MARRYING PLAY PEDAGOGIES WITH

STANDARIZED CURRICULUM:

A MIXED METHODS STUDY

By

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Abstract:

This study explores the realities experienced by first and second grade teachers as they are using play pedagogies to deliver the standardized Curriculum into Classroom (C2C) planning documents in the Central Queensland Mackay Region in Australia. Posited within a curriculum theory framework, the study defines curriculum as a verb, as opposed to a noun. Accepting that realities are constructed through experience with the world, and that multiple realities can exist at any one given point in time, this study strived to understand the realities and experiences of early childhood educators working in a system absorbed in an audit culture. Although the foundational understandings were gathered through a quantitative approach, in order to gain a clear understanding of how teachers are using play pedagogies to deliver standardized curriculum within their early primary classrooms, a mixed-methods approach was utilized. This project provided a platform for these educators to have their voices heard and their stories told. It also discussed successful strategies and barriers they experienced when implementing play pedagogies to deliver standardized curriculum within these grades.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education at its roots has always been concerned with the development of the individual child, not just their academic achievement, rather the focus is on their whole wellbeing. The *Early Years Learning Framework* (2009), Australia's national framework for early childhood education, outlines a vision for children's learning as belonging, being, and becoming. The binding feature of this structure is the relationships children have with others and the world around them, and how these relationships influence and inform the young child's knowledge, understandings and capabilities. The importance of relationships is best articulated through the African philosophy of Ubuntu which is surmised in the proverb, "I am because we are". Ubuntu – the essence of being human – is the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity. The Nobel Peace Prize winner of 1984, Desmond Tutu, said in an interview recorded as part of the motion picture *I Am Because We Are* (Ciccone & Rissman, 2008), that "you need the other person to be all they can be, in order for you to be all that you can be" thus clearly describing the need for one to understand ourselves in relation to others we encounter and interact with.

For over a century, this focus on development has been promoted as best being addressed pedagogically through play which enables young children to develop relationships with others and the world around them. While early childhood education policy and curriculum "around the world state that play is supposed to be of the utmost importance" (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008, p. 624), there is now without a doubt "an increasing pressure to achieve academic results early on, leaving little time for play and exploration of concepts" (Wells, 2016, p. 42). The practices and approaches of early childhood education in early primary grades in the state of Queensland's public schools are increasingly being influenced by the demand for improved test results on the National Assessment Program of Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Au's (2012) research findings identified that high-stakes testing results in content control, formal control and pedagogical control over curriculum, and this certainly has certainly occurred through the development of nationwide education policy, particularly the Melbourne Declaration (2008) and the subsequent Australian Curriculum (2014).

The Politics of Education in Australia

The Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians (MEETYA, 2008) was a policy that was developed under the direction of the Rudd Labor Government in 2007, as a direct result of the party's agenda to reform education in Australia. Colloquially known as 'The Melbourne Declaration', this policy "acknowledges major changes in the world that are placing new demands on Australian education" (MEETYA, 2008, p. 5). There are two key messages from this policy for all state and territory education departments: Australia is competing in a global economy based on knowledge and innovation, and therefore literacy and numeracy are to remain the cornerstone of Australian education. The cornerstone of the national curriculum are

the only two areas which are tested nationwide at regular intervals and are published online for the wider community consumption. This neo-liberalist agenda which the Australian Government has adopted serves to name and shame schools into surrendering to a standardized curriculum with a narrowed focus on literacy and numeracy. The aim of this concentrated attention on literacy and numeracy is for Australia to rise on Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) ladder as ranked by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. The ensuing result of such a narrowed focus is that the curriculum and pedagogies are manipulated and changed through political agendas and policy in the name of accountability.

NAPLAN is a nationwide high-stakes testing program undertaken by students in grades three, five, seven and nine; rolled out nationally in 2008. The results for each school, regardless if it is public, private or independent, are published in a league table on the *MySchool* website so that general public are informed of how each school performs. Through this website families are able to compare schools, make decisions around where to send their child based on these standardized results. This site does not provide any contextual information about the schools' culture, facilities, pedagogical approaches or how the teachers would work to support the development of each child. In Queensland, this in turn influences overall school enrolment size as families make decisions on where to enroll their child based on this data, which again impacts funding for schools as the state public education department allocates the number of teachers, administrators and specialists per school based on enrolment size.

