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Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives of Play in Preschool Classrooms

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CLASSROOMS

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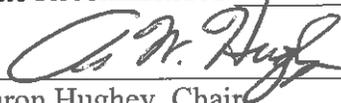Bowling Green, Kentucky

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By
Lois Michelle Edwards

May 2017

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVES OF PLAY IN PRESCHOOL CLASSROOMS

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Dean, Graduate School   Date 4/24/17

I dedicate my dissertation to the one and only love of my life. He is not famous or known across the country; he is known to those who love him as a real man. "When you understand the value of a person, you are close to understanding the heart of God." Robby Edwards, the only one I ever dated or loved and am proud to call my husband. Robby, you stood beside me through my tears, frustration, laughter and learning – from my first degree to my last, I will forever love you.

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This study examines early childhood educators' perceptions of play as a developmentally appropriate practice in preschool classrooms. Through selective sampling, 10 preschool teachers were chosen. These teachers were identified because of their experience, education, and the lead they take on various projects, as well as the author's personal knowledge of their work ethic and dedication to the education profession. The teachers were interviewed using an extempore, semi-structured configuration about their beliefs relating to play, how they implement play in their classrooms, and their viewpoint on hurdles to play. They identified the supports required to implement play as a developmentally appropriate practice in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. The early educators made it abundantly clear that play is the "concrete" in a strong foundation for preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Implications for future research and practice are included.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Fred Froebel created the concept of kindergarten in 1816, which means "child's garden" (UNICEF, 2013). The kindergarten and preschool teachers of today struggle with how to implement play in their classrooms. Often teachers use playtime as a reward for good behavior. In the 1930s, early childhood education began moving away from play and toward teacher-directed activities. In the 1980s and 1990s, academics were added to help the students meet required testing in upper grades and, as a direct result, playtime was limited.

The Problem Defined

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states, "Children have the right to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities" (UNICEF, 2013). However, in the hurry-up, fast-paced, tightly scheduled, high pressured and achievement-based worlds of many children today, play is not given adequate attention by adults, teachers, or caregivers. Many schools have become assembly lines in which children are treated like a car frame in a factory. At each stop or grade level, additional pieces of information are added to the child or frame (Elkind, 1993). In order to "have a complete car," teachers rely on nonstop academic instruction. They emphasize children's memorization of facts and use of distinct skills; children's learning is measured with standardized tests (Fromberg, 2002). In this highly structured environment, little time is available for play.

With playtime nonexistent, children do not have the opportunity to develop the ability to pretend play, which grants them the chance to use make-believe, fantasy, and symbolic behavior in representing one object as another. Pretend play allows children to

express positive and negative emotions. During pretend play children are able to use play objects and assign real-world meaning to them. Kaugars and Russ (2009) hypothesized that children who have the opportunity to play are more imaginative and expressive in their daily play.

Almon (2003) described a six-hour day in kindergarten: 90 minutes on early literacy drills, 60 minutes on mathematics, and 30 minutes on science. There is no time in the schedule for indoor play and only 30 minutes for outdoor play. In actuality, the word "play" may not even appear in most kindergarten curricula. In comparison to 10 to 20 years ago, three- and four-year-old children today are expected to employ high levels of reading and writing activities. The annihilation of play assuredly will have serious ramifications for children and for the future of childhood itself. Neighborhood pickup games of baseball and the freedom to explore open fields and woods are a thing of the past. The freedom to play in an unstructured environment has been replaced with the convenience of video, television, and computer screens; organized youth leagues begin at an increasingly earlier age than ever before. Children naturally imitate adults; therefore, it is very important that they witness adults being lively and creative with playful learning. This will inspire play in young children. Observing adults coupled with their own inquisitive nature will provide the underlying basis for play. "The ability to play is one of the principal criteria of mental health" (Almon, 2003, p. 1).

Purpose of the Study

This study explicitly brings together the issues just enumerated under the aforementioned problem defined. Preschool and kindergarten teachers often hear of the value of play in trainings and during in-service days. But playing with dolls and blocks

seems to have little to do with the academic knowledge that children need to succeed in preschool or kindergarten. Through play, children begin to understand their world. It is the mechanism they use to begin to interpret and to contemplate their world. Giving a child the opportunity to play unlocks creativity and imagination and develops reading and cognitive abilities, as well as further develops fine and gross motor skills. Play also sets the stage for social and emotional development; it provides the base foundation for learning.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2016) has recognized play as a right for every child and has emphasized the importance of play to child development. Poverty, child labor, war, and neighborhood violence challenge this right. However, children who have abundant resources and live in peace may not be receiving the full benefits of play. Today many children are being raised in a hurried and pressure-filled lifestyle and they are not benefiting from play. Child advocates must lobby for circumstances that give each child the opportunity to reap the benefits that are associated with play.

The author is employed by Owensboro Community and Technical College (OCTC) and teaches future preschool and kindergarten teachers to coordinate the early childhood education program. In 2015, she opened a preschool and offered all-day care for her students, also called wraparound care. With her extensive background in early education, it was a natural progression to be curious about how children learn and to ponder whether play is really an important part of the daily schedule in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. As the author developed her study, she found out that she desired to know early educators' thoughts and how they constructed the learning

experiences in their classrooms. As she read the literature, it became clear that she had developed her own biases and beliefs about early learning and play. General observation would lead one to look at play without much thought to the significance of what really happens during play, when in actuality there are many complex issues to play, including but not limited to that which the institution expects of the teacher and the decisions the teacher makes in relation to his/her classroom. In addition, pressures and barriers between theory and practice present in institutions have an effect on the way in which play is presented in the classroom.

Similar to the exploration of play, the author holds the same curious exploratory philosophy in research. The theory of constructivism is based on observation and scientific study attempting to reveal how people learn. Constructivism tells us that individuals formulate their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. In order to do this, one must ask questions, explore, and assess that which is known. In the preschool and kindergarten classroom, the constructivist view of learning can point toward a number of different teaching strategies. How the application of these strategies applies to play and learning is very significant. This study is important to the author to understand the play perspectives of the teachers in her local school district.

According to Howard, Jenvey, and Hill (2006) and Russ and Schafer (2006), play and learning are dovetailed together for children, especially young children. The main activity for learning considered in this study is play and teacher beliefs regarding play in relation to instructional practices. Play as a method for teaching appears to be on the decline in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Learning happens naturally as children

play; it occurs with no effort and appears seamless (Howard et al., 2006; Miller & Almon, 2009).

Children learn through the context of their play. Min and Lee (2006) stated that play is an important part of the culture and lives of children. Preschool and kindergarten teachers have the opportunity to use play to direct learning and to provide meaningful experiences. Connecting play to learning is a bridge that is examined in this study.

Rationale

With mandatory preschool in the near future of the public school system, it is imperative that educators and administrators realize the impact of play in the preschool and kindergarten classroom on the success of kindergarten and the elementary grades. In today's academic world, high scores are expected on testing, assessments, and achievement of preschool children. Scores are scrutinized and methods are put in place to increase the scores of the youngest students. The recent belief has been that the only way learning can occur is through worksheets or abstract, rote learning. Preschool children should not be expected to sit at their desks for long periods of the day. Up-to-date research has revealed that, even with older students, classroom engagement helps them retain more of what they have learned. When preschool children play, they expand their vocabulary, their ability to interact socially, and their cognitive processes. In addition, incorporating play into the daily schedule of a preschool classroom encourages children to want to attend preschool and, in turn, they become lifelong learners.

Educators' beliefs concerning the importance of play according to developmentally appropriate practices, as well as the decline in play in general in preschool and kindergarten classrooms, has been expounded upon and documented in the

literature (Ashiabi, 2007; Erwin & Delair, 2004; Miller & Almon, 2009). It would seem a natural progression to say that early educators' postulation and perceptions impact their teaching styles (Ashiabi, 2007; Erwin & Delair, 2004). It is indispensable to know whether and how early educators' beliefs about play as a developmentally appropriate practice are carried out in their classrooms.

Early educators are trained to design their classrooms around the needs of the child. The children are the center of the design; they are allowed to make choices through activities and materials provided by the teacher. The activities are taught in small groups or to individual children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Wien, 1996). It is important to understand the early educators' beliefs/perspectives concerning play in their classrooms in order to ensure that our youngest students in school are afforded the most appropriate instructional designs, strategies, and opportunities to learn.

The author's goal is to validate the value of play as it applies not only to the educational success of preschool children, but also to their overall cognitive development. Play enhances the development of a preschool child socially, cognitively, and physically. The need to evolve and to change is always present, even in adulthood.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study.

1. What are early educators' beliefs/perspectives on play as a developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms and what factors influence those beliefs?

2. In what ways is play implemented in the classroom?

3. What do early educators believe about the role of the adult in play?

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4. What, if any, are the barriers to play as a developmentally appropriate practice in early educators' classrooms?

5. What supports would enable early educators to implement play more fully as a developmentally appropriate practice?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined.

Early Educator: This is a teacher of three-, four- or five-year-old children.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is an instructional practice that is grounded in research that promotes and nurtures the optimal educational development of young children, as designed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): NAEYC is the professional organization of early childhood educators and early childhood special/exceptional educators.

Push-down Academics: Push-down academics occurs when the curricular expectations of older grade levels are brought down to younger children.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study is organized in the following manner: Chapter II is a review of the literature that investigates the nature of play in child development, play in preschool and kindergarten classrooms, studies concerning teacher beliefs, and perspective about play. Informed consent is discussed in Chapter III, as well as the research design, participants, and the interview process as the data collection instrument.

Chapter IV divulges the findings of the study, and Chapter V discusses the limitations of the study and the findings and implications for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Play Defined

There was a time when "play was king and early childhood was its domain" (Paley, 2004, p. 4). In 1816, Fred Froebel (UNICEF, 2013) created the concept of kindergarten, which means "child's garden." The kindergarten and preschool teachers of today struggle with implementing play in their classrooms. Often teachers use playtime as a reward for good behavior. Due to the belief that it would help children learn more, early childhood education began moving away from play in the 1930s and moving toward teacher-directed activities. In the 1980s and 1990s, academics were added to early childhood classrooms and, as a direct result, playtime was limited (UNICEF, 2003).

The American Academy of Pediatrics, along with Kenneth Ginsburg (2007), published a document in which play was defined. The document stressed the importance of play in relation to children and their families. Ginsburg asserted that play is imperative to a child's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2016) acknowledged that play is a right for every child (Ginsburg). Play has been a concern for the last several decades. The International Play Association was formed in 1961 to ensure a child's right to play (Wenner, 2009).

According to Ginsburg (2007), the interactions and engagement that a child experiences during daily activities is play. It encourages bonding first with family members, then with friends. When a child experiences play with an adult taking the lead, the child expands his/her play skills. Child-directed play enhances the ability to develop a sense of self, explore personal interests, and develop leadership skills. Play also

contributes to healthy brain development, and gives a child the opportunity for creativity and the ability to use their imaginations, and to assume social roles, all of which prepare children for their futures (Ginsburg, 2007). The literature has extensively documented that children learn and develop through play (Briggs & Hansen, 2012; Dewey, 1910, 1916; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009; Howard, 2010a, 2010b; Johnson & Dinger, 2012; Lillemyr, 2009; Moyles, 1989; Myck-Wayne, 2010; Oliver & Klugman, 2002; Piaget, 1962; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Samuelsson & Johansson, 2006).

Play helps children begin to understand their culture, self-regulation, and their place in society by giving them the opportunity to practice (Nicolopoulou, 2010). Play gives a child to opportunity to see the world through friends' eyes. They begin to understand others' perspectives and differences. Through modeling and interaction, children realize their role in society. Ultimately, play helps them become contributing members of society and part of the societal structure (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003).

Play in the Preschool Classroom

The central assertion woven throughout this study is the importance of play within the scope of childhood. Vygotsky, Piaget, Montessori, Dewey, and Froebel are several of the prominent pioneers who have laid the cornerstone for early childhood education. Individuals are influenced today by the investigations that these prominent researchers completed. Although their approaches vary, they share the belief that children learn through active participation and that meaningful learning occurs mainly during play (Bennett, Wood, & Rogers, 1997; Elkind, 1993; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Wood & Attfield, 2005).

