



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

SUBILAGA KEJO

M.A. (University of Dar es Salaam, 2006)

B.A (University of Dar es Salaam, 1997)

“Exploring Play in Early Years Education: Beliefs and Practices of Pre-Primary Educators in Tanzania”

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Monday, June 19, 2017

1:00 p.m.

David Turpin Building

Room A144

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Alison Preece, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Sylvia Pantaleo, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic (Member)

Dr. Alan Pence, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic (Outside Member)

Dr. Anna Kirova, University of Alberta (Additional Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Kathleen Peets, School of Early Childhood Studies, Ryerson University

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Carolyn Crippen, School of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

In this multi-case qualitative research study I explored the beliefs and practices of selected Tanzanian pre-primary educators, with regard to the role of play in early years education. The purpose was to gain insights into how the educators conceptualize play, understand its contribution to development, and if and how they incorporate it into their teaching/learning activities. Factors influencing their beliefs about play also were investigated. The study helps address an imbalance in the professional knowledge base in Early Childhood Education by providing research about play from a non-Western context. Fifteen interviews were conducted with three head and five pre-primary teachers from four schools. Observations (a total of 240 minutes at each school) were made to establish the presence of play and playful behaviour, with selected sessions videorecorded. Video clips, used to aid recall of, and reflection on, teaching practices and activities supported the teachers' interviews. Information from observations and curricular document reviews was used to enrich the findings from interviews. Data were thematically coded and Fleer's (2002) three sociocultural planes (personal, interpersonal, and community) used to analyze the influences on participants' beliefs and practices. Findings indicate that play is primarily understood to consist of enjoyable physical activities which teachers can exploit to motivate/activate children before and during lessons, but such play was not seen to contribute directly to the cognitive/academic development education is expected to enhance. Large class size, parents' demands for written work, curriculum requirements and teachers' limited competence were found to impede provision for play in the classroom. Implications and recommendations for contextually appropriate policy, curriculum, and pre-primary teacher education programs are outlined. The need for expansion of traditional notions of play and its role in education, as well as the use of traditional games and culturally meaningful materials in the curriculum are highlighted.