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“I learnt from a young age, that play is a waste of time!” Student teachers’ perceptions of Play: Theory and Practice in Pasifika Early Childhood Settings in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

This paper examines the findings of a case study that investigates the views of Samoan and Tongan female early childhood student teachers ideas of the term ‘play’ (Leaupepe, 2008a). The paper focuses on how their views have influenced the ways in which interactions between themselves and young children have occurred through play. By exploring their own childhood play experiences, cultural beliefs and values of play, parental attitudes towards play and understanding theories of play, student teachers were able to critically reflect upon the impact this has had towards their own teaching practices. The paper discusses tensions that exist with current policies related to play and explores the implications this may have for Pasifika early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Introduction

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the nature of play in early childhood education is based on a strong ideological and theoretical underpinning that emphasizes the value of play as a means of learning. Scientific studies of child development that value play as a way by which children learn provides the pedagogical vehicle for the delivery of the curriculum. The National Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whāriki, recognises the significance of play to the holistic development of the child and, as a consequence, promotes learning occurs through play (Ministry of Education, 1996). Play is regarded as the way that children actively inquire into the environment. It is how they “learn strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning” (p.16) and how they make sense of the natural, social, and material worlds. Understanding how play actually works to produce optimal learning outcomes for young children continues to intrigue and be of interest to early childhood educators who are challenged by the ideas of play and producing the required evidence for learning through play (Dockett & Fleer, 2003; Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002; Leaupepe, 2008b; 2010; Rothlein, & Brett, 1987; Sandberg, & Samuelsson, 2003; Wood & Attfield, 2005). Early childhood educators are required to adhere to current policies that are related to play, that is, the need to not only recognise play for its contributing factors to the teaching and learning of children, but to value play (Ministry of Education, 2007; 1996).

Teacher education plays an important role in equipping teachers to recognise the ideas associated to understanding theories of play and the complexities that are correlated with the benefits this has for young children. The value of play is recognised in Pasifika early childhood teacher education programmes delivered in the Faculty of Education at The University of Auckland (Airini, Leaupepe, Sauni, Tuafuti & Amituanai-Toloa, 2009). One such programme is examined in a research study that is discussed in this paper. The study found that not all students entering these programmes have a background where play is highly valued or
recognised for its contribution to the development of children’s cognitive and social abilities. In response to these findings, this paper explores the implications of the tension that arises when students bring to their studies deep-seated beliefs that are challenged by the ideas presented in their courses (Leaupepe, 2009) and considers issues for these students who enter such programmes. These programmes have provided opportunities for Pacific people to access and gain qualifications within the early childhood education sector (Airini et al., 2010). The next section discusses the research study in greater detail.

Research Study

In 2007 a small-scaled research explored Pasifika early childhood student teachers’ views of the term play. The research participants were recruited from a class listing and were enrolled in the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Education (PIECE) Diploma of Teaching programme. This was a specialized three-year programme that had been managed through the School of Pasifika Education, Faculty of Education, at The University of Auckland. This particular cohort consisted mainly of Samoan and Tongan students therefore the sample is not representative of all Pasifika groups. The research participants were in their second year of studies completing a teaching qualification that would permit them to work in both mainstream and Pacific Islands early childhood education settings. For the purpose of this study, understanding the views of Pasifika student teachers in relation to play and the contributing factors that have influenced their ways of thinking about play were considered important. It is hoped that an understanding of such views may support student teachers in their own responsiveness to play and help them recognise the effects this may have in how they provide play opportunities for young children.

A Pasifika Research Approach

Two Pasifika concepts have underpinned the research approach for the study reported here. Firstly, the kakala model that was developed by Thaman (1999) was considered as being appropriate. This model is based on Tongan values and principles that illustrate the customary practice of fragrant garland making. It is used in this study to describe the process of gathering knowledge, classifying information and disseminating knowledge and information. Toli kakala, the searching for, selecting and gathering of the most appropriate flowers is used here to explain the recruitment and interviewing of the research participants for the study. In order to investigate the nature of student teachers perceptions of play, interviews were conducted before and after undertaking a course about the value of play. During the initial stage of the research the student teachers shared of their childhood play memories. Kau tui kakala is the procedure by which the information shared by the research participants is methodically organised and interpreted in order to make the best possible design for the garland. Luva e kakala is the final process. This is used to describe how the research information is given back to the research participants, which in turn becomes a gift as the information and knowledge are used to inform others (Thaman, 1999).

