

Guyanese Children's Perceptions of the Play Experience

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PRESENTER: GODRYNE WINTZ

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KEY TERMS

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***'Children's play'* refers to the social context in which children actively explore power dynamics, social rules, identities and roles (adapted from Kyratzis 2000 cited in Paugh 2005).**

***'Perceptions'* - understandings, notions or ideas.**

OVERVIEW of Children's Play

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Children's play is often trivialized and is generally assumed to be something 'easy', non-serious, simply fun and interesting. Statements such as "They're only playing" or "That's mere child's play" suggest play to be trivial.

Play is also assumed to be an unproblematic category of children's activity and shared play is perceived to be basically a happy and harmonious experience (Löfdahl 2006; Thomson & Philo 2004).

OVERVIEW

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This research questioned adult-centric constructions and assumptions of play as trivial, enjoyable, interesting and stress-free activities for children.

Children are recognized as social actors who hold their own views and opinions, and have the right and capability of expressing their ideas,

OVERVIEW

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Two key aspects steered the research:

- **Children had valuable perspectives on their own play experiences**
- **An awareness of the need to articulate children's perspectives**

THE FIELDWORK SITE

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Fieldwork was carried out at Winter-Fresh Nursery School (pseudonym given), a private school located in Georgetown, Guyana.

The study was conducted with a level-two class comprising twelve five-year-old children.

Both boys and girls were included in the study as I hoped to obtain variety in the data gathered.

RESEARCH AIM & QUESTION

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The study examined children's perceptions of their play.

**The research question addressed was:
What meanings do children ascribe to their play?**

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Children's play is often trivialized (Thorne, 2005).**
- **Thorne (2005) postulates, that the word *play*, when coupled with *child* connotes triviality.**

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

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- **For the children concerned, play may be perceived as “hard work, dead-serious and bears profound consequences for participants’ social relations” (Björk-Willén and Cromdal, 2009).**
- **Play includes positive and negative dimensions (Löfdahl, 2006).**

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

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- **Children's play is often regarded as something nice and pleasant (Löfdahl, 2006).**
- **Once children are happy, play is thought of as contributing to their development in a proper manner (Löfdahl, 2006).**

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

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- **Play is perceived as disorganized and non-serious once it is not initiated by the adult or does not follow an “adult” agenda (Björk-Willén and Cromdal, 2009).**
- **Children’s play activities are perceived as “hotbeds for peer socialization” (Björk-Willén and Cromdal 2009).**

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

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- **The resentment, bullying, shifts, clashes, disputes, exclusions and inclusions, negotiations, boredom, reproduction of “authority, friendships and other interactional patterns that transcend episodes of dispute” (Maynard 1985), all function to help children acquire a sense of social structure and constitute this complex mix and dynamic process we call “play”.**

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

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Ethnographic data was obtained over a six-week period. The methods utilized were photo elicitation interview and participant observation.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

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- **Snapshots of the children's play, taken during observation sessions, were used as prompts to the interview conversations.**
- **Open-ended questions from an interview guide also stimulated interview conversations.**
- **Audio-recordings of the children's conversations during indoor play and the interview sessions facilitated the data analysis.**

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

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- **Transcripts were analyzed using a thematic approach.**
- **The themes emerged from the literature review and theoretical orientations as well as from the data obtained.**

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

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As a researcher into children's lives, it was important to adhere to a number of ethical obligations including seeking informed consent and confidentiality.

FINDINGS

Excerpt 1

1 **Mark: Sometimes play is fun and**
2 **sometimes it's not**

3 **Int: Why isn't play always fun?**

4 **Mark: ((smiles))**

5 **Some children get me vex**

6 **Int: And that spoils the play**

7 **Mark: Yes**

8 **Int: Tell me about the play with friends**

9 **Bess: To share and play is happy**

FINDINGS

Excerpt 2

1 **Int:** Sue is there anything else you want to
2 **tell about the picture**

3 **Sue:** I was having fun

4 **((interviewer directs a question at the group))**

5 **Int:** What things help you to have fun at
6 **school?**

5 **Children:** PLAY

7 **Sue:** But sometimes play is boring.

8 **Int:** What makes play boring

9 **Sue** I don't know

FINDINGS

Excerpt 3

- 1 **Int:** **Must you play?**
- 2 **Children:** **YES**
- 3 **Mary:** **Play is fun**
- 4 **Int:** **OK**
- 5 **Do you learn from playing?**
- 6 **Chris** **Yes.**
- 7 **Int:** **What do you learn from play?**
- 8 **Chris:** **You learn how to play with friends**

FINDINGS

Excerpt 4

- 47 **Int:** Do you think we should allow you to play everyday?
- 48 **Children:** [YES]
- 50 **Children:** [NO]
- 51 **Children:** [YES]
- 52 **Mark:** [NO]
- 53 **Mary:** Not all the time. Not all the time
- 54 **Bess:** Just free time
- 55 **Mark:** You can't learn if you play every day
- 55 **Children:** Yes
- 56 **Bess:** I am learning hide and seek now (.)
57 colours (.) running for sports
- 57 **Int:** That was some play you had today
- 59 **Bess:** That was nice play

FINDINGS

Excerpt 5

- 1 **Int:** Can you do without playing?
- 2 **Sue:** Sue can you do without playing?
- 3 **Sue:** No
- 4 **Int:** If we say no to playing, will you be
- 5 **happy with that?**
- 6 **Sue:** No
- 7 **Int:** Why not?
- 8 **Sue:** Be-cause I am playful

FINDINGS

Excerpt 6

- 1 **Int: Tell me about play**
- 2 **Mark: Sometimes play is fun but not every time**
- 3 **Int: Play is fun sometimes but not everytime**
- 4 **Mark: Sometimes I don't like to play**
- 5 **Int: Why don't you like to play sometimes?**
- 6 **Mark: Because I have to do work.**

CONCLUSIONS

Analyses revealed that children's perceptions of their play widely contrast with adult-centric assumptions of play as easy, stress-free, unimportant and non-serious activities for children.

The findings clearly support the claim by Björk-Willén & Cromdal (2009) that play for the children concerned is hard work and, dead serious.

CONCLUSIONS

The children's own perceptions of play as a time to learn to play with friends, as boring, and open to disruptions illustrate children's unique viewpoints about their play experiences.

Children's active involvement in research can enable greater understanding of their perspectives and help to inform and prioritize children's agendas in both policy and practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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- **That children be regarded as experts on their own subjective experiences.**
- **The individual contributions and unique perspectives that children bring to the deliberations be embraced and valued.**

THANK YOU

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