful activities as play episodes

Play – *Play definition*

Defining Play

(What do you define as play?)

EC Teacher

“Play in kindergarten is the natural way of *learning* and development... it is the main method for children’s *holistic development*.

Through play the child can be *entertain*, create and develop in all aspects.”

(EC5, p.13)

Child

“Play is when we play and *laugh*. We play mum, dad and babies... *we run and we like it.*”

(C21, 4.5 years old, p.36)

Parent

“Child’s activity that *pleases and excites the mind.*”

(P16, p.26)

Play – *Play definition in accordance with play episode*

EC Teacher

Play Definition

“Play is a pleasant process in which the child learns how to cooperate, share and have fun with his/hers friends or by it self. Through play children can sharpen their mind, develop their creativity, have fun and spend a pleasant time.”

(EC9, p.21)

Play Episode

“A child pretends to be a doctor, another child is the patient and they play. the doctor examines the patient with his tools.”

(EC9, p.22)

Child Play episode

“I remember once in the kindergarten in the sand box I created a castle with tunnels and curves which we had created with buckets together with my friends, but I did most of the work and it was really nice...”

(C19, 6n years old, p.32)



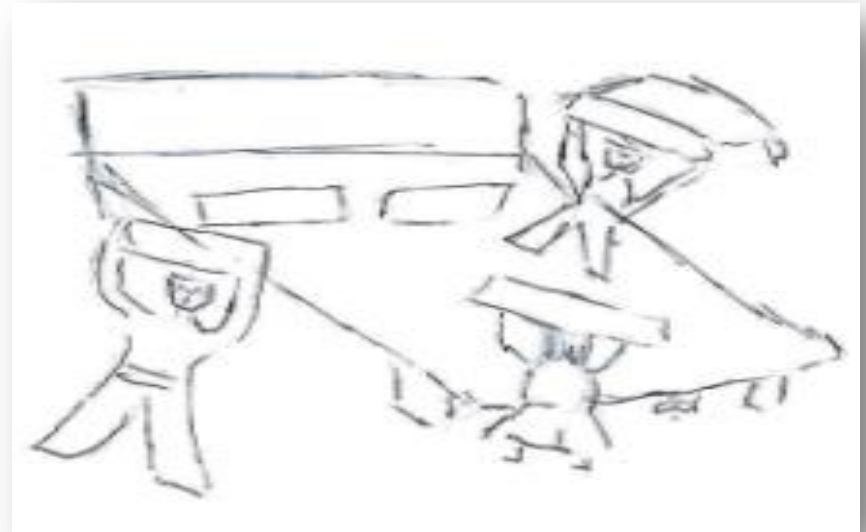
Play – *Play definition in accordance with play episode*



EC Teacher Play episode

“One game, group play can be hide and seek, especially in kindergarten because there are many available spaces that they can hide an object not them selves.”

(EC13, p.28)



Parent Play episode

“A lot of times we play football in the yard. I show him how to kick and pass the ball, do passes or other times we play drums.”

(P21, p.31)

Learning – *Learning Definition*

- ▶ Learning is viewed, by PCT, as:
 - ▶ New knowledge
 - ▶ New experiences
 - ▶ New rules
 - ▶ Appropriate behavior
 - ▶ There was consistency of these elements in regards to the learning episodes and also drawings
-

Defining Learning

(How do you define learning?)

EC Teacher

“A process which children learn *information*, gain *knowledge* and new *experiences*.”

(EC1, p.6)

Child

“I learn activities. I learn to write letters.”

(C9, 5 years old, p.17)

Parent

“It’s when children learn something, gain *knowledge*. Learning at home is mostly *rules*, how to become proper people and how to *behave*.”

(P1, p.6)

Learning – *Defining learning in accordance with learns episode*



Child

Learning Definition “I learn letters and numbers”
(C5, 6 years old, p.14)

Learning Episode “I learned to write numbers with my teacher”
(C5, 6 years old, p.14)



Child

Learning episode

“When we are all seated in a circle and sometimes... we learned a new letter. There is a magic board where the teacher writes and it corrects the teacher.”

(C8, 6 years old, p.16)

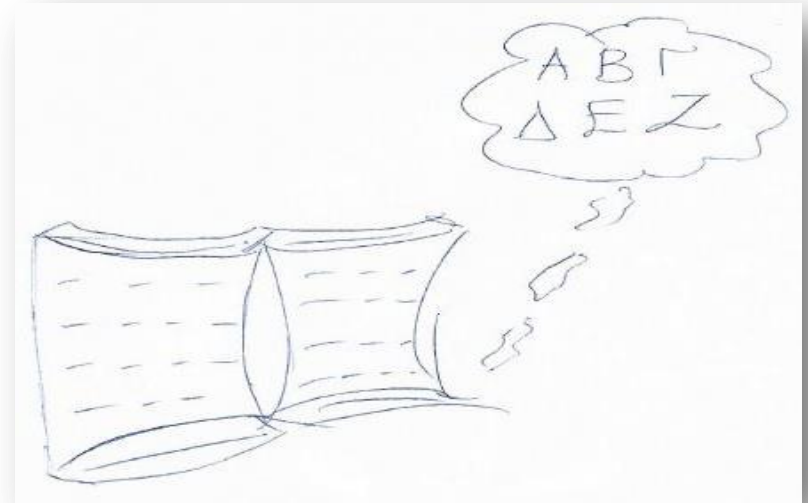
Learning – *Defining learning in accordance with learns episode*



EC Teacher ***Learning episode***

“The children are sited in circle on billows and discuss, with pictures and real leafs, about autumn and the phenomenon of the leafs following.”