Secondly, the concept of talanoa, a research methodology that is favoured by many Pacific Island peoples (Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu, & Finau, 2001) is incorporated in this study. Tala refers to "inform, tell, talk about" and noa means "nothing, or void" (Fa'afoi, Parkhill & Fletcher, 2006, p. 105). This provides a culturally appropriate setting whereby the researcher and research participants can talk openly and spontaneously about the research topic. The conversations and dialogue flow freely with very little intrusion of a formal structure with predetermined questions. In doing so, a shared understanding of ownership and research directions are incorporated. Manu'atu and Kepa (2006) make reference to talanoa as “critical thinking and action” with the notion of talanoamalē, which involves critical thinking that “gets under the skin” (p.171). The concept of talanoa validates a qualitative approach as the most
suitable method to use in this research as it adopts an oral interactive approach, while talanoamālie is the process by which critical thinking and reflection occurs (Leaupepe, 2010).

**What the research participants said about the term ‘play’**

**Initial views of play**

Prior to undertaking the course about the value of play, the research participants explained what they had meant by 'play'. For most it was a way to have fun. Play was described as:

- **Fun, exploring, discovering.**
- **I like playing all the time, it’s fun.**
- **Play was just you run around and have fun.**

All the research participants had said that play was associated with making friends this was how they had learnt to socialise with their peers. Play had been initially thought of as running around, climbing trees, which had no connection to learning. For example, the following quotes demonstrate this.

- **When we play we are making friends.**
- **I like playing making friends with my peers.**
- **We make lots of friends, it helps with communication.**
- **Play was just you run around and have fun, nothing to do with learning. You climb trees, make friends; it was a time to socialize. I always like to play.**

Play was relaxing and had been associated with exercising through playing traditional cultural games. For one participant play had been defined as a time that “occupied that space we had nothing to do or socialize”. Other views expressed included playing in groups, play as a reward and a way of exploring, and at times play included being competitive.

All the research participants had experienced and shared similar childhood play experiences. Their childhood play experiences occurred mainly outdoors and on a social level that involved other children, as one participant recalled.

- **We never play by ourselves, we always play in a group, it’s more fun to play together.**

Individual play seldom occurred. Indoor play involved playing cards and hand clapping games that were accompanied with chants. As one participant explains why indoor play is rear.

- **We hardly have any games indoors, back home no indoors; indoors we have to keep the house nicely for the visitors.**

All the research participants had no recollection of adults being involved in their childhood play experiences as children. These two features, absence of individualised play and the absence of adult participation may be contrasted with the type of play experienced by children in New Zealand. It was important to understand the significance of such views as they may have influenced the ways in which the student teachers interact with young children.
Recollection of parental views of play

All the research participants commented that from what they could remember as children, their parents’ attitudes towards play was often negative. Parents had either viewed play as a “waste of time” or “no value” or “not important for children”. This was especially the case when there was something else that their parents had considered more constructive and productive for children to do as one research participant recalls.

I learnt from a young age that play was a waste of time. I feel like playing all the time. I remember my mother saying to me ‘come home and do the things, sweep outside, pick up the rubbish.

Participants recalled that for their parents, play had interfered with daily chores and the work that needed to be done. Ironically, after the completion of chores, all the participants recall that ‘play’ was used as a reward. Play was a way of ensuring that chores were completed and often the participants would complete their chores faster if they knew that they could go outside and play with their friends or neighbours. Therefore, parents to some degree see the value of play if play was used as a means to reward their children for completing chores. For example, this is illustrated in the following quotes.

It’s just like a reward and then our parents would say, ‘ok you can go and play.’

Our parents reward us when we do our chores because it’s always we do our chores.

There are times like you have to do little chores at home and then it’s playtime.

One participant noted how work became the opportunity for play. For example, her recollection of working on the plantation.

When we go to the plantation we use to cut the you know banana skin back home, the ones ready to die, so we just cut the leaves, we sit in it and then we slide down. We slide from the plantation that likes on a hill, to the little water hole, its like a stream, it was funny and we really enjoy ourselves.

Another example shows how work sometimes provided opportunities to engage in pretend play.

We play under the tree, sometimes we make a umu, we put empty tins of corn beef and we make a umu, put little stick just to represent the food and put leaves on it and we have to try to make a umu.