Throughout the 20th century, many studies have been conducted that delve into different aspects of play in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. The studies have confirmed that play is an integral part of encouraging children to become lifelong learners (Parten, 1932; Rubin, Maioni, & Hornung, 1976; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990). The author was curious and hopeful to find studies that have focused on play specifically in preschool and kindergarten classrooms.

Hierarchy of Play Skills

Play has been studied extensively since the 1800s, beginning with Mildren Parten in 1929 when she wrote her dissertation about the stages of play. Parten was a pioneer with her observations of play. In 1932, Parten developed six stages of play that she observed in preschool children which are recognized and used by educators today: unoccupied play in which the child is not engaged in any activity; solitary play that occurs when a child plays alone; onlooker play when a child observes play but does not participate; parallel play when a child plays beside another but does not engage with the child; associative play that occurs when there is verbal interaction but no organization of the play; and cooperative play when children each take active roles during play (Rubin, et al., 1976).

Play and Peer Interaction, Social Competence, and Links to Pre-academic Skills

When children are academically ready for school because they were given the opportunity to play, it is evident that play is essential. Spontaneous play is important, natural, and healthy in their lives. Children simply learn better through play, as it is a natural way to explore. It enhances a child's life emotionally, physically, and cognitively

and develops their language and literary skills (Ginsburg, 2007; Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). Play, therefore, is an important vehicle that promotes school readiness.

The Loss of Play and Differences in Teachers' Beliefs

In 1965 U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a "war on poverty." As a result, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was signed into law. The Title I program was established to provide funds for school districts with a large population of lower socioeconomic students. The Head Start Preschool Program is a direct result of Title I and Johnson's war on poverty. Head Start is an effective national program that targets lower income children. To be accepted into the program, a child must live in a low-income environment, have a disability, or have second language learning needs. As a result of the enrollment requirements, many children fall through the cracks and do not qualify (Matthews, 2014). Universal pre-K programs have the ability to catch those children. In the six states that have these programs, they are available to all preschool children at the discretion of the school districts.

Studies have been conducted regarding the effectiveness of preschool. Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, and Dawson (2005) focused on the universal pre-K program in Tulsa, Oklahoma, during the 2002-2003 school year. "Using a quasi-experimental regression-discontinuity design that reduces the threat of selection bias, we estimated the overall effect of exposure to pre-K for children varying in race, ethnicity and income and for children in full-day and half-day programs" (p. 872). Research on pre-K programs has grown and is encouraging, but certainly not incontrovertible. Cognitive, language, or social development was found to be positively impacted during a study that was conducted in 13 states focusing on state-funded preschools (Gormley et al., 2005). In

Georgia, a study focusing on pre-K lower-income students found that the children began preschool below the national norm on letter and word recognition, but finished above the national norm. Another study was conducted in Michigan and the findings indicated that pre-K students scored higher in kindergarten in the areas of language, literacy, math, music, and social relations compared to those who did not attend preschool (Gormley et al., 2005). Cognitive and language domains were found to be higher in Black and Hispanic pre-K children when a locally developed test was administered in Oklahoma (Gormley et al., 2005). However, the White pre-K children did not benefit. Because of the findings of previous studies, the authors "examined differential pre-K effect by family income and racial-ethnic group of the children and by their enrollment in half- or- full day programs" (Gormley et al., 2005, p. 873).

Many studies with mixed results have been completed on the developmental consequences of preschool. One of the more interesting long-term studies, the Perry Preschool Study, was conducted in Ypsilanti, Michigan, between 1962 and 1967 (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2005). A total of 123 children between the ages of 3 and 4 born into poverty and considered high risk for failing in school were targeted. The children were followed until the age of 40. Studies such as the Perry Preschool Study have documented positive effects of early learning.

Although the Perry Preschool Study (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2005) showed that the preschool children of more than 40 years ago generally are more successful than those who did not attend preschool at the time of the study, the fact remains that, in general, findings in studies about pre-K programs continue to be controversial. Most findings have reported that the children who benefit most from

preschool programs are those in lower-income environments. Another variable is that pre-K programs operate on their own timeframe, which ranges from 2.5 hours to 10 hours per day. Very few states require college degrees or certification for pre-K teachers in daycares; some require only the Child Development Certificate. It is harder to obtain good data with all the variations allowed in pre-K classrooms.

Many studies have shown that the sooner a child begins learning, the better he or she performs down the road. President Obama stated:

> (Tonight) I propose working with states to make high-quality preschool available to every child in America. Every dollar we invest in high-quality early education can serve more than seven dollars later on - by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, even reducing violent crime. So let's do what works, and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind. Let's give our kids that chance. (Galinsky, 2013, p. 14)

If one is to take seriously this statement, research must be completed to ensure the accountability of programs. Effective leaders in early childhood are in place due to a state licensure requirement that each director meets the qualifications to become a preschool director. The only significant change in the leadership of private preschools is that administrators are now required to obtain the preschool Director's Credential.

An education clause is included in every state constitution. This clause requires legislators to author and to perpetuate a system of free, public schools, and thereby inoculate a corresponding right to a free public education. The clauses themselves do not answer the questions of whether a child has a right to preschool access. Approximately 20 states are attempting to guarantee schools the funding required to provide these

opportunities. This legal argument in four states rests upon two basic theories: (1) Preschool is an important component of an adequate education, and (2) equal educational opportunity requires offering preschool to all children. Many states have suggested education begins at kindergarten. However, Wisconsin provides that public education is free to all children between the ages of 4 and 20 (Ryan, 2006).

Ryan (2006) saw public preschool as a major issue in education policy law. Forty states embrace a well-established Head Start program, and an equal split exists of 25% of preschool students attending private versus public preschool. This indicates that basically 50% of preschool children are omitted. Low income and less education appear to be factors with the lack of attendance:

> Preschool has both short term benefits such as increased readiness for kindergarten and first grade, and long term benefits, such as decreased placements in special education and decreased grade retention. It can also improve the chances of high school graduation and college attendance and can improve future employment opportunities. (Ryan, 2006, p. 69)

Understanding the construct of leadership and its vast theoretical concepts and framework is imperative. In high performing early childhood programs, the administration must set a clear vision, and the curriculum and pedagogy must be shared by everyone in the early childhood setting. As such, state officials' decisions about whether and how to fund preschool education reflect this internal division, with the size of the Head Start community playing an influential role. The larger the federally-funded Head Start program, the smaller the need for private and public preschools. Therefore, it

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is very possible for high performing preschools to get lost in the shuffle of government bureaucracy (Karch, 2010).

Cheng (2012) completed a study to show the relationship between early childhood teachers' conceptualization of play and their practice. The present paper attempts to explore the issue through early childhood teachers' conceptualization of "learning and teaching through play" (Cheng, 2012, p. 65) with the aim of understanding the problem and shedding light on better ways to prepare teachers in this sector. Cheng listed the defining questions in this study: What is the conception of teaching through play as understood by pre-service student teachers? How does the conception of teaching through play develop with the experience student teachers receive in their courses in teacher education programs? Lesson plans, assignments, and journal entries from field experience were used to understand the assumed knowledge of the informants, who were asked to reflect on their own school observations. They made a video diary of sorts highlighting not only their practice with the children, but also their personal history. Also, they were required to observe children at play in a preschool classroom and record their reflections and experiences. Play-based pedagogy was discussed to assist them in conceptualizing their personal play-based pedagogy. Data were collected at the beginning of the term and again at the end. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Once the data were analyzed and coded, the researcher was able to examine the data and discover different features and themes. Two individuals participated in the study, both about 20 years of age. They were chosen by their senior teachers because they saw promise in the students.

The first participant, Anna, had a very negative connotation about teachers. Her past experiences involved being rebuked by them and her view was that they are very

powerful. Anna attempted to be playful when she was instructing a preschool child to draw the letter "b." She said that a "b" had a big tummy. Anna had a hard time describing the meaning of learning through play. She finally decided that children could learn in a group activity that involved play, although learning was limited because the interaction between teacher and child also was very limited. Anna was surprised when she allowed children to choose their own activities for play. She thought real play happened only if the children were happy and the discipline was good. During Anna's first activity with the children, she considered herself a failure; in her opinion the children were losing interest. With her second activity she sought advice from her teacher before she completed it. Anna felt she was more successful with her second activity. After the first year of preschool education courses, Anna was discouraged to the point that she left the preschool track of her education and enrolled in primary education classes.

The second participant in Cheng's study (2012), Becky also was in her first year of classes and around 20 years old. As a teenager Becky was required to babysit to help support her family, and she was quick to point out that she did not have an affinity for young children. She enrolled in the preschool track only because she was not admitted to the primary track of education. Becky was very open to the concept of learning through play. Her journal reflected the following entry:

> …learning has to be a process of meaning construction by the learner themselves. In order to change the situation of the didactic learning, we have to change the didactic teaching mode of the teachers. The way to realize it is through "play." In play, children can be scaffolded. (As cited in Cheng, 2012, p. 76)

Becky considered the choices of play that were given to the children to be positive. However, she struggled with the concept of play and learning and still viewed it as a reward for good behavior. When Becky completed her first activity with the preschool classroom, she also considered herself a failure because the room was quite chaotic. Becky felt the children were messy and naughty. During her second activity, the children were sitting down and the room was much more orderly, so she surmised that the activity was a success. Becky continued to struggle with the idea of play and learning. She oscillated her reframing on "play" and reconciled to the traditional practice after encountering the reality. The year of study proved to be successful in helping Becky to be more articulate and responsive. In relation to augmentation of her conception of "play," she drifted from being an upholder of "learning through play" to an emulator by the year's end.

Cheng (2012) found a need to amalgamate research with teacher education. Thus, to address the matter of the utilization of play, learning and teaching through play should be presented to the student teachers in an issue-based approach in order to stop the perpetuation of the quagmire. However, the study was limited. The control group consisted of two first-year teacher education students chosen by the teachers as likely to succeed or high achievers. The study was further limited by the background of the two participants. Furthermore, bias played a part in the journal entries due to their backgrounds.

Kochanska, Kim, Boldt, and Nordling (2013) further explored learning through play in relation to Cheng's (2012) findings. The purpose of the study was to determine whether play as usual or child-orientated play had an effect on parental control and child

competence. The objective of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a play-based

intervention to introduce a new measure of maternal engagement, and to examine

ecological factors that predict maternal engagement. The research by Kochanska et al.

(2013) involved 102 two-parent families taken from a community sample.

Advertisements of the play study were extensively publicized in eastern Iowa. The study

examined the effectiveness of play-based intervention, reflected on the play initiated by

the mother, and examined the effect of socioeconomic status on play. The cooperation

between the children and their mothers was measured in the laboratory before and after

the play sessions. A pretest and a posttest occurred six months later.

Participants included in the Kochanska et al. (2013) study were from very diverse

places, ranging from a college town, a small town, and rural areas. Eight play sessions

were chosen by random selection. The common factor was low-income families. Usual

playgroups and mothers who played daily with their children were followed for 10

weeks. The mothers' behavior was coded and the mothers kept diaries. The behaviors of

the children were coded as committed compliance and noncompliance. This was repeated

six months after the initial study. Overview of the design of the study is as follows: A

pretest was first conducted in a laboratory, and each session lasted three hours. The

children were assigned randomly to a child-oriented playgroup. After the pretest and the

group assignment, the mothers had training sessions during which they were taught play

techniques drawn from "Child's Game" Kochanska et al. (2013). Upon completion of

training, the play session began. During the mother-initiated sessions, the mothers used

the techniques they had been taught to encourage the children to engage in play. During

the play-as-usual sessions there was no structure or special engagement by the mothers. A total of 102 families participated in the study.

Kochanska et al. (2013) offered a glimpse into the power of play in reference to one-on-one and mother-to-child play. Three groups of children were observed ranging in age from 36 to 43 months. From the 10-week study, information was gleaned that indicated encouraging play can be a powerful factor in promoting social and emotional development in low-income families. In each play group, the uninterrupted sessions resulted in positive effects on the child-mother socio-emotional competence. A very modest effect was noted favoring the child-oriented play group. It was obvious from the study that, when comparing the play-as-usual group or one-to-one play group to the group of children who participated in the mother-to-child play, no significant difference was seen.