(EC3, p.9)



Parent ***Learning episode***

“At home we write all the letters, numbers up to 10, solve exercises from books for preschool. We find opposites.”

(P2, p.7)

Play and Learning – *Defining learning in terms of play*

- ▶ Play as a way of learning
 - ▶ PCT point out that through play there is learning of:
 - ▶ Social skills
 - ▶ Cognitive skills/ knowledge
 - ▶ 12/41 children reported that they do not learn anything during play

Defining learning in terms of play (What do children learn during play?)

<i>EC Teacher</i>	<i>Child</i>	<i>Parent</i>
“During play children learn a variety of things. Experiences, knowledge, values, attitudes, skills... but at the same time the feel joy.” (EC8, p.20)	“When we play UNO (game) I learn numbers and colors since they need the same (number & color) as the previous ones.” (C31, 5 years old, p.46)	“Everything, words, math, how to control their bodies, their creativity is encouraged and of course their cooperation skills.” (P14, p.23)

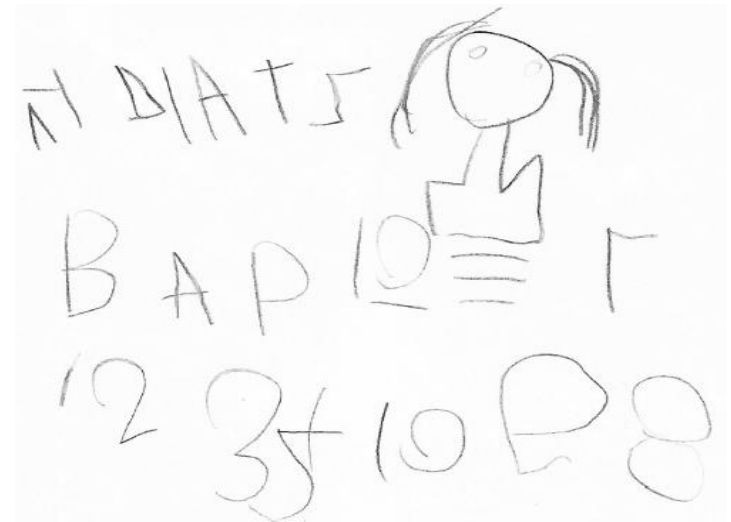
Play and Learning – *Relationship*

- ▶ Inconsistency between defining learning in terms of play and the learns episode
 - ▶ Majority reported learning events as teaching moments
 - ▶ Few exceptions mentioned events of learning through play
 - ▶ 1 parent
 - ▶ 3 EC teachers

Child

Learning in terms of play “I learn to run fast, I run all day in the yard. I learn to make friends because I play with all the children”
(C4, 5 years old, p.13)

Learning Episode “We do some lesson, but not all day. We were sited in the circle, the teacher talked and showed pictures about the body.”
(C4, 5 years old, p.13)



(C4, 5 years old, p.2)

Play and Learning – *Relationship inconsistency*

EC Teacher

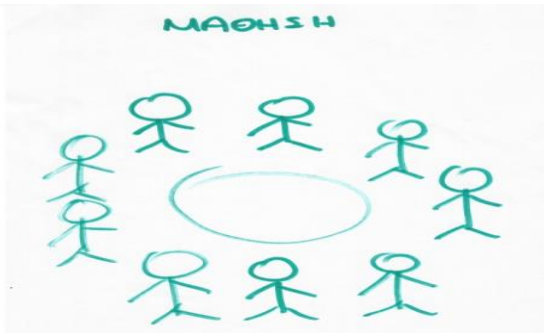
Learning in terms of play

“During play children learn a variety of things. Experiences, knowledge, values, attitudes, skills... but at the same time they feel joy.”

(EC8, p.20)

Learning Episode

“The children are seated on the carpet in a circle. The teacher hands out color cards...In the middle of the circle the teacher puts down different objects with different colors...When the music stops they find the object that has the same color as their card.”



