Public Abstract

First Name:Patricia

Middle Name:Merie

Last Name:White

Adviser's First Name:Barbara

Adviser's Last Name:Martin

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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As school districts navigated data and how to evidence student growth and success, educational stakeholders felt the pressure of increased testing requirements. The additional pressure led to more teacher-directed lecturing and paperwork for students rather than more open-ended, project-oriented lessons and active activities (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 the value of play.

This concurrent triangulation mixed methods study (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2010) explored adult stakeholder perceptions concerning the role of play as an educational tool in times of high rigor and accountability utilizing the lens of Piaget's (1929) constructivist learning theory (Bruner, 1996; Schweinhart, 2005). In the study, surveys were used to measure the connection between adult perceptions of play and school readiness. At the same time, adult perceptions regarding the role of play in a child's education were explored using qualitative interviews with adult stakeholders (e.g., administrators and teachers) throughout the state of Missouri. Collected data for this study was examined using inductive analysis as common themes emerged. All participants in this study alluded to the fact that play is learning in one form or another. Response trends also included the importance of developing social-emotional skills as well as working with the "whole child" rather than solely focusing on academics. 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 as well as to understand and exhibit socially acceptable behaviors.