In response to the Melbourne Declaration goals and the initial spasmodic NAPLAN results throughout the nation, the first iteration of the Australian Curriculum was released in 2013. While it is the federal government endorsed national curriculum, it

is at the discretion of each state and territory education department to decide how they address the curriculum. In Queensland, this resulted in the development of the Curriculum to Classroom (C2C) materials by the state Department of Education (2017), a standardized curriculum which is a "comprehensive set of whole-school and classroom planning materials" (para. 1). These materials have a pointed focus on addressing content which feed into the NAPLAN agenda, to produce student learning outcomes which enables them to perform at a higher level on this standardized test. As a direct result of this, early childhood educators in Queensland are feeling intense pressure to follow the standardized curriculum, particularly through C2C materials so that higher standardized student learning outcomes are produced earlier.

In the last decade it is visibly noticeable that the climate of early childhood education in Queensland public education has become accountability centric, with policy and subsequent practice tightly revolving around NAPLAN testing, a situation which Taubman (2009) refers to as audit culture. This has resulted in a curriculum which is suffering the effects of an ever-narrowing focus on standardized content that will be addressed in standardized tests in efforts to increase the nation's rankings on the international ladder of benchmarks such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Clearly, the social efficiency model of education, the model that aims to control society through the predetermined and decided outcomes and to eliminate the waste in education (Kliebard, 2004), has had a very strong grip on the state's schools since the introduction of the NAPLAN in 2008.

Just like the rolling nothing from the movie *The Neverending Story* (Damon & Peterson, 1984), the objective of this culture is to oppress the people in order to control

the outcomes. In a scene from the movie, the young warrior Atreyu has a desperate

discussion with the villain G'mork, the servant of the nothing:

> Atreyu: What is the Nothing?
>
> G'mork: It's the emptiness that's left. It's like a despair, destroying this world. And
> I have been trying to help it.
>
> Atreyu: But why?
>
> G'mork: Because people who have no hopes are easy to control; and whoever has
> the control... has the power!

If Queensland early phase (preparatory through second grade) teachers desire to once

again embrace the philosophy of Ubuntu, then the oppressive nature of the curriculum

and audit culture will need to be fought against and play pedagogies that connects to

personal experience will once again need to be restored.

Statement of Problem

The division between the standardized curriculum forced upon educators through

the audit culture and the naturalistic authentic learning approaches with which children

explore the world within which they live, clearly illustrates the binary of paradigms that

exists in early childhood education in Queensland. Existing scholarship in the field

supports the constructivist approach to learning in the early years over didactic

approaches (Branscombe, Burcham, Castle, & Surbeck, 2013; Cuffaro & Nager, 2013;

Evans and Saultz, 2015; Fortes, 2008; Katz & Chard, 2013; New, 2008), where play

pedagogies are seen as the most appropriate mode of teaching young children. However,

through the national governance of the Australian Curriculum and the prolonged focus on

quantitative results derived from NAPLAN under the premise to improve student-

learning outcomes; the audit culture continues to be fed and as a result standardized

curriculums are often delivered through didactic approaches with little space for alternative pedagogies. The problem that becomes apparent is that while both play pedagogies and standardized curriculums have the shared goal of improving student learning outcomes, currently both are working against each other.

Purpose of Study

In Queensland public education early childhood teachers continue to struggle in retaining their identities as pedagogues whom are the leading force in making curriculum decisions. Branscombe et al. (2013) emphasize in their work how "teachers must make decisions – considering what they know about teaching and learning as well as any mandates with which they must work – about building their own models of curriculum that are appropriate and consistent with what research has shown about how children construct knowledge" (p. 300). Within the current dualistic reality of early childhood pedagogies that oppose the audit culture that permeates the education profession, a distinct space has emerged for further inquiry into how to achieve best practices. This is not to imply that this space will develop a binary of one pedagogical approach being better than the other, rather research should be focused on "evaluating play-based practices in early education that avoid the misleading either/or of direct instruction versus unstructured free play" (Nicolopoulou, 2010, p. 3).