When mum go outside, the kids go outside and start digging beside mum weeding, doing some garden.

Childhood play experiences relied on the research participants’ ability to make use of whatever opportunities were given them, to use natural resources and their natural environment. The following quote illustrates this.

There was no materials, whatever we could find like natural resources, coconut leaves, whatever we find around the house, the environment, that’s what we use to play.

In some instances, it meant that now as adults and parents themselves, they had withheld opportunities for their own children to play using the same tactics as their parents. This is illustrated in the following quote.
When I told my children something to do [like some work-chores] but they didn’t do it, I told them, you don’t have to play. Yeah and sometimes I’m tired of cleaning up and say, ‘Stop playing’. And after I spoke to them when I see them I think, I feel sorry for what I say to my children to stop playing.

One participant remembered how unhappy she would be if she could not go out and play. The following quote reveals how she had used play as a bargaining tool to negotiate with her parents. 

When my mother don’t let me go and play I was crying and I was very sad at home. And when she asked me something to do, I didn’t want to do it sometimes I ask her, ‘If I do that can I go and have a play?’ [Interviewer] And what would she say? Oh yeah, you can do this and after that you go and play.

The majority of the participants described how often they wanted to play and when they did, it was usually met with disapproval. They recalled that when parents were busy with other things (hosting visitors, family and church commitments) play was a way of “keeping children occupied”.

Given these childhood experiences, which integrate work and play with traditional village life, the study was interested in what extent the students have changed their views about play to the view upon which the early childhood education course is based; namely that play should be valued as a means of learning.

What does this mean for the research participants?

The study has revealed that for the research participants, Pacific Island play practices differ markedly from play in Aotearoa New Zealand. A difference, which has implications for Pasifika students who enter New Zealand teacher education - early childhood programmes. This distinction is compounded by the educational theories studies in the course, which promote play for the development of the child’s social and cognitive abilities. For Pasifika students, the very idea of questioning and critiquing educational theories is challenging (Leaupepe, 2009). The lecturer is regarded as the expert who has the knowledge, expertise and experience. She is the authority. To question such authority becomes an almost impossible task, especially when deep-seated beliefs on authority are embedded within the student teachers’ way of being, that is, that authority should “be accepted unquestioningly” (Rata, 2002, p. 16).

According to Shalem and Bensusan (1999) such deep-seated beliefs or doxic beliefs, are extremely difficult to change and there is considerable debate about how change can occur, if at all. Beliefs that are so embodied that they are unconscious and unavailable for analysis using self-reflective strategies. Pierre Bourdieu refers to these beliefs as doxa, the ways in which “we accept many things without knowing them” (Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992, p. 113). There are different states of beliefs that “correspond to different kinds of beliefs of a varied significance” (Shalem & Bensusan, 1999, p.28). Trivial-beliefs are beliefs that protects us from having to question everything from scratch each time we do something, however, if anything goes wrong, we call them up to duty – we rely on them to get us back on track. Medium-term beliefs are enduring beliefs that have a more enduring kind because they imply some kind of continuous reflection (genuine interests at heart, for example: parents for their children). Deep-seated beliefs are beliefs we hold in respect to issues of race, gender, and nationalism, to religion, to matters such as death, and to aspirations for quality of life, however when called to scrutiny are often resisted. They are there they exist and go unchallenged (Leaupepe, 2009), tacit knowledge that is not thought about, rather “it just is” (Rata, 2002, p.15).
Given these childhood experiences, which show the integration of work and play in traditional village life, to what extent did the students change their views about play and adopt the ideas taught in the early childhood education course? Did they agree that play should be valued as a means of learning? The status of play is associated with the position of children and their role and function in various societies (Wood & Attfield, 2005). In developed countries, and among the middle class of developing countries such as India and China, play is regarded as the child’s ‘work’ (Roopnarine, Lasker, Sacks & Stores, 1998). In contrast, in societies based on traditional economies, such as Pacific Island Nations, play is what children do; it is not serious (Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2010; 2008b; Wood & Attfield, 2005), while work is about survival and to some extent a means of survival (Roopnarine et al., 1998). Those parental attitudes about children working were an important influence on how the student teachers later regarded play. All the research participants said that their parents had negative attitudes towards play. It was viewed as a “waste of time”. This was especially the case when there was something more productive for children to do. When children are needed for household chores play becomes an obstacle to such work (Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2008a). In the Pacific Islands, children are needed to help out with work on the plantations, fishing, and preparation for cooking and other related chores. This different approach has implications for Pacific Island migrants to New Zealand, especially for those who become early childhood educators in a system that awards a high status to play.

