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PERCEPTIONS OF PRE-SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATORS AND PARENTS TOWARDS LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

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Theorists and educationists such as Piaget, Vygotsky and Issac have affirmed that children learn to be independent and to master social skills through play. On the other hand, research literature (McConkey, 1986) shows that for special children, play is mostly perceived as past time and is parent-or teacher-centred. These perceptions are contrary to the definition of play: play is pleasurable and involves free choice (as cited by Wardle, 2003). With the above in mind, this study aimed to gain further insights into the pre-school special educators and parents perceptions of learning through play for special children. Forty pre-school special educators and forty parents were interviewed. A questionnaire was specifically designed to examine the pre-school special educators’ and parents’ perceptions on learning through play. It was found that both pre-school special educators and parents have positive perceptions towards learning through play. However, it was found that pre-school special educators perceive negatively towards ‘children create rules’ as definition of ‘play’. The result also indicated that conflicts exist in pre-school special educators and parents regarding the style of interventions. It demonstrated that play training for pre-school special educators and parents is crucial in order to provide quality play experience for special children.

Keywords: Learning through play, pre-school special educator

All children need to play. Theorists suggest that play is a necessity in children’s health development in their different stages of growth, as basic as good food, cleanliness, and rest (Sluss, 2005). According to Vygotsky and Piaget, play provides children the opportunities to learn skills that are needed for them to adapt themselves in this complicated world (as cited in Moyles, 1995; Macintyre, 2001). Besides that, through play children also learn to understand the world, interact with others, express and control emotions, solve problems, imagine and make choices (Hanline, 1999).

In terms of learning, Moyles (1995) wrote that play offers the opportunity for children to learn without the fear of making mistakes. Children with special needs should be encouraged to do things for themselves. Play involves risk-taking