The Kochanska et al. (2013) study was limited to a 10-week period and focused on low-income families. It focused only on low socioeconomic families in which there was a high possibility that the family interaction was lower because of the daily struggle to survive. During the study the mothers were required to keep a diary; however, they may not have been willing or able to do so accurately. The training sessions the mothers were required to attend were vital to the study's success and were three hours in length. Kochanska et al. found that more time and money should have been devoted to the sessions. Another limitation of the study was that in low-income families where the daily stressors inhibited bonding, the one-on-one daily interaction with a mother likely would have enhanced the quality of the overall attachment bond in any study of this nature.

Child-oriented play may be a promising, effective, and inexpensive means of promoting preschool children's positive development.

Cheng (2012) completed a study based on pre-service teachers' conceptualization of play. The study was designed to give the reader insight into the importance of play in a preschool classroom and the effect of a teacher on the implementation of whether play is a part of the learning process in the classroom. In comparison, Kochanska et al. (2013) designed research to focus on the benefit of play in the home. The Kochanska et al. study focused on gathering information from families in which play directed by mothers or spontaneous play was most effective.

In comparison to Cheng's (2012) participants, the sample in the Kochanska et al. (2013) study was diverse and larger. Cheng used two informants, while 102 families were represented in the study completed by Kochanska et al. The methods utilized by Cheng were in a school setting and very closely monitored, with some hands-on interaction by the teachers conducting the study, while that of Kochanska et al. was in a home or park setting and with no intervention by professionals. Play with mothers was allowed to simply occur as usual, or with the mothers initiating the play and making observations. Kochanska et al. focused on the family and play, and Cheng focused on the formal setting of school and play. Each study required the use of diaries by either the mothers or teachers. Also, data were collected in each and coded in order to give accurate results.

Cheng (2012) found that the pre-service teachers brought some biases into the study based on past experiences. This was reflected in the journals the teachers were required to keep. In the study conducted by Kochanska et al. (2013), mothers were sometimes distracted by the events of their daily lives, which also were reflected in their

diaries. Therefore, when examining the results for each study, these factors were taken into consideration. Cheng found a need to add research concerning the effectiveness of play to the coursework required during the teacher education program. Kochanska et al. found that both mother-directed play and play left to develop on its own are beneficial to children, with significant difference between the two groups.

Two pre-service teachers were involved in the study conducted by Cheng (2012), which limits applicability to this study. The research conducted by Kochanska et al. (2013) involved 102 families and three different groups of children, making the findings easier to apply to a broader base of people; however, the group was limited to low-income families. Both groups required participants to keep a daily journal or diary, which may not have been accurate and complete. Many factors determined the ability to keep accurate daily logs: education, time constraints, distractions, and general health.

Cheng (2012) was clear that preschool play is a cornerstone of success for future endeavors of adults. Cheng's research into pre-service teachers' attitudes about play is a key component to giving children the opportunity to play. Cheng did not make any recommendations for future studies. The research by Kochanska et al. (2013) provides a glimpse into the importance of play in a family structure. Kochanska et al. suggested it would be reasonable to conduct future studies with families of other socioeconomic levels. The diversity of these two studies, one from the perspective of preschool teachers and the other from the perspective of preschool parents, suggest that play is important to the development of children and is a very effective way to help them begin to understand the complex society in which they live. Play enhances a preschool child's social,

cognitive, and physical development. The need to evolve and to change is always present, even in adulthood.

Summary

The American Academy of Pediatrics and child theorists have emphasized the importance of play in the lives of children. The beliefs, perceptions, and dispositions of teachers have a direct influence on the method with which play is delivered in their personal classroom. The literature has included a definite vein of proof of the many benefits of play threaded throughout. According to the research, play is a large part of the preparation for school and benefits a child's development. A number of studies over the last several decades have examined the benefit of play in the social-emotional, physical, and cognitive development of children. A few have begun to scrutinize the loss of play.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

"There are limits to what the rationalizing knowledge epitomized by statistics can do. No matter how precise, quantification cannot inspire action, especially in a society whose bonds are forged by sympathy, not mere calculation." (Poovey, 1995, p. 84)

In addition to ethics, the research design, instrument, participants, and data are discussed in this chapter.

The role of a teacher is much more than numbers and data. The relationships formed during the teaching and learning process are what define teaching. The diadem or crown jewel that occurs during the process is the mutual knowledge gleaned during the process (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). Ayers (1993) and Noddings (1997) supported the position that learning and teaching through relational processes encourages lifelong learning and productivity in citizens.

This author chose to use a qualitative approach to conduct this research because the relational aspect of teaching and learning appealed to her, and the qualitative design gave her the opportunity to build relationships with the participants. The qualitative research method allowed an open, honest conversation with the study participants more specifically for the research educators. Giving the educators the opportunity to explain their beliefs and perspectives was of the utmost importance. According to Smith (1997), as cited in Genishi, Ryan, Blaise, and Yarnall (2001), the interview with the participants presented the opportunity to understand the instructional methods of the educators concerning play as well.

As interviews were conducted, deep, interesting, informative conversations occurred between the researcher and the educators. The educators were very open about

their reflections on play and how play operates in their personal classroom. Using the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to encourage the educators to examine and to reflect on their classroom experiences with play. Much consideration was given to the type of research that would produce the highest quality of information. The idea for the study grew out of Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states, "Children have the right and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities" (UNICEF, 2013). As the coordinator for an early childhood education program, the author has had the opportunity to visit many classrooms and observe teachers in many different settings, including private, public, and faith-based preschools. As she visited the classrooms, she became very aware of play and how it was implemented in the various classrooms. She became curious about the level of understanding of the preschool and kindergarten educators regarding the significance of play. Inquisitiveness about the educators' stance on play in their personal classrooms overtook the author and invoked several research questions.

Research Questions

1. What are early educators' beliefs/perspectives on play as a developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms and what factors influence those beliefs?

2. In what ways is play implemented in the classroom?

3. What do early educators believe about the role of the adult in play?

4. What, if any, are the barriers to play as a developmentally appropriate practice in early educators' classrooms?

5. What supports would enable early educators to implement play more fully as a developmentally appropriate practice?

Research Design

Theorist Jerome Bruner (1966, 1986, 1990, 1996) asserted that in order to effectively use the constructionist point of view in an interview setting, one must provide meaning and organization to allow the interviewee to go beyond the information given (Takaya, 2008). It seemed logical to use a qualitative approach for this study and to focus on an interview process because it complemented the purpose of the study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003). The author's goal for choosing an interview process was to give preschool and kindergarten teachers a voice to tell their stories. It is important for early childhood education teachers to reflect on their practices and to acknowledge their strengths and limitations within the role of play in their classrooms.

Constructivism was the theory used to encircle this study. The interaction of the physical world and the mind is what constructs the philosophical perspective of constructivism (Paul, 2005). Lincoln (as cited in Paul, 2005) stated that constructivism is analytical in nature in that it focuses on meaning-making activities of thinking people. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1998), the researchers' role is to listen very carefully and with compassion to the participant "in order to grasp a deep understanding of the information that is being exchanged" (p. 316). This approach allows participants to express their beliefs in a climate of cooperation and affinity. Advocates of this overview believe that values permeate and are ever present throughout inquiry, and the researcher must be mindful and appreciative of the beliefs and values of individuals (Paul, 2005).

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) remarked that Briggs (1998) eloquently described and stressed the socially productive nature of qualitative inquiry and the pursuit of research to discover the way in which social experiences are generated and given meaning. To understand what a life means to the person living it, one must be able to observe the processes through which the person conceives and creates the life: its purpose and goals, dangers and desire, and fear and loves. What motivates a person, cognitively and emotionally, to retain and build on this or that experience out of all those that she or he participates in, while ignoring or forgetting others? What imbues these special experiences with meaning? How are motives created? The researcher argues that formative experiences and emotions strongly influence not only the shapes of motives, wishes, and fears, but also how they operate in everyday life (Briggs, 1998, p. 2).

The relevance of using a qualitative approach for this study was monumental. A key aspect of the study was understanding individual educators' interpretations of play and how the teachers encourage play in their classrooms. The diversity of social worlds of each educator influenced the meaning, interpretation, and sustainability of play in the program. The author intended to delve into the portrayal of play that was occurring in the classroom and to compare these types of play to what is expressed in policy. Through participants' definitive accounts and policy perceptions, the researcher examined intent, meaning, and thinking in regard to play. Participants' data revealed interpretive and subjective posture on play-based learning in preschool and kindergarten classrooms.

Qualitative research is not based on hard numbers; it is interpretive by nature and also extends to the researcher. The author possesses her own biases and biography, which have a tendency to shape interpretation of the research. It was a must that the author

acknowledged this and remained very conscious of it during research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Tracy, 2013). According to Denzin and Lincoln, "Any gaze is filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observation socially situated in the world of – and between – the observers and the observed" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 29). Considering this, the author attempted to be aware of personal biases and how observations and interactions are affected (Tracy, 2013).

Participants

The participants were 10 preschool and/or kindergarten educators who teach in a variety of locations. The author recruited the educators with purpose and chose public, private, and religious-based educators for the sample (Patton, 2002). The intent of the study was to establish a comprehensive understanding of a group of preschool and/or kindergarten teachers' understanding about play. Three of the participants completed their master's degrees, four have completed their bachelor's degrees, two have completed their associate's degrees, and one had not obtained any degree. Teachers were chosen based on their experience and credentials. Some of the educators have been successful grant writers and some were trainers. Lead teachers and teachers' assistants were included in the sample.

The author sent the 10 participants an invitation through the U.S. Postal Service; a brief description of the study was included in the invitation. If the candidates were willing to participate in the study, they were asked to respond via email or phone. All who were invited agreed to participate. Miles and Huberman (1994) indicated that small, purposeful sampling in qualitative research yields the best results.

As the coordinator of the early childhood education program at a community college, the author was in the unique position to recruit participants. She has many connections in the early childhood field in her community. She has had the opportunity to have conversations with her students and graduates in the field and is a friend, educator, and colleague. Table 1 outlines the educational background and teaching experience of the 10 female participants.

Table 1

Participants' Background and Experience

Background/Experience	Participant N
Highest Degree Earned	
Master's	3
Bachelor's	4
Associate's	2
No degree	1
Years teaching preschool and/or kindergarten	
7-10 years	6
4-6 years	3
2-4 years	1

The teachers invited to participate in this study are by definition proficient, expert, early childhood educators. They believe they use evidence-based methods in their classrooms. The educators have taken advantage of trainings and personally offered trainings. The group of educators remains current in the field by reading professional literature and being members of professional organizations. It was critical to interview

teachers who are confident in their proficiency and practice of early childhood education and who would feel comfortable sharing their beliefs and ideas about play as a developmentally appropriate practice.

Instrument

A conscientious review of the literature revealed one tool, "Teacher Beliefs and Practices Survey - 3-5 year olds," developed by Burts et al. (as cited in Kim, 2005) that was used to scrutinize the beliefs of kindergarten teachers. The survey was very focused on a variety of developmentally appropriate practices; however, questions concerning play were few and far between. This tool opened the discussion about play, yet it did not allow a deep discussion. Therefore, the educators were unable to express their beliefs about play. Other studies have been conducted on types of play in the classroom that occur in specific areas such as manipulatives, blocks, and housekeeping (Hanline, Milton, & Phelps, 2008; Heisner, 2005; Kaugars & Russ, 2009).

As the focus of this study was about preschool and kindergarten teachers' beliefs about play, the instrument was designed to capture their perspectives, and the educators needed to have a substantial amount of time to reflect and to think about their personal beliefs, practices, and biases concerning play in their classrooms. This could not be accomplished with a simple survey (Kim, 2005).

McMullen and Alat (2002) were very clear in informing their readers that investigating and reporting teachers' beliefs is a complicated procedure. They noted that some identifying factors influence how teachers' beliefs are put into practice, but there is much to learn. The educational background, including coursework and the level of education, was an important factor that impacts teachers' beliefs in their application of

developmentally appropriate practice, of which play is an important component

(McMullen & Alat, 2002). Teachers with higher levels of education with specific courses

in early childhood education implement more developmentally appropriate practices in

relation to play in their classrooms, in comparison to teachers with lower levels of

education (McMullen et al., 2006). In regard to the earlier approaches used to report

teacher beliefs, arguments can be made that closed question methods of capturing teacher

beliefs are overly simplified and may not meticulously reflect their true beliefs about the

practices that are evident in classrooms (Lee, 2006).