(EC8, p.20)

Learning Drawings

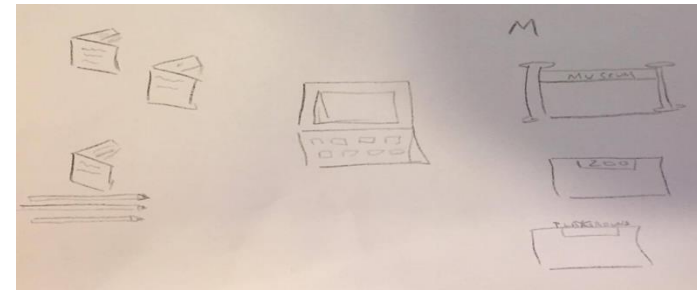
Parent

“During play at school they surely learn to socialize, learn to cooperate with other children... when he is with me I see it as a time of bonding either by reading a story, which is a learning process, or playing hide and seek...”

(P15, p.25)

“Early literacy exercises, I feel that he has not yet mastered how to hold the pencil...”

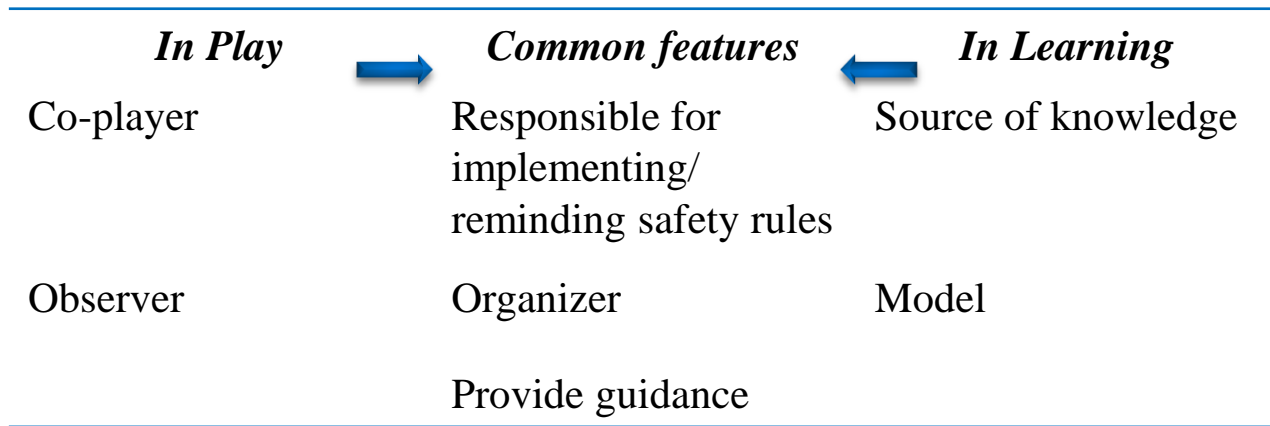
(P15, p.25)



(P15, p.26)

Play and Learning – *The role of the adult*

- ▶ Multiple roles reported, by parents, children and EC teachers, in reference of the role of adult in play and learning



EC Teacher

In Play

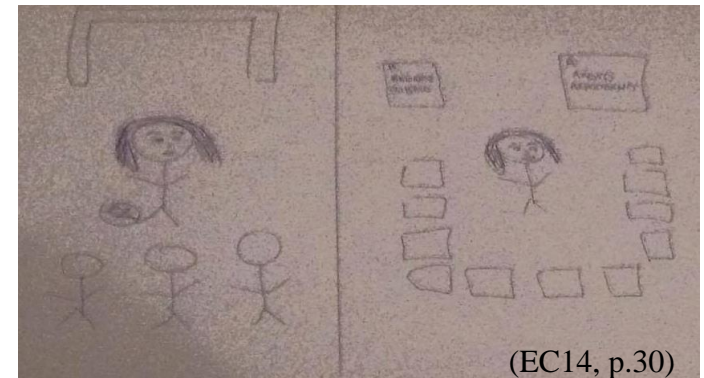
“My role in play is to help or guide the children when needed.”

(EC14, p.30)

In Learning

“My role in learning is to guide the children.”

(EC14, p.30)



Discussion

- ▶ There is a common discourse on importance of play (curriculum & EC pedagogy)
 - ▶ Beliefs and practice often contradict

(Loizou & Avgitidou, 2014; Wood & Bennett, 2001)

- ▶ Play and Learning are defined with common characteristics revolving children's development - cognitive, kinesthetic, emotional and social
- ▶ “Learning” is more of a teacher-led practice ➡ Difficulty to show learning through play

(McMulle et al., 2006; Charlesworth et al., 1991; Charlesworth et al., 1993)

- ▶ Need for more empirical research to highlight the learning taking place through play

(Lillard, Lerner, Hopkins, Dore, Smith & Palmquist, 2012;
Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006)

Suggestions

In-service and pre-service teachers need to construct a more elaborate understanding between children's play and children's learning

- ▶ Supporting Play & Learning in regards to practice
 - ▶ In service and pre service teacher education programs
 - ▶ Courses exemplifying the relationship of play and learning – play pedagogy
 - ▶ Workshops – enhancing adult's play skills
 - ▶ Parent-School relationship



Thank you!!!



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