In 2015, Griffith University implemented the Age-appropriate Pedagogies Pilot Project, which was fully funded by the Queensland Department of Education and Training and trialed within forty-six public schools across the state. Taking the perspective that play and explicit instruction can co-exist and that both are beneficial, the program adopted the view that pedagogies need to be varied taking into account individual learners' age, background and abilities, as well as the interests of both the

children and the teachers (Department of Education and Training, 2015). Identifying eleven characteristics of effective pedagogies: active; agentic; collaborative; creative; explicit; language rich and dialogic; learner focused; narrative; playful; responsive and scaffolding, the Department of Education and Training (2016b) advocates that teachers that participate in the program consider these when working "with children and colleagues to be responsive to the individual child, context and purpose of learning" (para. 1). Although this program is now in the third year of implementation and does not specifically focus on play pedagogy, while it is inclusive of it, it is certainly an important first step towards the organizational endorsement of play as a purposeful pedagogical approach for young children in formal school learning environments.

While it is recognized that the public education organization here in Queensland is advocating and actively working towards promoting age-appropriate pedagogies through the department's transition to school initiative (Department of Education and Training, 2016a), this program is specifically targeting and focusing on supporting teachers in the prep grade level which until recently was a non-compulsory first year of schooling. The null curriculum that is being taught through this narrowed attention to the prep grade level is that the characteristics of effective pedagogies are more acceptable in transitional school settings, and after preparatory is where serious learning occurs. This identifies a clear space to assess how, if at all, teachers in grades one and two in Queensland public schools are using play pedagogies to deliver the Australian Curriculum through the standardized framework of the C2C materials.

Theoretical Grounding

Viewing early childhood pedagogical practices within the public education sphere through a curriculum theory framework, allows one to work through current

understandings in relation to past theories and future endeavors. This also allows one to examine how teachers working in the first and second grades of primary school are creating educational experiences for young children. Curriculum theorist William Pinar (2012) describes curriculum theory as being "focused on [the] educational experience" (p. 2) and views curriculum as a verb, as opposed to a noun, a complicated conversation which is to be not only experienced but personally lived. It is this view of curriculum as a verb that this study is grounded within to explore how teachers are working to connect play pedagogies to standardized curriculum and have young children lead learning experiences based on their lived experiences.

Methodology

This mixed methods study measured the early phase teacher's use of play pedagogies to deliver curriculum within the first two grades of primary schools in the Greater Mackay district of the Central Queensland region of Education Queensland, the state's public education department. A sequential explanatory design was used, with quantitative data collected initially via survey to determine the frequency of play pedagogies being employed by grade one and two teachers to deliver the C2C curriculum across the district, as well as to ascertain any trends in how teachers are using play pedagogies in early year's classrooms. Based on the findings from this first phase, qualitative data was collected to explore these findings further. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) state "this design is most useful when the researcher wants to assess trends and relationships with quantitative data but also be able to explain the mechanism or reasons behind the resultant trends" (p. 82).

Research Questions

This research study had the overarching research question, how, if at all, are early childhood educators currently using play pedagogies to deliver C2C curriculum. To further clarify avenues of discovery and consequential findings, the following research questions were used to further guide inquiry:

    a.   Which key learning areas are most likely to be delivered through the implementation of play pedagogies?

    b.   What strategies do teachers use to include play within the enacted curriculum?

    c.   What obstacles do teachers encounter in not only adopting but also consistently using play pedagogies in early primary classrooms?

    d.   Where do educators seek support and guidance in developing the enacted curriculum?

Researchers Positionality Statement

As a young child I loved learning about the world around me, the way my teachers expressed themselves, and how they encouraged us as learners to express ourselves. Learning in the classrooms of my youth was done through action, involvement and personal interests. I still remember the teacher that designed her own dresses and wore old orange peels as earrings from her ears. My teachers taught me to value uniqueness that it was okay to be different, and that learning was the ultimate personal experience. These early experiences have without a doubt influenced not only the way that I teach, but also how I define education and its purpose. When I started working in the field of early childhood education back in the early nineties as a childcare assistant, I saw education as a process of nurturing the young child as a whole, through the provision

of a variety of carefully planned learning experiences. Since obtaining my first early childhood vocational qualification in 1992, and subsequently working in a variety of early childhood education settings, I have developed a strong belief that learning and teaching in these early years are best experienced through play pedagogies. This is a key foundational belief that has stayed with me throughout my life both personally and professionally.

