WORK HARD, PLAY HARD: EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF PLAY IN TIMES OF RIGOR AND HIGH ACCOUNTABILITY

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ABSTRACT

As school districts navigated data and how to evidence student growth and success, educational stakeholders felt the pressure of increased testing requirements. This pressure led to more teacher-directed lectures and paperwork rather than open-ended, project-oriented lessons (Elkind, 2007). Consequently, increased accountability and rigor causes educational stakeholders to lose sight of the value of early childhood programs (Liston, Whitcomb, & Borko, 2007) and play. Utilizing the lens of Piaget’s (1929) constructivist learning theory (Bruner, 1996; Schweinhart, 2005), adult stakeholder perceptions concerning the role of play as an educational tool in times of high rigor and accountability were explored.

All participants in this study suggested play is learning in one form or another. Response trends also included a need to develop social-emotional skills and work with the “whole child” rather than solely focusing on academics. However, best practice is often prioritized last as stakeholders strive to meet their numerous requirements. To this end, we as a society are missing prime opportunities to better develop well-rounded children who not only comprehend academic concepts, but who also have healthy self-concepts and relationships.