After considering the information and realizing there is no simple answer, the

author determined that a qualitative interview approach would be an appropriate method

to collect and to assimilate the information required for effective research. The potential

of a more open interview process existed during the semi-structured interviews, as well as

the possibility of the formation of a relationship between the researcher and the

participant (Patton, 2002). The open interview encouraged the participant to respond fully

within the context of the interview (Weiss, 1994). The interview process when used as a

central tool enhanced the exchange of ideas during information gathering (Cohen et al.,

2003). The chosen interview process enhanced the opportunity to capture the teachers'

beliefs about play. The open-ended questions allowed each participant to expound on

personal beliefs about play and the way in which play was carried out in the classroom.

The interview is defined as a conversation between researcher and participant that

attempts to gather data through communication (Cohen et al., 2003). The interview

allows the researcher a window into the viewpoint of the participants and how the

participants clarify their perceptions (Weiss, 1994). The interview process for this study

provided the teachers an opportunity to describe the factors that influence their beliefs and how those beliefs affect their relationships and their work with children. During the interview, the researcher's role is to mentor the participant through the process with careful attention to the research topic. It is the researcher's responsibility to provide prompts for amplification if needed and to ensure that the responses truly belong to the participant (Weiss, 1994).

Interview Questions

Five research and interview questions emerged as the author read the literature, and the questions were the driving strength of the study. The researcher's goal was to learn about preschool and kindergarten teachers' beliefs regarding play as an appropriate practice in their classroom. The research and the interview questions should be challenging without being aggressive. The questions for this study were constructed to promote conversation and the exchange of ideas so the participants would feel relaxed and would discuss their beliefs about play. They also were written to evoke rich, detailed feedback from the teachers.

The interview questions were carefully composed from a synthesis of the literature. The interview instrument can be found in Appendix C**.** The documented loss of play (Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, & Gryfe, 2008; Miller & Almon, 2009); play in the preschool classroom (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Hanline et al., 2008); the adult role in play (Ashiabi 2007; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011); and teachers' beliefs about play (Kim, 2005; McMullen & Alat, 2002) are included in this document.

A direct correlation exists between the beliefs of teachers and their actual practice of play in a classroom. The educators' beliefs impact their practice of play; therefore, it

was imperative that questions about the educators' beliefs be developed (McMullen & Alat, 2002; Smith, 1997, as cited in Genishi et al., 2001). The central focus of the study was to research early childhood educators' positions on play. Four of the 13 interview questions (questions 3, 5, 6 and 10) precisely addressed the participants' beliefs about play as a developmentally appropriate practice. It was very important to have an understanding of the level of formal or informal education of the participants and the effect on their position on play in their classrooms. Therefore, questions 1, 2, and 4 were developed.

The author's goal was to learn the method early childhood educators apply to their personal beliefs about play in their classrooms. Many studies have addressed play in early childhood classrooms through observations and/or teacher surveys (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Coolahan, Fantuzzo, Mendez, & McDermott, 2000; Rubin et al., 1976; Smilansky, 1968). Barton and Worlery (2010) focused on singular aspects of play. Research Question 2 was designed to investigate how play is carried out in the classrooms. It is directly parallel with interview questions 7, 8, 9, and 11.

The purpose of Research Question 3 and interview question 10 was to delve into early childhood educators' beliefs relative to the role of the adult during play and its interaction in the classroom. The questions were composed after a review of the literature (Ashiabi, 2007; NAEYC, 2009; Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2010).

Research Questions 4 and 5 are associated with questions 12 and 13. The author desired to determine whether the participants experienced the issues surrounding play that were operant in the literature (Fisher et al., 2008; Ginsburg, 2007; Miller & Almon,

2009). The nugget of truth that was under discovery was to learn the supports the

educators needed to implement play. The interviews were semi-structured. The process

involved 13 open-ended questions that granted the participants time to think reflectively

with minimal risk of preconceived assumptions on the part of the researcher. Open-ended

questions also provided opportunity for amplification of a belief or perspective in

response to the question (Cohen et al., 2003). The individuality of each participant's

perspective and beliefs was maintained by the open-ended nature of the questions. Table

2 lists the research questions and their corresponding interview questions.

Table 2

Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions*
1. What are early childhood Educators' beliefs/perspectives on play as a developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms and what factors influence those beliefs?	1-6
2. In what ways is play implemented in the classroom?	7-9, 11
3. What do early childhood educators believe about the role of the adult in play?	10
4. What, if any, are the barriers to play as a developmentally appropriate practice in early educators' classrooms?	12
5. What supports would enable early educators to implement play more fully as a developmentally appropriate practice?	13

*See Appendix C.

The author asked a National Board certified early childhood educator to assess the

questions that were intended as part of the interview and to provide feedback as to their

appropriateness to the study and the participants. After the interview protocol was in

place, the author was concerned about the clarity and understanding of each question.

Therefore, once again she asked the same individual to review the questions. Her goal was open-ended questions that were thought provoking without being intimidating or confusing. Open-ended questions have the tendency to allow interviewees to answer at their own pace without feeling pressured or hurried. As the conversations continued with the educator, the author was advised to use caution with academic terms, which could be intimidating for participants. She also agreed that the interview questions lined up with the research questions. The interview setting also was discussed, with an emphasis on the comfort of the room for easy conversation. Advice was given as to the conversation style and encouraging the participants to respond in their own personal style (M. Turley, personal communication, December 1, 2016).

Interview Process

The researcher secured a small Sony personal recorder to use during the interviews. The recorder is very small and, therefore, unobtrusive when used in a public place. Each interview was on an individual cassette and labeled. Once the recording was completed, the cassette and all information connected to that particular interview was coded to maintain the confidentiality of each participant. The author personally transcribed each interview in her private office where the recording could not be overheard. The utmost care was taken during every step of the interview process to assure the anonymity of the participants.

Consideration was given during this process as to analysis of the data once it was generated. The Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) method of noticing, collecting, and thinking, an approach designed by John V. Seidel (1998), guided the author's thoughts on her approach to the research data. The comparison that Seidel made to a jigsaw puzzle

was very accurate. The process involved reading the interviews several times, coding them as well as examining the interview data, and examining them until a pattern and theme emerged.

Crabtree and Miller (1999) stated that the QDA method is successful if the analyst considers a few guidelines before beginning the data analysis:

- Know yourself, your biases, and preconceptions.

- Know your question.

- Seek creative abundance.

- Consult others and keep looking for alternative interpretations.

- Be flexible.

- Exhaust the data.

- Try to account for all the data in the texts, then publicly acknowledge the unexplained and remember the next principle.

- Celebrate anomalies.

- They are the windows to insight.

- Get critical feedback.

- The solo analyst is a great danger to self and others.

- Be explicit.

- Share the details with yourself, your team members, and your audiences. (pp. 142-143)

Informed Consent

In order to establish trust between the researcher and the participant, the author made every effort to spend time with the participants. The goal was to put them at ease and to be certain the information they shared was accurate (Seidman, Sullivan, & Schatzkamer, 1983). Rather than the participants serving as the author's research subjects, she recruited them as partners in the process. She informed them of all details concerning the study, including how she determined the research subject. She explained the way in which the interview would be conducted, transcribed, and coded. All participants were presented with a copy of the informed consent document, the research questions, and the interview questions. Informed consent was obtained and written consent was secured before the interviews began (See Appendix B).

The Interviews

The semi-structured interviews consisted of a named set of open-ended questions with the purpose of obtaining descriptive, detailed, and elaborate responses on perceptions, interpretations, and practices of play-based learning and policy. The participants were asked to respond to the questions in a neutral setting of their choice. Some chose their homes, some coffee shops, and others chose the author's office or break room. All interviews were conducted one-on-one and recorded; the researcher also took notes to ensure accuracy. The recordings were later transcribed and then reviewed by participants for member checking. The interview tapes, along with the hard copies of the interviews, were secured in a locked filing cabinet. Additionally, the transcription of the interviews and the recordings were stored on a password-protected personal computer.

During the interviews, the author was an attentive listener and continually checked the appropriateness of the questions during the process. Permission was granted to record before the device was turned on. The author ensured that participants were comfortable with the questions and that their responses would be as truthful and open as possible (Diefenbach, 2009; Seidman et al., 1983).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a method in which raw data are systemized to obtain useful information. There are a variety of ways to approach data analysis. It is important to pay attention when it is collected, and to seriously consider the data and the conclusions. Included in the analysis of the data are interpretation, summary, and integration (Weiss, 1994).

This study used a small sample size. According to Creswell (2007), a hybrid approach that uses a computer program and a physical approach is appropriate for a smaller study. This study used interviews, the physical approach, after which they were transcribed and kept on a computer. The data were categorized by interview question and then analyzed using patterns, themes, and content analysis to establish persistent themes, direct interpretation, and triangulation. An understanding of the data was attained through the recognition of patterns and themes, delving into teachers' beliefs and perspectives, and through the emergence of identified factors that influenced their beliefs. Each interview was individually considered and then examined as part of a whole (Cohen et al., 2003; Patton, 2002). When the interviews were complete, the first step was to transcribe. After the transcripts were completed, they were sent to each participant to

confirm the accuracy of the notes. Corrections were made as needed. A comparison was made between notes, interviews, and transcriptions to discover themes and patterns.

After the data were considered, all information was included in a single document for ease of manipulation. The next step was to group all responses according to the questions in another document, which allowed the researcher to analyze and group similar responses, experiences, and beliefs (Patton, 2002). The author coded each with a number and used the codes for each participant, as well as including any important notes. The author also searched for patterns, differences, and similarities in the responses. From this process, the narrative began to form. The themes that emerged included play schemas or scenarios, change in play during the school year, the way in which curriculum and toys impact play, and how professional development affects play.

Reliability

According to Cohen et al. (2003), the qualitative approach is characterized as the fit between that which the researcher gathers and reality, as well as the dependability of the data. With this design, participants had the opportunity to use their own words to describe their personal practices in their classroom. The educators also had the opportunity to describe in detail their personal beliefs. In this study, the notes, interviews, and documents that were used for compiling the information were checked and contrasted by the researcher and the participants for dependability (Golafshani, 2003). The semi-structured interview questions allowed for some uniformity in response that supported the coding and categorization as these materialized.

Validity

Every effort was made to minimize bias through the establishment of rapport between researcher and participant, practiced inquiry techniques, consistent coding, and careful recording of the data (Cohen et al., 2003). With the small sample, it was not feasible to generalize the data; however, some evidence is viable to share concerning play in early childhood classrooms. Investigator triangulation was used to confirm authenticity and plausibility, which are essential factors that support truthfulness in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003).

Ethics

A completed application was submitted to the Western Kentucky University Institutional Review Board, which included a description of the study, participant selection information, and copies of informed consent forms. IRB approval was granted. Every effort was made to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of each teacher. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were properly invited to the study and were afforded the opportunity to decline at any point. Every effort was made to curb the impact on their professional and personal lives by organizing the interviews at times that were agreeable to the participants in public places that were within easy access.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

The researcher's professional relationship with the participants as an instructor and coordinator for the early childhood education program at the local community college could be considered a limitation. However, in reality, the relationship appeared to enhance the openness and honesty displayed by participants during the interview process. Mutual respect was demonstrated, which opened the floor for open, deep conversations.

During the interviews the participants and the interviewer were able to commiserate, sharing many of the same experiences as early childhood educators in and out of the classroom. The dual role that the author has experienced encouraged the narrative (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

The relationship between the participants and the researcher is one of coequality and support. Each participant seemed very happy and eager to participate in the interview process and welcomed the opportunity to share their beliefs, practices, and methods of play in their classrooms. No evidence was seen relative to any pressure or manipulation to participate in the study. Every attempt was made to clarify that the author's role as a researcher did not impact her role as a professional with them at the present date or in the future. She reminded the teachers/participants that their interview and any corresponding conversations would be maintained in a private, locked office and/or on a password-protected computer. The author also assured them they would not be identified in the study.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

This chapter outlined the interview process, data analysis of the interview, reliability and validity, and ethics that guided the study. The chapter also explored in-depth the researcher's relationship with the participants. The chapter also discussed the research design and research questions and their relationship to the interview questions.