As an early childhood teacher who is passionate about play based curriculum as the most appropriate way of teaching and assessing young children, I definitely have a personal bias towards the effectiveness of play pedagogies to produce high quality and authentic learning outcomes as opposed to other methods. What this does is provides a window for which I view the world and how it should be. My last classroom teaching experience with young children was working in the public education organization, Education Queensland at a time when the standardized curriculum was just being introduced. During this time, I felt the pressure to conform to teaching a standardized curriculum though didactic methods rather than stay true to my pedagogical beliefs. I worked diligently at the time to weave the two aspects of my professional work together, pedagogical beliefs with pedagogical practices. It is from this viewpoint that I am motivated to explore how the early childhood teachers working in the early phase of primary are marrying play pedagogies with standardized curriculum.

As the researcher, my strength lies in being active in the field for the past twenty years, not just here within Australia but internationally. Through my continued active participation in the field within a variety of positions; teacher educator, lead learner, teacher researcher, and curriculum specialist; it is my aim to weave these experiences together in order to connect colleagues with others in the field. It is believed that these

connections will build a community of practice amongst the teachers in order to help support and sustain professional engagement in discussions around curriculum development and theory. This will provide the sustenance for teachers to grow their self-efficacy as early childhood pedagogues and with time, create a movement leading up to a tipping point of change. Teachers can once again not only become curriculum theorists and specialists, but also be given the recognition that they fulfil that role. However, this change can only happen if they are given the time to develop relationships with all members of the community; so that respect can be built, cooperative interactions can transpire, and collaborative outcomes can be realized in order to pave the future way forward in education. It will be through the multiple perspectives of others, that we can see clearly the heart of issues, the possible solutions and the innovation of the future. These diverse perspectives reminds us that education is not a linear process, it is not a finite destination, rather it is ever evolving, developing and growing. Education is the experience of constantly stretching and growing yet being forever incomplete.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will describe the current research findings of play pedagogies and associated learning approaches within early childhood education. It will outline the recognition and wide acceptance of play pedagogies as a pillar of curriculum design in the preschool setting, and the newly endorsed Age-Appropriate Pedagogies program. Describing the ever present audit culture and the impact on early childhood educational policies and practices, the divide between philosophical beliefs and practices will be examined. This creates a conflicted binary within early primary education, which will be examined, between the child-initiated authentic learning fostered by play pedagogies and the didactic teaching practices within a prescribed curriculum which is directed by standards and spawned by high stakes testing. Additionally, the need for research to focus beyond identifying pedagogical beliefs of teachers, to investigate in more depth the specific teaching techniques that are working in the public education arena to support child-initiated authentic learning that occurs within the scope of play pedagogies will be argued.

Historical Background

Early childhood education has historically been grounded in play pedagogies, tracing from the works of pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel to education philosopher Maria Montessori to the collective theories of Reggio Emilia. The common thread weaved through the fabric of early childhood pedagogies is experiential learning, particularly through play. This persistently recurring focal point in early learning theories throughout the ages could lead one to believe that play pedagogies are all the same. However, this is deeply misleading, as the definition of play as a teaching and learning approach has always been ambiguous at best (Smith & Vollstedt, 1985, p. 1042). Play as a pedagogy is frequently described as being active, hands-on learning through personal experience (Grieshaber, 2010; Lillemyr, Søbstad, Marder & Flowerday, 2011; New, 2008; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Synodi, 2010), although play alone does not guarantee learning and knowledge creation will occur.

