

Outdoor Physical Play as Critical to Early Childhood Development: Findings from Saudi Arabia

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Abstract : Play in early childhood education has been stifled across the world due to an overemphasis on academic achievement and a reduced focus on physical play and motor development. In Saudi Arabia, teachers reticent to allocate more time to play for fear of retribution from parents and administrators that children are losing academic seat time. This practice has proven to be detrimental to the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of children. Teachers are pressured to prioritize Arabic, math, and science while providing minimal time for physical activities. Administrators tend to push for an ever-increasing emphasis on academia in order to achieve higher test scores. However, young children often find it difficult to concentrate if they are not able to get out energy through physical play. Furthermore, many youth educators are not qualified to oversee physical activities, and many facilities are unprepared for safe, outdoor play. This results in children getting little to no outdoor activity. They are stuck in a strict academic regimen that may dampen the creativity and imagination easily fostered through cooperative play. For a stronger educational system and more well-rounded students, Saudi schools should enact policies that extend the number of required hours dedicated to outdoor and physical play. They should also offer training for unqualified teachers. This training should focus on the benefits of physical play and instruct them on how to facilitate these activities safely and effectively. School administrators must focus on providing adequate equipment and safe environments for the purpose of outdoor play and education. In doing so, they will be setting their students up for a successful future and improving their abilities in all aspects of education.

Keywords : early childhood education, play, outdoor, Saudi Arabia

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