

“Exploring Saudi Arabian preschool teachers’ conceptualisations about play and play based

Asma Aljohani¹

¹ University of New England

Abstract

Play is central to children lives as a way to explore their environments, interact with adults and peers, practice agency, and construct understandings. In educational settings, play is defined as significant and valuable for promoting children's learning and development. However, play is a culturally and socially situated construct, thus people from different cultures vary in how play is perceived and how to best pedagogically support children's learning through play. In recent years, the Saudi Arabian (SA) government has mandated the implementation of Play Based Learning (PBL), a Western approach to learning and development, in SA preschools. However, the SA social, cultural and religious context can be expected to influence preschool teachers' conceptualisation of play and relevant pedagogies to promote PBL. Therefore, in this ongoing doctoral study I am exploring how Saudi preschool teachers define play and PBL. This study is guided by a qualitative research design informed by social constructivism and an indigenous methodology. The data collection is initially focused on seven preschool teachers' working in public early childhood settings, whilst later data will encompass private and charity preschool teachers. The seven teachers were firstly interviewed to seek their understandings of play for supporting children's learning and development and the PBL approach. The interview data revealed that the teachers varied in their expressed understandings about play; although, a common ideological stance was to conceptualise play as promoting children' development and integral to children’s natures. However, PBL in preschool settings did not appear to be fully understood or clearly articulated in the definitions and implementation shared during interviews. The pedagogical approaches to PBL shared by the teachers positioned play as either entirely teacher-initiated or child-initiated. PBL as teacher- initiated was described as the teacher leading all activities both in and outside the classroom. In contrast, child-initiated PBL was perceived as occurring outdoors where it was thought of as separate to learning. A guided-play approach collaboratively designed by a teacher and a child and commonly implemented in Western countries, was not directly mentioned by the preschool teachers. This initial analysis and findings support the need for a clear and consistent SA framework for PBL to translate this introduced Western PBL approach in ways relevant to the unique SA socio-cultural context.

Keywords: Play-based learning, Pedagogy, Preschool, Saudi Arabia, Social constructivism, Indigenous methodology

Method: Qualitative Research

Presenter Email: aaliohan@myune.edu.au.

Supervisors Name: Dr. Sue Elliott, Prof. Margaret Sims, Dr. Jo Bird

Supervisors Email: sue.elliott@une.edu.au; margaret.sims@mq.edu.au; Jbird21@une.edu.au.

Supervisors Phone: 0267735087, NA, 0267735802.