Since the mid-nineteenth century Friedrich Fröbel, the founding father of the kindergarten, believed that educators should guide children's play towards meeting learning goals. Fröbel & Hailmann (1886) stated the teacher's role in children's play was to steer them away from "apparently purposeless and frivolous play to the teeming fields of earnest labor; not by contemning play but by fostering it, and by directing it in its legitimate channels" (p. 101). Within his writings, Fröbel places great value on play as a vehicle for learning and teaching, not only young children, but all learners throughout their lives. It is this attention on using play as a method for learning throughout one's life that highlights the developmental nature of such an approach. Looking at how one develops over the span of a lifetime, is the focus in the field of developmental psychology. Although not housed within the field of psychology, Fröbel's persistent

study and theorizing on how children learn from early to later life, particularly through play, certainly takes a developmental slant.

Heavily influenced by Fröbel's work, early childhood education in Queensland began to see a formalization and recognition of importance in the late nineteenth century through the Department of Public Instruction through the inaugural appointment of the role Instructress in Kindergarten. The expectation and training of early childhood teachers at this time emphasized the adoption of Fröbel pedagogical practices "consisting of play and the Fröbellian gifts and occupations" (Logan & Clarke, 1984, p. 22). The emphasis on play as a pedagogy continued through the first half of the twentieth century in Queensland, with the Brisbane Kindergarten Training College (1937) noting in their Alumnae minutes the importance of learning through play activity ensured that "a child was given a chance to develop into a happy normal social being with the right habits and attitudes towards life".

The endorsement and advocacy for play based pedagogies continued into the public schools in the 1970s when the Queensland State Government opened state preschool centers, although often not on the same site as the compulsory grades, offering two and a half full-day and/or half-day programs per week (Logan & Clarke, 2014). Although under the direction of the public education system, educators within these services were provided with the autonomy and professional respect to develop their own curriculum delivered through play pedagogies. The introduction of the first formal curriculum in the late nineties, the Preschool Curriculum Guidelines [PCG] clearly outlined that the intended purpose was "to describe, rather than prescribe, ways in which the teacher might promote play-based learning" (Queensland School Curriculum Council, 1998, p. 2). Language used within these guidelines appeared to promote and support early

childhood educators in their role of pedagogues, rather than signal the imminent approach of the standardizing of curriculum.

Eight years on from the introduction of the PCG, the Queensland Government announced that from 2007 onwards, the year before compulsory schooling would change from the current part-time offerings to a five day full day program. In anticipation of this impending change, the guidelines were superseded by the new Early Years Curriculum Guidelines [EYCG]. With this came not only an alteration in the program offering, but also in terminology. The voluntary grade was renamed from Preschool to Preparatory Year (colloquially known as Prep), thus indicating the new intent behind the change. The new EYCG did however; indicate in its language that it embraced the early childhood phase of schooling (grades one and two) with the aim to provide continuity of learning (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006a). Additionally, it outlined a conceptual framework for the phases of learning which were expected to be developed through a continuum of learning.

Unlike the Preschool Curriculum Guidelines that advocated play pedagogy, the EYCG lists play as only one of five contexts of learning deemed appropriate with the others being "real-life situations, investigations, routines and transitions, and focused learning and teaching" (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006a, p. 8). Whilst the EYLG communicated that it encompassed the early childhood phase of schooling, there was no guidance on how it was to be implemented in the compulsory grade levels. The focus was solely on the voluntary grade level Prep, thus indicating an increased focus on addressing the Queensland standardized curriculum. Only four years later in 2010, the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, n.d.) was introduced nationwide setting "the expectations for what all Australian students should be

taught" from Foundation (Prep) through to Grade Ten. In response, the Queensland Department of Education and Training developed the Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) materials, "a comprehensive set of whole-school and classroom planning materials" (Department of Education and Training, 2017, para. 1).

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Play Pedagogies and Associated Learning Approaches

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Considering that there is no one definite definition of play pedagogies as there are several methods of teaching and learning which come under this umbrella; it is important to review these in more detail. The following discussion provides an overview of the current scholarship which discusses these pedagogical approaches.

Experiential Education

Experiential education and experiential learning are often seen as synonymous with each other, and although they are related, they hold very unique meanings unto themselves. Experiential education can be defined as the overarching idea that provides the vision of how education should look and feel as an experience (Dewey, 1993). Experiential learning, on the other hand can be defined as creating new knowledge and understandings through the reflection of experiences undertaken. Lewis & Williams (1994) support this stating that at "its simplest form, experiential learning means learning from experience or learning by doing" (p. 5). The importance of education as a series of related lived experiences that the student has, which shapes knowledge construction, develops skills and supports practice which accentuates and advances not only the individual within, but also society as a whole, is the core aspiration of experiential education (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012).

