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Stakeholder Perspectives of Play-based Learning in the First Year of Primary
School: A Case Study in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

This qualitative research study explored key stakeholders' perspectives of a play-based learning (Pb-L) approach in the first year of primary school. A case-study design was used to gather information about the perceived value, challenges, and characteristics of a Pb-L environment in an Auckland-based primary school. The children's perspectives of the role of play were explored in six focus group interviews, while an online survey was used to collect parent or caregiver's experiences of the current Pb-L approach. Lastly, two separate interviews were conducted with a classroom teacher and school leader to capture their experiences of implementing a play-based approach. The findings of the study indicated that children perceived self-initiated, hands-on exploration that was based on their interests, and social interaction with peers, as important in their play and learning activities. Overall, the parents, teacher, and school leader demonstrated a shared understanding of the value of a Pb-L approach, particularly in relation to the importance of child well-being and children's social and emotional development. The study outlines the adults' perspectives of the benefits and challenges of a play pedagogy and highlights the implications for schools/teaching practice, including potential opportunities for future research. It is proposed that a Pb-L pedagogy provides an approach to development and learning that embraces the natural playfulness with which children enter school to support meaningful early learning experiences that promote lifelong learning.

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