"Knowledge cannot judge itself. Knowledge must be judged by other knowledge, and therein lies the essence of wisdom" (Postman, 1999, p. 95).

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter reports the conclusions of the study according to each research question. The purpose of this study was to understand early childhood educators' perceptions and beliefs about play as a developmentally appropriate practice. Ten early childhood educators participated in this study. A semi-structured interview was used to obtain the findings that are presented in this chapter. Each participant was interviewed in the same manner. As the questions were open-ended, participants had the opportunity to elaborate on their responses to clarify answers as needed. This chapter's design reports the findings by elaborating on each question.

The following research questions guide this study.

1. What are early educators' beliefs/perspectives on play as a developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms and what factors influence those beliefs?

2. In what ways is play implemented in the classroom?

3. What do early educators believe about the role of the adult in play?

4. What, if any, are the barriers to play as a developmentally appropriate practice in early educators' classrooms?

5. What supports would enable early educators to implement play more fully as a developmentally appropriate practice?

Research Question 1: Early Educators' Beliefs and Influencing Factors

Six of the interview questions pertained to the first research question. (1) How do you define play? (2) What is your understanding of the different types of play? (3) In

what ways do you believe play influences/impacts a child's development and learning? (4) How have your own educational experiences influenced your beliefs about the role and implementation of play in your classroom? (5) What is your perception of the role of play in school readiness? (6) Is play as you perceive it an integral part of the daily classroom routine? As the participants were answering the interview questions, one led to the next, making the process very fluid.

As the analysis of the conversation began, it was clear that throughout the narrative a theme was emerging. It was apparent that the responses could be grouped as themes within the interview questions as they related to Research Question 1. The participants' responses are italicized and identified with their assigned number at the end of each response.

Table 3 lists the participants' responses to Research Question 1, which incorporates interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

General Definitions of Play

In response to Interview Question 1 (How do you define play?), participants shared that, in their opinion, play is vital to young children and their development. The educators described or defined play as child-centered, child-directed, child-chosen, and intrinsically motivating. Six participants indicated that play is imperative to development. Two stated that play is imagination-reenacting life.

Table 3

Summary of Research Question 1: Participant Beliefs

Participant	General Definition of Play	Factors Influencing Beliefs (Questions 2 & 4)	Impact of play (Question 3)	Role of Play (Questions 5 & 6)
5		Education	Low play skills can result in slower social development	
4	Provision of material and opportunity to promote developmental appropriate skills through play	Working as a team with colleagues	Foundation for learning	Math skills are enhanced through play
6	Imperative to development	Professional learning communities	Important to social skills	
1	Innumerable definitions	Journal articles/personal research		Integrate play with a theme
10	Occurs through active exploration	Teaching experiences	Learning with meaning is a result of play	Provides opportunity for role play
8	Play is linked to learning	Professional development	Parents/educators need a deeper understanding of the significance of play	
2	Imagination-reenacting life			

One of the participants reflected on her observation of play in her classroom: "It was as if the child was trying to make sense of her world" (4). Another educator observed that "play is how children understand things" (6). "Play is fun and self-directed. Play is rehearsal for real life and kids are learning while they are playing. Play happens spontaneously" (1). "Play is an expression of a child's imagination" (10). Adjectives were free flowing as the educators were defining play. Active, fun, exciting, creative,

imaginative, social, participatory, motivating, and exploratory are a few adjectives that were used. Six of the participants recognized that little people learn through play:

I see play as a way for children to learn. Play can be directed; however, it is much

better when children are directing their own play. (10)

The educators may supply the materials, but we allow the children to assign the

characters and set the stage. (4)

Factors that Influence Beliefs about Play

Data collected from Interview Question 4 (How have your own educational

experiences influenced your beliefs about the role and implementation of play in your

classroom?) indicated that a variety of factors influenced an educator's position on play.

The factors included formal educational background, personal classroom experience, and

the interactions of the participants with other educators. Each also cited independent

readings and conferences as direct influences on their perception of play. Several of the

participants acknowledged that, through their readings and workshop attendance, they

realized they need more playtime in their classrooms.

One participant remarked, "I am always learning that there is so much more to

learn about play. Journals have helped me to understand that children given the

opportunity to play develop into lifelong learners" (3). This participant understood that

learning for herself and her students never ends. The more that she learns about play, the

more she encourages play in her classroom and, as a result, her students learn more.

Another participant was eager to talk about her own education and its role in her

understanding of play. She desired to create the caring learning community that she

experienced as a student.

A few of the participants identified NAEYC as having a direct influence on their personal beliefs about play. All participants concluded that play is developmentally appropriate, enhances learning, and is a best practice for early educators. One noted: "Regardless of personal belief we must look at best practices for children. Play is developmentally appropriate and should be part of the curriculum for preschool and kindergarten classrooms" (2).

Beliefs/Perceptions of the Influence/Impact of Play on Learning

To Interview Questions 2 and 3 (What is your understanding of the different types of play?; In what ways do you believe play influences/impacts a child's development and learning?), individually, each participant agreed that play impacts development. As a collective unit, their statements solidly embrace the belief that play has a momentous impact on learning. One comment was: **"**Play is everything. Pre-literacy and pre-math skills are developed through play. Play is so simple but it is everything. Play is the base that all education is built upon" (7). Five of the participants declared that play makes learning relevant because the child is intense and engaged in the active examination of his or her environment. Four stated that play affects development and learning by affording social interaction. Additionally, gross and fine motor skill-building opportunities are present during play. Finally, problem-solving opportunities allow children to work through ideas or thoughts they do not fully understand. Remarks included:

> Everything that occurs during the school day should be playful. Children learn through play. If I am not conscientious I can get consumed with getting my students ready for kindergarten with ABC's and 123's rather than making my environment ready for learning through play. (6)

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Play can be incorporated into the daily routine of a classroom. Play should be

integrated into every thematic unit to help lay the foundation of education. (8)

Each individual agreed that not only educators, but parents as well, need a basic

understanding of play, how it evolves, and the different stages of play. With the absence

of an understanding of play, expectations may not be realistic. One interviewee stated:

A child could be in the solitary play stage and not quite ready to move into the

next stage. With an understanding of the stages of play there shouldn't be any

concern. While stages are labeled, there are many different levels of development

that occur when moving from one stage to the next. (1)

Seven participants said that play is crucial because it is the infrastructure for all learning.

One comment was: "If there are gaps in play skills, then there is a good possibility that

gaps will be present in academic skills at a later date" (4).

Beliefs/Perceptions of the Role of Play in School Readiness/Integral to the

Classroom

In responding to Interview Questions 5 and 6 (What is your perception of the role

of play in school readiness?; Is play as you perceive it an integral part of the daily

classroom routine?), all participants disclosed that play is an essential aspect of school

readiness and an indispensable part of the daily classroom routine. Comments included:

Play should be the profound foundation for all of preschool because it helps to

develop children emotionally, academically, and socially for kindergarten. (2)

We have our classroom plan, but we leave room in the plan for the children to

lead us where their interests are. (10)

Three interviewees described that their plans have a great deal of flexibility for various activities and many choices for the students. One stated, "When I approach academic concepts like reading through play, it (play) just naturally happens" (5). Five teachers shared their concerns that social development can be stunted if children are never exposed to the concept of play through taking turns and sharing.

<div align="center">

Research Question 2: Implementation of Play

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Ways Play is Implemented in the Classroom

For Interview Questions 7-9 (How much time is devoted to play in your classroom?; How much is child initiated play? Adult initiated?; Describe the types of play you observe/facilitate/structure in your classroom?), as with the previous questions, the answers to the interview questions were very free flowing. The participants seemed to enjoy responding to the questions about their daily schedule. They told stories about their daily schedules, emphasizing the fact that they were flexible with the day-to-day operations of the classrooms.

The description that the educators gave concerning play throughout their day is illustrated in Table 4. Five participants described play throughout the daily routine. Three experienced difficulty in distinguishing between play and other activities; they considered everything they did as learning through play. Some participants noted that their schedule was more rigid because of the school schedule, breakfast, lunch, and playground time; therefore, they had to conform to a little more restricted schedule. Each noted that circle time was part of the daily schedule, but only two referred to it as playtime. Each participant explained the importance of room arrangement when fostering play. They also shared the importance of toy selections/classroom materials in incorporating play into the

learning process. Centers were designed to extend the curricular themes throughout the room.

Table 4

Summary of Research Question 2: How Play is Implemented in Classroom

Participant	Table Play	Center Time	Outside Play	Free Play
1	30 minutes	1 hour	1 hour	Upon arrival, before pick up
2		1 hour	1 hour	Upon arrival, before pick up
3	30 minutes	1 hour	1 hour	
4		1 hour	1 hour	Upon arrival, before pick up
5		1 hour	1 hour	
6		1 hour	1 hour	
7	45 minutes	1 hour	1 hour	Upon arrival, before pick up
8	30 minutes	1 hour	1 hour	
9	20 minutes	1 hour	1 hour	Upon arrival, before pick up
10		1 hour	1 hour	Upon arrival, before pick up

One individual noted, "Room arrangement is key, there must be interactive play areas and areas for solitary play as well. I focus on the centers that encourage group play. In my opinion group play is what will help a child develop into a learner" (9). Length of the day was also a factor influencing the way in which play was incorporated into the daily schedule. Preschool and kindergarten classrooms incorporated breakfast; lunch; bathroom time; library; naptimes; transitions; therapies; and, many times, school wide events. Therefore, the day is not entirely at the discretion of the educator. A teacher remarked, "By the time that we cover all the required events my day has been reduced drastically" (3).

Regarding who initiates play, in general, participants agreed that most play is initiated by the child. Center time gives the child the opportunity to be the leader and to set the stage for play. Comments included:

It is a challenge for me not to get involved in the choice of play that a child makes. I have learned to steer clear if a child wants to play with the puzzles for a week straight that is okay. They are playing and they are directing themselves. (7) Children can be limited in choosing their play depending on their maturity level. Occasionally a child will need direction, but once they settle in there are happy to play. (9)

The participants agreed that almost without exception outside play is self-directed. There were a few exceptions when an item such as new equipment or a new activity opportunity was added to the playground.

Types of Play Observed/Facilitated/Structured

For Interview Questions 2 and 9 (What is your understanding of the different types of play? Describe the types of play you observe/facilitate/structure in your classroom?), overall, the participants were shaky with their academic knowledge of the types of play. Nevertheless, they were very astute observers of what type of play was actually occurring in their personal classrooms (See Table 5). Half of the individuals observed children in their personal classrooms that used solitary play skills. These children had not developed the ability or skills to participate in cooperative play.

Table 5

Type of Play Observed

Type of Play	Participant N
Solitary	6
Cooperative	3
Variety	2
Variance in skills between older and younger students	3
Usefulness of free play for assessment	1
Change in amount and level of play over year	10
Play schemes (child and adult initiated)	10

Participants statements included:

Many times I am aware of children playing alone and really enjoying their play.

(3)

Really observing the children specifically in the area of play helped me to realize

what developmental level the child is on. (4)

As an educator I am guilty of having certain goals that I want to reach every day

and pushing to reach the goal. When I miss the goal I get frustrated. However, I

have learned that I can reach the goal many times by allowing the children to do

what they naturally do-- learn through play. (2)

Three participants referred to block play. Each said it is easy to articulate the

stage of play a child is in after watching them in the block area. The older, more skilled

children build towers and buildings, while the younger children simply make towers and

knock them down. One educator indicated:

Occasionally there is some frustration between the children in the classroom because of the differences of the ages. The differences in the ages is great enough that the younger children sometimes frustrate the older children during play. (10)

The participants also divulged that their teaching practices and strategies changed during the school year. As they became familiar with their students, they adapted their practices to meet the needs of the particular students in their classrooms. An interviewee remarked:

At the beginning of the school year or when a new child is introduced to the classroom there is much more required of the adult. The child needs to feel secure in order to be free to play. In addition, the child must be "educated" about play and its role in the classroom. (9)

Additionally, Interview Question 9 opened the discussion of play schemes. During this discussion, participants described the types of play they had observed, structured or facilitated. The use of instructional and supportive play strategy surfaced during the interview process. For the sake of this interview process, play schemes were described as materials and props provided by the teacher to enhance play in the classrooms. Discussions centered on children with developmental delays; participants noted that they had children with disabilities in their classrooms. They agreed that schemes were especially helpful in directing play for children with learning disabilities. Two educators stated:

Children with disabilities do not just naturally evolve into deeper richer play. The props and materials assist the children to enter and understand play. (3)

Many times children that are physically preschool age are developmentally around two years of age. As a facilitator of play, I have to be careful not to expect more of the child than they are actually capable of doing. (5)

Curriculum and thematic units were used as the basis for the play schemes. The participants explained that they constructed different schemes and put them in centers around the classroom. This procedure was in place to teach the children with developmental delays how to play in the centers.