John Dewey, was a pivotal scholar in the theories of experiential education, publishing his own theories which were grounded in critiques of the curriculum models

and pedagogies that were predominant in the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries, which focused on training the child to fit within the existing social order (Kliebard, 2004). In his paper entitled *The Child and the Curriculum* and published in 1902, Dewey voiced his concerns of traditional pedagogies stating that they provided hollow learning experiences because "the logically formulated material of a science or branch of learning, of a study, is no substitute for the having of individual experiences" (Dewey, 1993, p. 126). Instead, he advocated that education should be a process that is experienced rather than a preconceived outcome to which one should arrive within a given timespan, and that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits that define a single process (Dewey, 1993).

Experiential education can still be seen today within schools, although it now is predominantly seen in early childhood education before mandatory schooling grades and ironically at the completion end of formal schooling in vocational education and training learning environments where learning is competency-based. Within these educational contexts, the role of the teacher in the learning process is crucial in guiding the students to make connections between their lived experiences within their play and the curriculum connections as mandated by the governing body. As Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) declared, "the curriculum must be internalized and lived by the teacher…[so that they] see the possibilities everywhere in the child's environment" (p. 637). In the field of early childhood education, experiential learning is seen as developmentally appropriate practice, with the view of early learning programs being "a place of shared lives and relationships among many adults and many children… [a place that is] … sort of construction in motion, continuously adjusting itself" (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012, p. 41).

Developmentally Appropriate Programs

Almost twenty years ago, the American leading association on early childhood education, the National Association of Education for Young Children [NAEYC] which influences policy internationally, produced the now widely adopted and well defined position statement describing developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood education. This document has evolved over the years, resulting in several updates and editions, spawning springboard publications around the same theme and giving rise to the term 'developmentally appropriate practice' being synonymous with early childhood education. According to NAEYC (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) developmentally appropriate practice involves "teachers meeting young children where they are developmentally, both as individuals and as part of a group; and helping each child meet challenging and achievable learning goals" (p. xii). Developmentally appropriate practices, or DAP as they are commonly known, are continuously mentioned throughout the literature in early childhood education as being a pillar for teaching approaches within early childhood (Branscombe et al, 2013; Chen & McNamee, 2013; Cuffaro & Nager, 2013; Hinitz, 2013; Powell, 2013; Ray & Melendez, 2013).

However, predominantly these publications have focused on the pedagogical practices within preschool programs, leaving the conceptualization of how to implement such practices within an outcomes-driven primary setting to develop through a hazy and vague veil. This may be due to DAP preserving the value of play and recognizing that it is "an important vehicle for developing … language, cognition, and social competence" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 14). This active promotion of play as a pedagogy is at conflict with the primary school grades where the "focus is on prescribed goals and accountability through testing" and teachers "perceive that children are not

accomplishing set goals in play" (Branscombe et al, 2013, p. 149). What does prevail through the references to appropriate practices in early primary classrooms is the need to create curriculum, which builds upon where the learner is at developmentally, with what they can achieve both independently and with assistance. Branscombe et al (2013) advocate that "teachers [should] consider the context…in planning curriculum…[including]… geography, community values, required standards, and developmental levels and interests of children and teachers" (Branscombe et al, 2013, p. 18). It is through this developmental lens that play can be understood to foster and support authentic learning that is personally meaningful to the learner.

In order to develop authentic learning experiences in early primary curricula, educators must acknowledge that children are competent in the construction of their own education. As the literature reveals, many cultures around the world view children as competent constructors of knowledge, outlining how they fluidly move between the dual roles of teacher and learner within the context of play (Fortes, 2008; Gaskins, 2008; Malunowski, 2008). The perspective of children as competent in these cultures allows them to be intrinsically motivated in engaging in purposeful learning experiences, which are authentic and meaningful, as well as self-initiated. The literature certainly recognizes the importance of encouraging and sustaining children's intellectual curiosity, yet it also highlights that the realization of young children needing to be viewed as competent in creating their own learning journeys, in policy and practice, is almost exclusively confined to preschool learning environments. As Rogoff et al (2008) outright declares in Western societies, "children between 5 and 7 [are admitted] into quasi-adult status" through "the practice of beginning serious schooling" (p. 253). This entry into the world of adult expectations within the school environment results in the learner's self-efficacy

regressing due to policy and practice which clearly articulates that they are no longer competent to be involved in deciding their own learning outcomes.