Despite these childhood influences, it appeared that the research participants had accepted the ideas about play that were presented in the course.

Well I read this theorists and their perspectives of play, there is heaps that I don’t really know that’s play. I just think it’s normal but to the theorists, their theory is more than play, it’s play and at the same time children learn so to me the theorists have big knowledge about play.

Playing hop scotch, I didn’t realize that I learn the numbers, the shape as well as hand and eye coordination, how you throw the stone, and according to some of the theorists that I’ve read about for example Piaget with his games with rules, I didn’t realize that I am exploring and I am learning.

Yet, in their practice, some, although not all, regress to the position where play was not really valued. This is illustrated by one of the research participant in the following quote regarding deep-seated beliefs about boys and girls playing together.

In Tongan culture you know there are certain play that boys can only do and certain play that girls can only do, and there were times that boys and girls are not allowed to play together because of boys being rough and for the respect we have for each other. For example, we are playing marbles it would have been rude for me to play marbles, of the way we are kneeling down on the ground, climbing trees with boys because then having exposed ourselves as a child. Some play was limited for us because of the languages we might use in our play. Even now, after I learn about those theorists I still don’t let my daughter play certain games, I don’t let her climb trees, no climbing trees

Despite what the research participant has learned in her course about the benefits of play, which include frequent debate about the importance of gender-equality in play, the participant’s own embodied beliefs remain unchanged, indeed they are quite firmly fixed in the traditional way. Given that New Zealand education is based on human rights legislation and a liberal-democratic culture that requires and values gender equality, the education system actively encourages gender interaction. The result for this particular student is an unacknowledged tension as she passively receives the ideas presented in the courses, but actively allows her own views to govern her interactions with children. She may appear in
class to have adopted the required knowledge through assessments, an acceptance demonstrated in her assignments. She may also appear to engage in the appropriate practices within the early childhood centres where she undertakes practical experience, but it is a superficial acceptance. The subtle and unconscious messages that she sends to the children through her body language and choice of words reveal that the new learning has not extricated the deeper doxic beliefs. It is difficult to know whether this resistance to change is the result of unshakeable doxic beliefs or whether the students are simply fitting into the practices of some Pasifika early childhood centres in Auckland. That, of course, reinforces the deep-seated beliefs.

However there was one research participant who fully accepted the new ideas about play that she encountered in the course.

I have learnt a lot, so much that I didn’t know that was play. I teach my own children and teach even my husband, I teach my husband about the module as well. I am spreading the word, I feel proud cause my husband doesn’t speak English that much but he says, “let the child explore” I know how important play is and I want to encourage it. I can take children’s play further by encouraging them, being supportive cause now I understand the value of play.

Not only has she been able to incorporate the new knowledge into her professional practice but she also attempted to change her adult children’s views and practices towards their own children. At this point she is met with resistance. This is rather predictable given that her children were using the very practices with their children that their mother had used with them in the past.

It's hard, cause you know; I now see my eldest child and how he stops his son from playing. What happened to me as a child, I passed on to him. I tell him to leave his son, he is exploring. We start to argue and he says to me “what a waste of time, look at the mess” I feel sad and know what has happened, it’s like a cycle being continued, but I know now and I want to try and encourage him so his son can learn and have fun.