Building upon the ability of the children as they developed their personal play skills and interacted with one another, the teachers took advantage of the imaginative play opportunities that naturally occurred. Two statements were made:

We pretended that we were going to the park. On the way we stopped for ice cream and we had to rescue a puppy. (1)

I also set up a McDonalds in the house center. The children pretended to take orders and exchange money for food. They then pretended to eat the food at the table and clean up the area as well. (7)

For the most part, the educators agreed that they follow a theme until the children are no longer interested. They stated that the longevity of a theme is entirely up to the children. It may last a few weeks, a month, or perhaps only a few days. As long as the children were engaged, the educators followed their lead.

Accommodations to Support the Play of Individual Children

Regarding Interview Question 11 (What, if any, accommodations do you make to support individual children to play in your classroom?), the number of children with developmental delays in classrooms varied from two to seven. Two classrooms had no

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children with developmental delays. Table 6 illustrates the accommodations made to enable play across the classroom, as well as for the individual student.

Table 6

Accommodations to Enable Play

Across the Classroom	Individual Student
• Clean up reminder • Plenty of choices • Clearly defined play areas with wide access points • Small groups • Large groups • Teachers and aides available	• Musical Chimes • Plenty of choices • 1:1 instruction • Direct instruction • Direct instruction • Materials readily available depending on interest of the student

Regardless of the number of children per classroom, each educator said that, depending upon the developmental delay, every child required some type of accommodation. The accommodation varied from teaching styles to special equipment required by the child. A teacher added:

> The goal of the educator is to entice the child to get involved in play in the classroom. I must look at each child as an individual; I am constantly looking for that toy that will spark a child's interest. I want the child to be captivated by learning through play, without even realizing it. (3)

During the interview process the participants' responses overall indicated that accommodations must be part of any teaching strategy. They mentioned adult interaction, visual cues, one-on-one instruction, clearly defined play spaces, efficient communication, closing or rotating centers, and timers as part of effective accommodations. The accommodations were very specific to appropriate developmental practices for play. It also was evident that children with developmental delays have selective interests. The

participants discussed that, for the first part of any school year, there is a period of getting to know the students and then identifying the child's individual interests and making the classroom appeal to the child. One teacher commented:

> As I have matured in my teaching, I have realized that my room décor comes way down the list to my teaching style and accommodations. For instance, I discovered that one of my students loved M & M's candies. Every number and letter that I used in my classroom included a drawing of an M & M candy. It really worked. The child was more focused and enjoyed learning numbers and letters. (4)

All teachers used the technique of closing centers on occasion, which piques the child's interest toward the centers that are open. She stated:

> One of the benefits of closing a center is social development. When there are less centers open it encourages social development among the children. Social development is crucial in all children, especially children with delays. (3)

Research Question 3: Role of the Adult

Research Question 3 was addressed by Interview Question 10 (What do you believe is the adult's role in play in your classroom?). Each participant talked about the significance of the role of the adult had in play as a developmentally appropriate practice. Table 7 illustrates the participants' beliefs about the role of the adult in play.

Table 7

Summary of Research Question 3: Role of the Adult

Role	Participant N
Fundamental to developmentally appropriate practice; Accommodations should be made according to individual needs; A variety of activities should be developed and prepared ahead of time	9
Collaboration with other professionals	3
Observer	4
Direct instruction	5
Facilitator	4

For each, the role was multi-layered, convoluted, and exacting in the sense that

the teacher or teacher's assistant may have many roles within play and across the daily

routine of the school day. One educator added: "The adult in the classroom is to engage

the children with specifically designed activities throughout the school day. The activity

must be age appropriate; day after day this can present a challenge" (7). A participant

described how the role of the adult in the preschool classroom changes daily. On

occasion, the adult may teach problem-solving skills and then help the child practice the

skill. The adult also may use the opportunity to direct play by facilitating play, using the

scaffolding technique, simply supporting the child during play or broadening the play

with the use of materials. Comments included:

Observation is a key when teaching preschool. Many times I simply position

myself to observe two centers at a time and carefully watch to see what the

children are doing in order to see what they know. (5)

Now I try to support play and find the solution for any problem that my student

might incur. I assist the children in finding the words that are required for

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communication when sharing toys or taking turns. The children need the ability to

work through communication barriers in order to have effective play. (2)

The participants agreed that the children gain skills throughout the year and that

each adult in the classroom needs to be aware of the maturation and growth of the child.

The adult role changes according to the development of the child. Participants noted:

I believe that the adult has to model what play means and what is looks like for

the students in order for them to be successful. The adult has to communicate

expectation and the "why" in which the students are involved in play. (6)

The adult's role is to provide materials for play, make sure it is engaging and if

not change it up, create play space, and set and make sure rules are in place for

the security of the child. (10)

Direct instruction of course is always part of teaching, but the most exciting part

of teaching is when the children begin to direct the play. As the children direct the

play I might perhaps add some things to the play. Such as let us ask a friend to

join, or what if we do this. (3)

According to the teachers, if adults are patient, many times they will see the

children begin to play. The children are very capable of establishing friendships and

solving their problems. One individual indicated: "Many times as adults, we have a

tendency to think that we need to be in charge of everything. However, just getting things

moving in the play centers then observing seems to be the best method for successful

play" (9). Another opened up about her working relationship with the teacher's aide in

her classroom and that it was beneficial for enhancing play:

When my aide and I work together, we can make a difference. For instance, if we

are looking to enhance social development in the housekeeping center. We are

both very aware of what is happening during play in the housekeeping center and

at different times, we each encourage the children to work together. For instance,

there is only one skillet in the housekeeping center. The children are required to

take turns; they all love the skillet so it becomes an issue in the housekeeping

center. The aide and I have learned that a few encouraging words or instructions

from us will help the play develop. The children have a clearer understanding of

what sharing really is. (4)

Research Question 4: Barriers to Play

Interview Question 12 (What, if any, obstacles or barriers to play are evidence in

your school?) addressed Research Question 4. Each participant expressed concerns about

time constraints due to the rigid schedule of the school day, breakfast, lunch, snack,

playground time, music, therapists, etc. Table 8 illustrates the findings of Research

Question 4 regarding barriers to play.

Table 8

Summary of Research Question 4: Barriers to Play

Participant	Barriers
7	Reluctance of educator to include play because the educator might be judged; The children might not be prepared for kindergarten (standardized testing results)
5	The size of the room might hinder play
3	Limited outdoor play equipment
8	Class schedule: parents and administration might not understand the need for play

Participants also cited the schedule as a time restraint that was reflected by the amount of playtime available in their personal classroom. A teacher stated:

The time part of the play equation is a constant struggle for me. I would love to have time after play to sit with my students and talk about what they were playing and if they enjoyed it. I would love to have the time to review the playtime with each child. (7)

Preschool classrooms typically are designed around centers. Participants said they wanted more time for center playtime during the day. They shared that sometimes center time does not occur because of required attendance at special events. A teacher remarked that time is a major factor with children. If they are given too much or too little time, it can be disastrous. Children are frustrated if insufficient time is allotted, then bored if excessive time is set aside for a certain play opportunity. Flexibility and following the child's interest is the best solution. A teacher expressed, "If I am not very careful and intentional then major upsets can and do happen. During play items will go flying across the room and tempers will flare" (9).

One teacher explained that she is required to keep toys in totes in a storage closet because enough room is not available in her personal classroom. She said that the physically transporting her totes and having the time required to bring them into the classroom has become a real problem: "If I were blessed with a larger classroom I could keep items of interest out at all times and add to my collection depending on the theme. This would help my students stay engaged" (5). Several discussed the lack of outside play equipment and a larger playground. The equipment on several playgrounds is inadequate and inappropriate for preschool children. The statement was made that:

A larger budget would solve many problems. Not just for my classroom but I mean a larger budget for the entire school. We could beef up our outside play area, which would allow classes to share the outdoor play space and not be so limited on outdoor playtime. (6)

Another barrier about which each teacher expressed concern was the lack of qualified adults in the classroom. Each classroom had at least one aide, but none were required to have early childhood education degrees; it was preferred but not required. One of the participants expressed her frustration as she tried to be certain each of her students are making progress:

Many times, I am torn from helping a student to solving a crisis with another student. If perhaps my aide was at least required to have some training in early childhood she might see the need quicker and feel qualified to intervene in the situation. (1)

Time and resources. Sometimes I wish there were more options/resources available to choose from. (8)

The barrier that was most important to the participants was the lack of understanding of adults surrounding the benefits of play. They stated that, from the administration to the aides, little understanding was evident as to the importance of play in development and the time needed for adequate play. Standardized testing was mentioned as a barrier because of the time required to prepare for the testing. The participants expressed concern that if they sent their class to kindergarten without knowing every letter sound, they would be considered a bad teacher. An individual asserted:

Early childhood education is in crisis mode because play has been moved to the back burner. As an educator I realize that numbers and letters are important as the foundation of reading. However, play is of equal importance. We are expecting too much of the children and pushing down academics to the preschool classroom where children need time to play. (10)

The participants talked about kindergarten as the new first grade. The stress experienced by preschool teachers was very impactful. They were concerned that developmental milestones will be missed because of the lack of play. An interviewee wondered, "What will happen to my students that do not have a rich full family life where their needs for play and exploration are not met?" (10). One participant described her personal logical struggle with the disunion of practices in prekindergarten and kindergarten:

I think the real problem comes in when these little people have been able to guide their own learning in pre-k but then when they get to kindergarten, they are automatically from day one told to sit down at a table and wait for a teacher's directions. Preschool children have had the freedom to choose activities and the opportunity for movement that they will no longer experience. (3)

All participants were concerned that other professionals and parents do not understand the developmental appropriateness of play in the preschool classroom. One remarked, "The children will blossom when play and learning is thematically driven. The parents and other educators may not be as aware as they should be about the importance of play and that play can drive the curriculum" (6). Each agreed that play should not be limited to the preschool classroom, centers should be put returned to kindergarten

classrooms, and primary students should have an opportunity to move and to play. One

stated, "We are slighting our children by taking away play especially center time in

kindergarten classrooms. Play in centers enhances imagination and originality" (10).

<p align="center">**Research Question 5: Supports for Play**</p>

Interview Question 13 (What supports would enable you to implement play more

fully as a developmentally appropriate practice?) addressed Research Question 5, which

correlates to Research Question 4 about barriers to play. All participants agreed that

assistance from more adults would be a huge support. Table 9 summarizes the supports

for play.

Table 9

Summary of Research Question 5: Supports for Play

Participant	Supports
10	Higher numbers of aides in the classrooms; Increase professional development opportunities for the aides to enhance their skills
8	Smaller class sizes
6	Training focusing on play

The following quote is from one participant describing a routine occurrence:

While four hands are definitely better than just two, sometimes we just need more

in our classroom. In our classroom, there are as many as five areas where children

can be playing. If I am reading a book one on one and my aide is assisting with

dress up and we hear some screaming coming from the block area, one of us has

to leave the interaction that we have with a child and put out the fire before it gets

out of control. (4)

One participant was very expressive about the extent that she valued the other

professionals who occasionally were in her classroom: "The speech pathologist visits my

room one day a week to rotate in the centers; I would like to have her at least 2 days a week" (10).