Project Approach

Authentic learning is not a new concept, nor is it one that is confined to the theories of early learning within Australia. Research in child development across the globe has uncovered that authentic learning is not only valued, but also actively utilized by many cultures. In West Africa, Fortes (2008) uncovered how the Tallensi people "teach through real situations which children are drawn to participate in because it is expected that they are capable and desirous of mastering the necessary skills" (p. 37) while further north in Italy, New (2008) reports that in Reggio Emilia, projects which children are working on are,

> conducted in an atmosphere that is simultaneously playful and serious—playful in that children are free to explore their ideas by themselves and with each other, with no pressure or expectation that they will stay with a project for any predetermined length of time, nor that there is any set goal which they must obtain (p. 222).

Through these authentic learning experiences, children are constructing interdisciplinary knowledge, which holds personal meaning as they make connections to prior knowledge and begin to hypothesis about future possibilities.

The project approach, based on the work of John Dewey, involves three phases: project selection, investigation and representation, and culminating and debriefing events (Clark, 2006). This approach promotes children as active and capable contributors to their own learning journey in areas of interest to themselves. Katz and Chard (2013) acknowledge that through the project approach children design projects which are of

"special interest to them" and that they "accept responsibility for particular types of tasks that will contribute to the overall investigation" (p. 280). This approach empowers children and encourages them to design their own learning units, to engage in curriculum content in a method that is personally meaningful to themselves, and to develop depth of understanding through participation. Helm (2012) agrees, stating:

> they generate their own questions for investigation, discuss hypotheses with peers, use their notes and drawings as resources, and interview experts and we see this in the way their paintings, drawings, and sculptures represent their relationship with what they are studying (p. 73).

The project approach can be seen in the Early Years Curriculum Guidelines which advocated for "extended investigations of personal interested negotiated between children, teachers and other partners" (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006b, p. 2). As presented in these guidelines, the project approach complemented play as a context for learning rather than a substitute, being one piece of the pedagogical puzzle to meet young learners' needs.

Play Based Learning

Many early childhood educators aim to keep play as part of their programs, by employing a play based learning approach. Play based learning can be defined as a series of teacher initiated, planned play experiences designed to meet predetermined outcomes. The Early Years Learning Framework, the key component of the Australian Government's National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, describes play based learning as "a context for learning through which children organize and make sense of their social worlds, as they actively engage with people, objects and representations" (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and

Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 46). This generalized statement provides direction to those educators wanting to validate the inclusion of play in their programs, yet it does not state what this play would look like in practice. Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2013) have identified through their research, that play based learning has three distinct types: 1) open-ended play, modelled-play and, 3) purposefully framed play, and that all three have their place in a play based learning approach.

Open-ended play they contend is depicted by the teacher providing children with materials to explore and play with but there is minimal teacher engagement and interaction in the play; whereas, modelled-play sees the teacher illustrate, explain and/or demonstrates the use of materials to the children. Finally, purposefully framed play is when the teacher not only provides the children with the materials, they also model how to use the materials, and then the teacher actively interacts and engages in play with the children. (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2013, p. 333)

Hayes (2016) describes how learning spaces at Narrabundah Early Childhood School are set up to allow for different types of play both inside and outside for all students from the 3 year old preschool program through to Grade Two. She articulates that "not all tasks are self-directed" with educators taking "the opportunity to work one on one with children on shared goals (educator, child and parent/carer) while others are engaged in self-directed projects" (p. 25). Clearly play-based learning is highly contextualized and personalized dependent on the community being served and the extent to which the young child is involved in directing their own learning through play experiences.

