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Conceptual split? Parents' and experts' perceptions of play in the 21st century

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Abstract

Two studies examined U.S. mothers' ($N = 1130$) and child development professionals' ($N = 99$) beliefs about the relationship between play and learning. Study 1 investigated relationships among maternal conceptualizations of play, perceived learning value, and frequency of children's play behaviors. *All Play* mothers viewed activities ranging from unstructured, imaginary behaviors to structured, goal-oriented activities as play, *Traditional* mothers viewed unstructured activities as playful and *Uncertain* mothers seemed less clear about what constituted play. While mothers ascribed more learning value to structured activities, amount of value varied in relation to their conceptualizations of play. Frequency in which children play in these activities also varied in relation to mother's "play-learning" beliefs. Study 2 revealed that professionals and mothers differed in their play beliefs. Professionals rated structured activities as nonplay, associating less learning value with these activities compared to unstructured

activities. Implications concerning societal trends towards structured learning environments for children are discussed in light of Irving Sigel's work.



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Keywords

Play; Academics; Learning; Beliefs; Early childhood; Mothers; Parents

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