Abstract

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLAY-BASED EXPERIENCES IN POST-NCLB KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS: THE ROLE OF TRAINING, RESOURCES, AND ACCOUNTABILITY PRESSURES IN MEETING BEST PRACTICE

by

Cristina Medellin

Adviser: Professor Joseph Glick

In response to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), opportunities for play-based experiences in classrooms have been challenged over the past decade. Despite research demonstrating the educational benefits of child-driven play, teachers and schools have been pressured to focus on improving children’s success on standardized assessments which may not relate to the developmental achievements expected from activity based experiences (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005; Graue, 2010; Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). To explore teachers’ response to the tension between assessment driven mandates and best early childhood practices, this study investigated which factors influence teacher practices and values. Specifically, how do teacher training and classroom resources influence teachers’ values about the appropriateness of using child-driven learning materials as well as creating opportunities in the classroom schedule for play-based experiences? Additionally, how do teachers’ perceived accountability pressures to their classroom practice influence their values and opportunities for play-based experiences?

Regression analyses were performed to explore 142 NYC kindergarten teachers’ responses on the Early Childhood Time Use Scale-Profile (ECTUS-P; Astuto, Cahalan & Allen, 2014). Results suggest that when teachers are trained in developmental theory and adequate resources, play-based experiences in the classroom remain a priority in the classroom. In addition,
teacher’s value of child-driven materials remains intact when training and resources are available. By contrast, when accountability pressures influence classroom instructional time teachers’ endorsements of child-driven materials to promote play-based experiences suffer. These findings speak to implications for professional development of teachers in a post-NCLB context that supports the importance of grounding an early childhood workforce in developmental theory so that play-based experiences can remain a priority.