

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO EFFECTS OF PLAY IN LEARNING TO
CHILDREN AGED 3-6 YEARS IN KAKAMEGA MUNICIPALITY.**

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**A RESEARCH REPORT PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT.

'Play' is sometimes contrasted with 'work' and characterized as a type of activity which is essentially unimportant, trivial and lacking in any serious purpose. As such, it is seen as something that children do because they are immature, and as something they will grow out of as they become adults. However, as this report is intended to demonstrate, this view is mistaken. Play in all its rich variety is one of the highest achievements of the human species, alongside language, culture and technology. Indeed, without play, none of these other achievements would be possible. The value of play is increasingly recognized, by researchers and within the policy arena, for adults as well as children, as the evidence mounts of its relationship with intellectual achievement and emotional well-being.

This research, however, focuses on the value of children's play. It is a particularly important time for play to be recognized, as modern societies face increasing challenges, including those that are economic, social and environmental. At the same time, the opportunities and support for children's play, which is critical to their development of the abilities they will need as future citizens able to address these challenges, are themselves under threat. This arises from increasing urbanization, from increasing stress in family life, and from changes in educational systems.

Within the educational field, during recent decades the importance of high quality early childhood education has been increasingly recognized by the research community and by governments and policy makers throughout Africa and world-wide. However, the nature of 'high quality' in this context has been contested. While in some African societies the emphasis continues to be upon providing young children with rich, stimulating experiences within a nurturing social context, increasingly in many countries within East Africa and across the world, an 'earlier is better' approach has been adopted, with an emphasis upon introducing young children at the earliest possible stage to the formal skills of literacy and numeracy. This is inimical to the provision and support for rich play opportunities. What is increasingly recognized within the research and policy communities, however, is that one vital ingredient in supporting healthy intellectual, emotional and social development in young children is the provision of opportunities and the support for play.

The purposes and functions of play in children's development have been researched well. This report provides an overview of the range of research concerned with children's play (anthropological, biological, psychological, educational) which has established the value of play for learning and development (and the consequences of a lack of play opportunities). This includes sections reviewing research concerned with each of the five main types of play in which human children engage (physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretense/socio-dramatic play and games with rules) and the implications of each area of research for provision and policy.

This report concludes with a section summarizing the research, views and policy recommendations related to children's play of leading child play researchers.

Alongside, and partly arising from, the increasing body of research evidence, there has been a recent significant growth in the recognition of the importance of children's play within the policy arena. This report recognizes this which provides an overview of the governmental, professional and