Understanding cultural influences on play:
Caregivers’/Parents’ perspectives of pediatric play
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**Mission of FSRL**

Faculté des Sciences de Réhabilitation de Léogâne (FSRL) shares the mission of the Episcopal University of Haiti: A commitment to teaching, research, and service, and its recognition of the power of a Christian message in all we do. To offer professional programs of study in occupational therapy and physical therapy, incorporating community-based rehabilitation principles and practices, to prepare our graduates for effective healthcare services as clinicians, leaders, researchers, and agents of change.

**Identified Needs of FSRL**

- Currently there are no, or a very limited amount of, culturally informed therapeutic activities available to occupational therapists practicing in Haiti.
- There is limited research that examines play forms and activities outside of Western societies (Travick-Smith, 2010).
- The curriculum at FSRL is still in the development process and is looking for course enhancement opportunities.
- The World Federation of Occupational Therapy (WFOT, 2012) stated that research is vital to the development and growth of occupational therapy worldwide and drives education and clinical practice. Therefore, research is needed to construct a culturally relevant curriculum at FSRL.

**Goals of the Experiential Component**

- Design a Photovoice research study that seeks to understand the culture and perspectives of participants in order to give individuals an opportunity to more accurately express their culture and values as it relates to play.
- Analyze data collected via interviews in order to assess and establish themes relating to children’s play in Haiti.
- Identify and elaborate on elements of play that are pertinent to Haitian culture as well as common play activities in which children engage in order to best address the needs and priorities of children with disabilities in the country of Haiti.
- Report research findings with recommendations for course development/enhancement regarding the cultural components of play through producing a manuscript.

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**Outcomes**

**Teacher**

They like to play that they are a teacher. They like to give each other homework like they do at school.”

- Participant #1

“This is a picture of my 3 daughters. She is the teacher of the 2 youngest, mathematics, teaching them how to count...They like to do it often.”

- Participant #2

**Kites**

“Haitian children, especially boys, love to fly kites...We use some cheap, thin plastic or paper, and then some coconut leaves to make the cross. And also they use the thin plastic for the tail to balance the kite, and thread. The little thread in the coconut leaves, and you use it to fly it...Sometimes they make kites to sell...but for the kids where they cannot buy one, they just check their community and fabricate the whole kite.”

- Participant #3

**Soccer**

“It is one of the favorite sports of children in Haiti. Parents let them play because the sport is part of the culture of a man and of children, which develops the intelligence and helps with health...They play soccer all over. The kids from 4 to 5 years old are already playing.”

- Participant #3

**Mama and Papa**

“A game like mom and dad, it’s very traditional when the kids, especially the daughters, are a few years old, parents buy her a doll...When they are playing they can say ‘these are my kids’...They really like that.”

- Participant #3

**Louloup, Louloup Eyapa**

“There is a devil who wants to take the kids...he just moves to take the kids and the mom just jumps in between to stop the devil. When the devil moves...then she jumps like this [demonstrates]...to protect her kids. It’s a very old game in the Haitian culture, it’s very old. I’m very surprised to see it, I used to play it all the time...The meaning of it is from the Haitian culture of Voodoo...The mom always pays attention, to watch over the kids so the witchcraft does not eat the babies.”

- Participant #2

**Themes & Considerations**

**Preferred Play Areas**

- The most commonly occurring play activities in this study were games, motor play, and pretend play. Each of these areas were comprised of activities that reflected aspects of the culture such as family roles and religious traditions.

**Peer Play**

- Children showed a strong preference for playing with peers rather than playing alone.

**Cognitive and Physical Development**

- Games or activities that participants perceived to be important for cognitive development were especially emphasized. While this study found cultural elements to have an impact on the play activities in which children engage, consideration of culture, traditions, and values must also extend to the parents and caregivers. Understanding the values and perspectives of the family as a whole is essential in the provision of meaningful, client-centered intervention and care.