A scoping review of research on play-based pedagogies in kindergarten education

Article Summary
Across a number of countries, play-based learning is the mandated pedagogy in early years’ curricula. However, a lack of consensus remains both in research and practice regarding the value and role of play in children’s learning. This scoping review analyses 168 articles addressing play-based learning for 4–5 year old children divided into three categories: research on play for developmental learning, research on play for academic learning and factors influencing play in kindergarten classrooms. Much of the research endorsed play as fulfilling an important role in early learning. However, two disparate perspectives concerning the role of play for developmental versus academic learning demonstrate different orientations towards the value and potential benefits of play. Research focused on developmental learning endorsed the use of free play and a passive teacher role, while research focused on academic learning endorsed teacher-directed and mutually directed play where the teacher fulfills an active play role. A similar lack of consensus was found among research with educators regarding the role and benefits of play. These findings indicate a need to move away from a binary stance regarding play and towards an integration of perspectives and practices, with different types of play perceived as complementary rather than incompatible.

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