Participants expressed concern with the lack of adult support, especially when the teacher had more than one child with developmental delays in the classroom. Eight participants reported that smaller class sizes would be helpful with children bonding with one another and having the opportunity to listen and to learn about their peers' play plans for the day and what they have experienced with their families the night before. One said, "With the increase in class size, it becomes more of a challenge to manage all aspects of the classroom. I want the children to have the opportunity to communicate but it takes a lot of time when the class is large" (3). Individualized play skills are easier and more likely to happen in a smaller class: "It would be very possible to move along quicker and help to develop the students' skills fully in a small classroom" (7). Smaller class size would allow for more individually designed play according to the skill level of each child. "A participant stated, "You could devote a lot more time and really develop people's skills fully and I think move them along quicker if you had smaller class sizes" (3). Adult support at the beginning of the school year was an idea of one participant. She elaborated that, as children come into the classroom, they need more assistance:

> To have more help at the beginning of the school year would be a dream come
> true. The additional adults in the classroom could help facilitate communication
> and interaction between the adults and students as well as student-to-student
> communication. Once the students have a firm grasp on expectations then the
> adults could be phased out. (2)

Six participants expressed the need for trainings about play. The trainings should focus on play and be offered to teachers, aides, administrators, speech pathologists, and any other adult who interacts in the preschool classroom. One participant was very explicit that the training would develop a shared understanding of play:

Play should be defined in the training so everyone has a very clear understanding of what play is. Using the same language and terms to describe play would be very helpful. Coaching of what to do in real life play situations should be included. (9)

One simply said, "Maybe teacher development to help gain understanding of why there is a need for play" (7). All participants were very clear that they would love to have more opportunities to develop and to enhance their skills. A teacher remarked:

I know that I should work on my skills to be certain that my ideas are fresh and novel and I challenge my students. Reflection is one of the most important tools in my toolbox. It is my goal to reflect every day to see if my techniques are effective and if my students are making progress. (5)

Summary

Upon review, the discoveries of this study offer an insight into early childhood educators' beliefs about play as developmentally appropriate practices within the context of their individual classrooms and their personal educational experiences. The participants agreed that play is indispensable in the development of young children. They also concurred that play is developmentally appropriate and is the infrastructure of instruction in their classrooms. The description of play included but was not limited to the following: enjoyable, fun, interactive, engaging, creative, and imaginative; it provides

opportunities for interaction and socialization with peers. Each developmental domain is enhanced through play, social emotional, cognitive, communication, and physical. The participants also agreed that, through play, children make sense of their world; they imitate adults and act out real-world situations.

During the interview process, themes emerged that were related to the interview questions: peers, play schemas, changes in play, disability, typical development, other professionals, toys, playground equipment, professional development, and trainings. Each participant was aware that their personal formal education, trainings, professional development, and independent research played a role in their beliefs concerning play as a developmentally appropriate practice. All were willing to reflect on their practices concerning play in their personal classrooms.

The context of play during the school day was openly discussed. Each participant was very clear in expressing a desire for more playtime during the school day. Each discussed the barriers to play, including time, classroom size, playground size and equipment, expectations from the standardized tests, school schedule restraints, and parents' attitudes. The participants confirmed that knowledgeable adults, smaller classes, and professional development opportunities would be great supports to have in place.

Chapter V discusses the findings in relation to and the implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The aspiration of this study was to learn about and to understand early childhood educators' beliefs/perceptions about play in their classrooms. The study also documented changes in curricular, assessment, and performance expectations for all children entering kindergarten. Over the past three decades, the topic of developmentally appropriate practices and play has been researched through many different studies (Bray & Cooper, 2007; Provost & LaFreniere, 1991; Rubin, Watson, & Jambor, 1978; Saracho & Spodek, 1998). The beliefs of early educators about play have not been identified in any previous studies.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are early educators' beliefs/perspectives on play as a developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms and what factors influence those beliefs?

2. In what ways is play implemented in the classroom?

3. What do early educators believe about the role of the adult in play?

4. What, if any, are the barriers to play as a developmentally appropriate practice in early educators' classrooms?

5. What supports would enable early educators to implement play more fully as a developmentally appropriate practice?

With the changes in communal expectations for children and the trends in education practices, this study was deemed necessary (Ginsburg, 2007; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009). Research has indicated that, at the university level, an emphasis is on play as an appropriate developmental practice, however, researchers have

written about and documented the effects of standardized testing, push-down academics, and the apparent loss of play of children (Fisher et al., 2008; Graue, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009; Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004;). A disconnect appears to exist between theory and practice in the preschool setting. When studying the research, it appears that at the preschool level pencils and paper seem to be taking over the classroom, although at the university level the preferred developmental practice is learning through play. According to the pedagogy espoused at the university level, standardized testing and push-down academics are crowding out the time that should be allotted for play for our youngest students (Ginsburg, 2007; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009;).

Teachers of young children have a right to have their voices heard about what they believe and have experienced concerning play. An important part of this study was to give the educators the freedom to be heard. They grasped at the opportunity to provide their opinions concerning standardized testing and push-down academics in relation to play. During the literature review, very little, if any, information dealt with early educators' beliefs about play. One goal of this study was to grant educated, passionate, dedicated early educators an opportunity to share their stories, concerns, and beliefs about play in their classrooms.

Each participant was eager and willing to share stories and was very engaged during the interview process. The interviewee and researcher had established a common interest prior to the interview. Participants welcomed the actual interview as an uninterrupted time to talk about and to discuss their beliefs concerning play. Stories were shared followed by laughter and camaraderie; the researcher could see that the

participants felt a deep connection to their students. Many revealed they spent early morning and late afternoon hours in their classrooms. This was a regular part of their day, which gave the researcher a glimpse into the dedication these educators possess for their students. After each interview, the author took the opportunity to reflect on the individual teacher, reread transcripts, and make additional notes that seemed important to the teacher. The passion these educators expressed helped the researcher remain on task with a fresh perspective during each interview.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stressed the importance of the researcher and participant feeling connected. The interconnection between the researcher and the participants of this study made the interview process easy. They were linked through their profession but had never carved out time to have an in-depth conversation about early childhood education concerning play in the preschool classroom. Ezzy (2010) revealed an interesting perspective on the interview process. He said that the interview is a sort of performance between the interviewer and the interviewee. The result of the performance is mutual understanding and an exchange of ideas, a rapport of analysis, discovery, and contemplation. The author argues that the emotional tension between the two intensifies the interview process. As an established relationship existed, the participants were comfortable with sharing their beliefs and perceptions, which provided deeper and richer descriptions of their own narratives, all interwoven together for this study.

The findings of this research affirm that early childhood educators believe in play. They reveal that play is a developmentally appropriate practice and a building block in preschool classrooms. The results are important because they reiterate the philosophical approach of early childhood educators teaching the whole child from a developmentally

appropriate stage. The remainder of this chapter discusses the findings of the study by research question. The participants' responses to each are incorporated to provide a clear picture of their collective interviews regarding play as a developmentally appropriate practice. Also included in the chapter is a discussion of the limitations and implications for future research and practice.

Research Question 1: Early Educators' Beliefs and Influencing Factors

A theme was woven throughout the study. Each participant declared that play was the infrastructure for learning in her classroom and the instructional practice centered on play. McMullen and Alat (2002) reported that highly trained early educators have strong convictions that play is imperative in the preschool classroom, and the participants of this study concurred with those findings. The participants skillfully included play in their everyday school schedule, and all stated it was their goal to make learning fun for the students. They concluded that providing the opportunity for play made learning meaningful to children. When a child is purposefully engaged in play, it helps to develop fine and gross motor skills, social skills, and cognitive skills, as well as provides problem-solving opportunities. McMullen and Alat and the study participants aligned with the pedagogical stances of NAEYC and the child development theories of Vygotsky (2002) and Piaget (1962; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Most participants had a general understanding of the categories of play developed by Parten (1932). All contended that they stay current in the field by reading professional journals, attending conferences, and taking part in professional development opportunities.

The study participants agreed philosophically with theory and practice as identified in the literature (Fisher et al., 2008; Graue, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009). As a

group, they are aware of the movement toward push-down academics and standardized testing that was crowding into preschool playtime. However, they stayed true to their beliefs about play regardless of the changes in educational trends they experienced in their everyday lives as teachers. In addition, the participants indicated that professional development events encourage them to expand the play opportunities in their classrooms. They stated that the reality they face as a teacher in a large school district involves a limited opportunities for play. No practical way exists to offer more play due to the expectation of the school districts. Their autonomy is hampered by time, schedules, space, number of children in the classroom, and limited number of trained adults available to assist in the classroom. The teachers acknowledged that they feel the pressure of the expectations of the kindergarten readiness programs. However, each insisted that play is part of the necessary developmentally appropriate practice in kindergarten.

This reported disconnect has been documented and identified (Almon, 2004; Miller & Almon, 2009; Zigler et al., 2004). Push-down academics, changes in the curriculum, and standardized tests are rising in importance in early childhood education (Adcock & Patton, 2001; Lava, Recchia, & Giovacco-Johnson, 2004). The teachers in this study made it clear that they are not bending to the pressures and changes they experience. The teachers plan to continue offering play as a developmentally appropriate practice despite the challenges. The beliefs of these highly educated and experienced teachers are reported in this study and confirmed by research that has identified teachers' levels of education as a factor in the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices (McMullen & Alat, 2002).

It would be an interesting focus for future research to develop a study that would give the participants an opportunity to practice according to their personal beliefs about play and the knowledge they have gained while in the field in accordance with the child development theories. The study could ignore the social pressures of push-down academics and standardized testing. The teacher participants in this study were a mixture of those who had and had not completed graduate school. Each had completed some early childhood classes at some level; however, all indicated they obtained the bulk of their specific training about play through professional readings, professional development, and/or "on the job training."

According to a specific group of researchers who studied educators' beliefs about play, preschool and kindergarten teachers may have different beliefs about the role of play and school readiness (Adcock & Patton, 2001). Some of the participants discussed the differences in beliefs about expectations of school readiness for preschool. A standard exists, but the expectations seem to be disconnected according to teachers involved in the discussion. Many of the participants feel some uneasiness when their students transition from preschool to kindergarten, but they do not allow the uncomfortable feeling to limit their use of play in their personal classroom. They all agreed that play is a developmentally appropriate practice for preschool.

Research Question 2: Implementation of Play

The teacher participants in this study discussed the amount and type of play actualized in their personal classrooms. They stated that they observed different types of play as described by Parten (1932) and Smilansky (1968). Each individual was able to identify the different developmental stages/levels from Piaget (1962) while observing the

children in their classrooms. Not all participants could use the terminology that Piaget espoused, but they noticed changes in the children during play when they compared play skills from the beginning to the end of the school year.

The teachers planned instruction centered on play as a developmentally appropriate practice and discussed that their beliefs affect the implementation of play. It is of the utmost importance that the littlest learners have the opportunity to experience unbridled joy while playing at school. To accomplish this, the teachers in this study reflected on their daily routines and considered different ways to increase the amount of play, as well as to improve the quality of playful interactions throughout the school day. Spontaneous play was encouraged and was implemented through structured and unstructured activities. Play was fostered by using play scenarios, thematic learning centers, and many opportunities for social interaction to improve cognitive skills.

According to a study by Barton and Wolery (2008), play is a typical method used by psychologists and social workers to assist children in developing pretend play skills. Barton and Wolery (2010) completed a later study that revealed preschool teachers also can be effective in teaching pretend play skills if they have the proper training to implement the instruction with consistency. The study participants created play scenarios by using their experience in the classroom, their knowledge base through professional developmental opportunities and professional readings, and their familiarity with their students to teach pretend play in their classrooms. All participants were required to use lesson plans, and they detailed their use of play in those lesson plans. During the interview, they discussed the progress the children had made throughout the year as play skills were taught.

The research completed by Bray and Cooper (2007) and Coolahan et al. (2000) confirmed that pretend play is very beneficial for children with developmental delays as well, especially when paired with children who are developing normally. Mixing children without regard to their abilities helps to build social skills. In their interviews, the study participants agreed with this research. More than one said that children with developmental delays often respond better to their typically developing peers than to the adult in the classroom. The benefit of typical and atypical playing together for extended periods could be the topic for additional studies.

The research conducted by Miller and Almon (2009) was the only study that specifically addressed the amount of time devoted to play. However, all participants voiced concern that they are unable to squeeze adequate playtime in a day. The participants were very clear about their desire for a more flexible schedule that would provide ample time to incorporate everyday play in their classrooms.

