

Street play as occupation for pre-teens in Belhar, South Africa

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Introduction: Street play is often overlooked as an important activity for young people and has negative connotations associated with it. There is seemingly no documented research currently which describes the meaning children and young people ascribe to street play. This paper explores the experiences of pre-teens who engage in street play within the context of Belhar, South Africa.

Objectives: It reports on a study conducted in order to gain insight into street play from the perspectives of pre-teens, their reasons, feelings and attitudes, with the purpose of informing occupation-focused occupational therapy with this population in contexts similar to Belhar, a low to middle income community in Cape Town, South Africa.

Method: Descriptive phenomenology was used to describe and understand the pre-teens' experiences, collecting data using in-depth semi-structured interviews, journals and photo elicitation.

Results: Four themes were identified, 'fun and control', 'we run', 'forming a collective identity' and 'living in a dangerous world'. The study found that street play provided significant meaning for the participants, highlighting the discursive nature of fun and control - demonstrated through the paradox of freedom and constraint. The element of 'free choice' in play was reframed, revealing a collective dimension.

Conclusion: The findings of the study support an occupational justice approach to occupational therapy, which requires interdisciplinary research and practice, in order to inform policies that should promote children and young people's meaningful participation in society. Perhaps occupational therapy intervention should be more connected to context and perhaps the therapy room should become the street.