Challenges for Pasifika early childhood teachers

It would be useful for Pasifika early childhood teachers to consider what play has meant for them, to reflect on their own childhood play experiences and consider how different these experiences may be to the children that they interact with as practitioners. According to Sandberg and Samuelsson (2003) young children’s experiences of play are to some extent influenced by the values and beliefs held by early childhood teachers. Literature has revealed that early childhood teachers own understanding of theories of play and what was actually practiced has been a key feature in several studies and an issue for many teachers both in mainstream early childhood settings (Hedges, 2003; Newman, Brody & Beauchamp, 1996; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Rothlein & Brett, 1987; Wood & Bennet, 1998) and in Pacific Island early childhood education centres (Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2010, 2008a; Mara & Burgess, 2007). It is important to understand how Pasifika early childhood teachers’ views of play are constructed and the influences that have led to such views. It is suggested that early childhood teachers views and experiences of play will in turn have an effect on the types of play, amount of play, space for play made available to children and the role of teachers in children’s play (Fleer, 2003; Hughes, 2004; Keating, Fabian, Jordan, Mavers, & Roberts, 2000; Leaupepe, 2010; Newman, Brody & Beauchamp, 1996; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Riojas-Cortez, 2000; Roopnarine & Johnson, 2001; Rothlein & Brett, 1987; Sandberg & Samuelsson, 2003).
Despite knowing the benefits of play, teachers have struggled with trying to implement effective and meaningful opportunities for children to engage in play (Leaupepe, 2010; Ranz-Smith, 2007). Mara and Burgess’s (2007) study revealed that Pasifika early childhood teachers were more likely to allow children to play with their peers rather than participate in children’s play themselves. This is an area that would need to be addressed so that Pasifika early childhood teachers become confident in their understanding of theories of play to optimise potential learning opportunities for young children. Advocating for play opportunities for children becomes an even more challenging task when confronted with those within the profession who continue to be lead by deep-seated beliefs about play. The views of the research participants are important and need to be reconciled to policy if they are to implement the curriculum.

The views and beliefs of Pacific Island parents who have been raised and educated in the Pacific Island Nations may still remain influential (Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2010). Those who migrate to New Zealand may not necessarily see the value in play and opportunities for their children to be engage in play episodes may be hindered. In Pacific Island early childhood centres, teachers may feel obligated to carry out the expectations of parents, that is, to produce evidence of children’s learning by way of worksheets and other related tasks (Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2010). Therefore play is once again used as a means to reward children once such tasks are completed. Following the course the participants had come to realize that their own upbringing and perceptions held by their parents influenced the way in which they had limited opportunities for children to play. Parker-Rees (1999) points out that this may also be influenced by the fact that play is something that adults seem to grow out of when they “grow up.” (p.61). Because parents have viewed play as a waste of time, often Pasifika early childhood teachers placed a stronger emphasis on more teacher-initiated, teacher-directed instructional teaching activities (Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2010; Mauigoa-Tekene, 2006; Mara & Burgess, 2007). A practice that is often reflected within the practices of Pacific Island early childhood centres.

Play-related policies


Te whāriki: Exploration – Mana Aotūroa
The child learns through active exploration of the environment.
Goal 1: Children experience an environment where their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised.

Learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and attitudes
Children develop:
• the ability to make decision, choose their own materials, and set their own problems;
• the attitude that not knowing and being uncertain are part of the process of being a good learner;
• an expectation that they take responsibility for their own learning;
• the knowledge that trying things out, exploration, and curiosity are important and valued ways of learning;
• increasing confidence and a repertoire for symbolic, pretend, or dramatic play;
• the knowledge that playing with ideas and materials, with no objective in mind, can be an enjoyable, creative, and valid approach to learning.
(Ministry of Education, 1996, p.84).
The New Zealand Curriculum
Health and Physical Education: Level One
Movement skills; Science and technology
• Develop a wide range of movement skills, using a variety of equipment and play environments.
Positive attitudes: Challenges and social and cultural factors
• Participate in a range of games and activities and identify the factors that make participation safe and enjoyable.
(Ministry of Education, 2007)

Implementing the above goals and outcomes become a challenge for Pasifika early childhood teachers. A common feature in many Pacific Island early childhood centres is the way in which the teacher engages in direct instructional teaching with children whereby the teacher controls the whole learning process (Leaupepe, 2010; 2008a; Mauigoa-Tekene, 2006). Children are familiar with the practices of teachers being in charge and directing the learning as this reflects the practices by which children learn in the home (Airini et al., 2009; Schoeffel & Meleisa, 1996). For the research participants in this study, their own perceptions of play prior to studying theories of play have meant that they were not able to recognise and value children’s play as opportunities for further learning. The participants were more inclined to offer experiences that allowed the teacher to direct the learning. Rote learning and mechanical memorizations are the preferred teaching strategies that are incorporated in some Pacific Island early childhood settings (Mara & Burgess, 2007; Hughes, 2004). This type of learning was influenced by the arrival of some of the missionaries (for example see Tagoilelagi, 1995; Tanielu, 2004) and to which the research participants had been brought up in. Although this has proven to provide a way of learning for young children, there is evidence to suggest that this type of learning has had negative effects on children’s long term learning (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001 cited in Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006). Pasifika early childhood teachers who have experienced such ways of learning through directional instruction that places emphasis on drill and practice learning, rote and memorization learning are most likely to continue such practices as adults (Leaupepe, 2010; 2008a; Mara & Burgess, 2007).