Research Question 3: Role of the Adult

Bray and Cooper (2007), Provost and LaFreniere (1991), Rubin et al. (1978), and Saracho and Spodek (1998) reported that a vital component of play includes adults' involvement. The participants of this research study echoed these sentiments. They stated that the most significant learning that occurred with adult-directed play was the students' increased ability to problem solve and to interact socially. According to the data gathered in this study, the participants believe they were observing high quality play in their classrooms. The experienced educators' beliefs in this study confirm findings from Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot (2010) research revealing a link between a teacher's education and experiences and the quality of play collaboration.

In their pursuit of enhancing learning and improving children's skills, the participants discussed that they continually searched for ways to promote play to meet the children's developmental levels. They spoke about the need to appreciate and to understand the individual children in the class in order to best aid them in their play and to grant them opportunities to interact with their environment (Mastrangelo, 2009). The participants also discussed the importance of observation, rather than reflection, when teaching. They described that the children's play skills develop over time and that the teacher must be spontaneous and sensitive to each child's individual strengths and needs as they plan for instruction and insert skill-building opportunities in play (Barton & Wolrey, 2010).

Another component of successful play, according to the study participants, is to offer considerable support at the beginning of the school year and to gradually withdraw the support as the year progresses. Mixed age grouping also is effective in promoting play. Depending upon birthdays, a teacher may have a range of ages in the classroom, from an older 3-year-old student to a very young 5-year-old child. The 5-year-old will be able to engage the 3-year-old in effective play in ways that a teacher would be unable to engage them. According to the study participants, many times the littlest learners do not have an understanding of every toy in the classroom, especially the manipulatives such as counting bears. In this instance, the participants described themselves as play facilitators, play supporters, or play observers, and later cheerleaders when children grasp the task.

The participants understood the important role of the adult in children's play, as evidenced in the study, but they also stated that there certainly is a place for child-initiated play. The participants discovered that many times children are engaged more in

the child-directed activities than the teacher-initiated play, which coincides with the findings of Tsao et al. (2008). The consensus of the participants was that no literature has specifically given guidance to the amount of facilitation appropriate during play, which creates a delicate balance for the teachers. This could be the topic for study as well.

Research Question 4: Barriers to Play

The following barriers to play dominated the interview sessions: lack of adult support, limited indoor and outdoor play space, standardized testing, time restraints, number of children in each class, available materials, and parental and other adults' expectations of the preschool classroom. Each study participant mentioned countless ways she attempted to overcome the barriers. They provided trainings for parents disguised under titles centered on holiday themes, sent home informational booklets about the importance of play, and had family nights designed for the parents to experience play. The teachers either purchased or made materials for their classroom and outside play. They turned standardized testing into a time of fun with rewards for test completion. The size of the classroom and outdoor play area was beyond the educators' control. Parks were in close proximity to many schools; therefore, the teachers could take their classes to the park to have extra outdoor space. However, the educators who had small classrooms simply had to deal with the lack of indoor space.

The discoveries of this study show that heightened awareness of current literature undoubtedly influenced the teacher participants' classrooms in a positive manner. In addition to the literature, the participants' classroom experiences and professional development added to their knowledge base of the importance of play. Throughout the interview process the educators shared their beliefs that choosing a profession as a

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preschool teacher was almost like a divine calling to make a difference in the lives of children. They took their jobs home with them, reflecting on practices that worked and those that were not as effective. They also indicated that teaching is a journey that never really ends; and there is always room to improve, learn, and become a more effective teacher.

The group of participants as a whole acknowledged that they feel pressure when their preschool children transition from preschool to kindergarten. The push-down academics and curricular changes were a concern of every individual. They were concerned about the changes, but they held firm to their convictions of the importance of play in the classroom. Each was convinced that preschool children learn better through play. As advocates for the littlest learners, they spoke openly about the need for play and their intent to preserve play as an important part of their daily schedule. Their conclusion was that play is a developmentally appropriate practice they will continue in their classrooms.

Research Question 5: Supports for Play

If one considers the barriers to play, the same list for supports for play can be used that are considered barriers to play: more space, more adults who are skilled, more materials, more time, and less children in each classroom. One simply needs to change their perspective to the positive. The study participants shared that an increased number of skilled adults in the classroom would make the largest impact on play. The children would benefit, in that the adult would be available for interactive play, facilitate pretend play, and help to develop problem-solving skills. Pathologists and occupational therapists could provide a high level of support, while paraprofessionals trained in play could fill

the role of an additional pair of hands in the preschool classroom. It would be beneficial to the preschool teachers to have another professional in the classroom with a different skill set and, therefore, a different perspective on play.

More adult support was identified as the need for paraprofessionals who could render more generalized assistance, as well as professionals such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists who could provide more individualized, specialized supports. One participant described that she learns from other professionals who support the classroom. Smaller class size and more time for play also were named as barriers; in a positive light, they also could be considered supports. The participants desired more time in the structured school day schedule for play. They agreed that a routine or schedule is best. The teachers also agreed that a smaller size class gives the teacher an opportunity for more attention to working on each student's developmental skills that will ensure success in the higher grades.

Each participant exuded a high level of confidence in their personal ability to engage children in developmentally appropriate play; however, they welcomed more opportunities to hone their skills and to have a deeper understanding of play. This desire confirms that which the research studies by McMullen and Alat (2002), McMullen et al. (2006), and Trawick and Dziurgot (2010) discovered: teachers are open and desire more training in the area of play.

Limitations

This study was conducted in a specific geographic area with a small number of participants. Patton (2002) ascertained that this type of sampling could be considered a limitation. This researcher agrees that the sampling was limited and small, but the

research opens the door and gives a voice to the educators who are concerned about giving children the freedom to learn the way in which they learn best. The interviews allowed deep, rich conversations in a safe environment in which the educators were allowed to share how their perceptions are put into practice.

Interpretations, the author's personal beliefs, and biases about early childhood education and play as a developmentally appropriate practice are other limitations. The study, as well as the research questions, were designed around the researcher's understanding of the literature. The probing interview questions were developed and designed by the author's personal quest for a deeper understanding of the educators' beliefs and perceptions of developmentally appropriate practices surrounding play.

The researcher's role as a college teacher may have been a limitation because the participants could have guarded some of their responses to the interview questions, even although their participation in the study was voluntary. Every effort was made to help the participants feel comfortable and at ease with sharing their stories. The author believes her role as a college educator enhanced the conversations because of mutual respect for one another. The research process provided everyone involved with opportunities to reflect on mutual practices in support of young children as they engaged in the monologue about play.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

Additional research is needed on the way in which early childhood educators' beliefs connect with their practices in the classroom. A replication of this study could include a different sample of participants and teachers with more training on play and play-based curriculum. In research based on the current study, the demographic could

include teachers from a wider geographic area of the United States. The interview process used during this study seemed to give way to a deep understanding of the factors causing a weak connection between early childhood teachers' beliefs and their practices in the classrooms. Perhaps continuing this study using different interview questions would yield even more information.

These talented teachers in this study shared how they manage to cultivate a balance between theory and practice in their classrooms in the zone of play as a developmentally appropriate practice. They continue to seek professional development opportunities to increase their knowledge base in their desire to reinforce young children concerning play. Subsequent consultations with teachers who are accomplished in preschool classrooms would provide additional understanding of how they attain the balance between theory and practice. It would be important to identify the factors that support them in the use of developmentally appropriate practice despite the current trends in education.

Developing an observational study to compare the preschool educators' beliefs about their actual practices would be an effective way to observe the educators in action (McMullen et al., 2006). As such, the actual instructional strategies these teachers adopt to implement play as a developmentally appropriate practice would be exposed. This could lead to professional development for pre-service and in-service teachers. Adding a year of coaching to a professional development session would be a unique offering to any teacher. To link a teacher who is passionate and educated about play to one who has the desire to make play part of the everyday schedule, but is lacking the knowledge of how to

make that happen, would be a great match. This could be beneficial in educating new and seasoned teachers in the implementation of play as developmentally appropriate practice.

The resolution of the perspectives and processes of these talented early childhood educators presented in this study enlightens policy makers, administrators, and practitioners about how play as an accepted "best practice" is executed in American classrooms today. In addition, this research illustrates the way early childhood educators' beliefs affect their practice across the daily routine in preschool classrooms (Ashiabi, 2007; Erwin & Delair, 2004; File, 1994; Logue & Harvey, 2009).

"For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them."

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (as cited in Griffin, 2010)

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APPENDIX A: Questionnaire Instrument

Research Questions

1. What are early educators' beliefs/perspectives on play as a developmentally appropriate practice in their classrooms and what factors influence those beliefs?

2. In what ways is play implemented in the classroom?

3. What do early educators believe about the role of the adult in play?

4. What, if any, are the barriers to play as a developmentally appropriate practice in early educators' classrooms?

5. What supports would enable early educators to implement play more fully as a developmentally appropriate practice?

Interview Questions

1. How do you define play?

2. What is your understanding of the different types of play?

3. In what ways do you believe play influences/impacts a children's development and learning?

4. How have your own educational experiences influenced your beliefs about the role and implementation of play in your classroom?

5. What is your perception of the role of play in school readiness?

6. Is play as you perceive it an integral part of the daily classroom routine?

7. How much time is devoted to play in your classroom?

8. How much is child initiated play? Adult initiated?

9. Describe the types of play you observe/facilitate/structure in your classroom?

10. What do you believe is the adult's role in play in your classroom?

11. What, if any, accommodations do you make to support individual children to play in your classroom?

12. What, if any obstacles or barriers to play are evident in your school?

13. What supports would enable you to implement play more fully as a developmentally appropriate practice?

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent and Consent Letter

INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Play in Early Childhood Classrooms
Investigator: Michelle Edwards, WKU Early Childhood Education
michelle.edwards@kctcs.edu   or   270-314-2394

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University.
The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.
You must be 21 years old or older to participate in this research study.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

   1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:**
It is my goal that using an interview process will allow teachers a voice to express their beliefs about play and its role in the classroom. The teachers' stories or narratives would be the foundation for Early Childhood Educators and their stories would be shared with a community of Early Childhood Educators which will give the interviews, thus stories, thus narratives meaning in that community.

   2. **Explanation of Procedures:**
A semi-structured interview process will be the main line for gathering data. The interviews will be between December 14, 2016 and December 14, 2017 and arranged around the educator's schedule and comfort. The data collection process should expect to take 15-30 minutes.

   3. **Discomfort and Risks:**
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research study.

   4. **Benefits:**
It is important to give voice to the educator beliefs about play because these educators are often the first teachers of young children. The importance of understanding what the Early Childhood Educators beliefs are and how they implement play in their classrooms with in the context of their own values, beliefs about play is foundational to the school based learning experience for these young children.

   5. **Confidentiality:**
Notes, recordings, and scripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a secure office with the

faculty advisor. These documents will remain locked for five years upon final completion of the study. Identifiable data will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms in all publications and or presentations.

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:**

Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____

Witness   Date

- I agree to the audio/video recording of the research. *(Initial here)* _____

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129

CONSENT LETTER

November 1, 2016

Dear Participant,

I invite you to participate in a research study entitled teachers thoughts on play. I am currently enrolled in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green KY, and I am in the process of writing my dissertation. The purpose of the research is to determine preschool teacher's thoughts on play.
Your participation in this research project is voluntary. You may decline altogether, or not answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. There are no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous. Data from this research will be kept under lock and key and reported only as a collective combined total. No one other that the researcher will know your individual answers to the interview questions.
If you agree to participate please send me a text with your email address and I will set up at time that we can meet and I can interview you. .he interview will take approximately 1 hour/

If you have, any questions please feel free to call me at 270-314-2394.

Thank you for your assistance in the important endeavor.

Sincerely yours,

Michelle Edwards
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

APPENDIX C: IRB Approval

WKU

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

DATE: November 17, 2016

TO: lois michelle edwards
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [980216-2] Play in the Early Childhood Classroom
REFERENCE #:   IRB 17-152
SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: November 17, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE: November 17, 2017
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a *signed* consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of November 17, 2017.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Mooney at (270) 745-2129 or irb@wku.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

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