It would be beneficial for Pasifika early childhood teachers to critically examine their own attitudes and perceptions of play and consider how such views may enhance or hinder children’s learning and development. Although Western theories of play may not be favoured amongst some Pasifika early childhood teachers, consideration must take into account others way of achieving effective learning for young children at the same time appreciating that the interpretations of play will vary from culture to culture (Leaupepe, 2010).

For the research participants in this study and what has been reported in this paper, there is no doubt that the participants had made connections to play as a way of providing fun. As children, the research participants play occurred within social groupings where the level of participation was sometimes competitive. However, now as adults, involvement in children’s play were limited. In Pacific Island Nations, adults very rarely get involved in children’s play. This lack of involvement seems to be evident in Pasifika early childhood teachers practice. For example, Mara and Burgess (2007) illustrated that Samoan teachers seldom played or got involved in children’s play episodes, reinforcing the notion of play being a waste of time when they could be concentrating on more important matters such as literacy and numeracy activities. The teachers in Mara and Burgess’s study adopted traditional teaching practices that involved teacher-directed methods. Play episodes were not identified as ways of encouraging literacy and numeracy skills, but offered as a reward for children who had completed work related tasks.
Conclusion

This study examined how Pasifika student teachers' viewed play before and after taking a course about the value of play. The notions and concepts of play in this study were mainly associated with the type of play valued in traditional village life where children are expected to work. From what the participants understood, they described play as a means of releasing energy and engaging in physical exercises. The participants' reflections upon their own childhood play experiences and with the course content subject knowledge on play continues to challenge the research participants deep-seated beliefs whereby change may be difficult to occur.

It appears that very little research has been conducted on Pacific Island perceptions of play. It cannot be assumed that play is important and valued in all cultures and societies (Fleer, 1999; Leaupepe, 2010). According to Dockett and Fleer (2003) play cannot be perceived outside of the cultural, political and historical context in which play emerges. Literature on play that is presently used in teacher education draws from research that has been conducted from Western perspectives and collected in Western contexts (Dockett & Fleer, 2003). However, recognition of the deep-seated beliefs that Pasifika students bring with them in their studies need to be acknowledged. Additional considerations to the extent of which such beliefs have produced change require further exploration. Such beliefs will have an impact on the types of exposure and opportunities children would have to engage in play episodes.

Negative responses from parents have been noted in several studies whereby parents have viewed play as a waste of time and of no value (Gaskins, Haight, & Lancy, 2007; Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2008a; Rothlein & Brett, 1987). Consideration of parental beliefs and attitudes towards play, the role and function of children in society and within cultures, amount of play space and time made available to children all need to be accounted for when viewing play from multicultural perspectives (Leaupepe, 2010).

Literature has revealed that early childhood teachers own understanding of theories of play and what was actually practiced continues to be a key feature in several studies and an issue for many teachers both in mainstream early childhood settings (Hedges, 2003; Newman, Brody & Beauchamp, 1996; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Rothlein & Brett, 1987; Wood & Bennett, 1998) and in Pacific Island early childhood services (Hughes, 2004; Leaupepe, 2010, 2008a; Mara & Burgess, 2007). It is important to understand how Pasifika early childhood teachers’ views of play are constructed and the influences that have led to such views. The provision and exposure of play experiences that children are engaged in are greatly influenced by the views held by early childhood teachers (Sandberg & Samuelsson, 2003).

This study does not claim to have all the answers, however, it is hoped that by exploring some of the tensions that have been addressed in this paper, that a platform has been created for further discussion and debate to continue. It is important that early childhood teachers understand the impact that their own views of play has towards young children’s learning and development.

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1 This was a requirement in the partial fulfilment of completion for the Master’s programme offered at the University of Auckland.

2 The PIECE programme is an important qualification for men and women who work in Pacific Island early childhood centres in Aotearoa New Zealand. A qualification that was inspired by Pacific communities, driven and delivered by Pacific academics that represent the seven Pacific Island Nations, namely; Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands, Niue, Fiji, Tokelau and Tuvalu.

3 The information presented draws on the transcriptions of the research participants’ interviews. English is a second-language for all the participants in this research study and quotes/statements used are exactly to how the participants have expressed themselves.