Pillar of early childhood curriculum design

Through the review of play pedagogies and associated learning approaches, it can be clearly seen that play has been a persistent pillar of early childhood curriculum design for over a century. Whilst play based curriculum is endorsed by both the profession globally and the Australian Government locally as a preferred method of learning for young children in early childhood education and care settings prior to compulsory schooling, this support evaporates in mandated policies for the foundation grade onwards. While recognized as a fundamental approach to teaching and learning in non-compulsory early childhood education and care settings; play pedagogies are not commonly supported in compulsory education (Breathnach, O'Gorman, May & Danby, 2016, p. 78). Scheu (2016) articulates this well describing how many early childhood educators "have grieved the loss of researched, play-based inquiry teaching methods where curriculum was child-initiated and designed in collaboration" (p. 47). She goes on to note that in many early years' classrooms

> …familiar resources such as painting easels, blocks, costumes and manipulative equipment has been pushed aside for desks as teachers feel pressure to implement the teacher-directed, formalized learning of the scripted C2C units with accompanying worksheet-style assessments. (Scheu, 2016, p. 47)

Curriculum to the Classroom (C2C) and Audit Culture

With the introduction of the Australian Curriculum in 2010, each state and territory government developed their own strategies and interpretation of this national requirement. In Queensland, this manifested in the development and subsequent implementation of the Curriculum into Classroom (C2C) materials in 2012. When these were first introduced by the state public education department, Education Queensland,

the directive was that "teachers must utilize it completely in their practices" which resulted in teachers' expertise being "undervalued and their flexibility to cater for individual students was undermined" (Barton, Garvis & Ryan, 2014, p. 172). This strips educators of their role as pedagogues and supports a panopticon approach to education ensuring that all educators are exhibiting a common and consistent practice across the nation. This effectively promotes the notion that teachers do not have the ability themselves to design and deliver a high quality curriculum for our youngest citizens, and therefore need to be provided with the tools to ensure this outcome.

Pinar (2012) states "teachers have been forced to abdicate this authority by the bureaucratic protocols that presumably hold them "accountable", but which, in fact, render them unable to teach. Instead, teachers are supposed to "manage learning" (p. 4-5). Without a doubt the climate of early childhood education in public schooling in Queensland, has taken a dramatic turn where the atmospheric pressure of accountability and assessment have become the tools of oppression in order to control the curriculum. Taubman (2009) describes the current climate in education in his book *Teaching by Numbers* as being entrenched deep within an audit culture. This insidiously growing mindset is fed by the assumption that a particular knowledge and skill set in one academic area has more importance over another and in order for schooling to be efficient a sharp focus must be made on one area over another. Evidenced in this particular political approach is the adoption of a social efficiency model of education, a model that aims to control society through the predetermined and decided outcomes and to eliminate the waste in education (Kliebard, 2004). This has, has had a very strong grip on the state's schools since the introduction of the NAPLAN in 2008. The result is an

ever narrowing focus on standardized content that will be addressed in standardized tests and can be clearly seen as Pascoe & Brennan (2017) state:

> In 2009, Australia became the first country in the world to collect national data on the developmental health and wellbeing of all children as they start school. All five AEDC (Australian Early Development Census) domains have been found to be good predictors of later numeracy and literacy outcomes of children as measured by NAPLAN (p. 24).

Clearly, this stronghold has resulted in a cultivation of compliance of the teaching profession to focus solely on having children achieve in predetermined curriculum areas of worth. This has impacted how teachers teach and how students learn, and the perception of what learning should look like. As Pinar (2012) states "by linking the curriculum to student performance on standardized examinations, politicians have, in effect, taken control of what is to be taught: the curriculum" (p. 2).

The progression to this current reality has seen a shift in perceived expertise from the pedagogues themselves to the policy makers and political member in power at any given time. These new outcomes, bottom line focused experts are placing a forceful demand on educators to focus on producing students who perform well on standardized learning outcomes which culminate in and are measured by high-stakes standardized tests. The assumption underpinning audit culture is that is that there is a solitary and specific method of gauging excellence, through which both teachers and students can be assessed and compared. Unfortunately, this is not just impractical, but calls for a particular mindset or way of being, focusing only on bottom lines, rather than the growth and development of an individual. For early childhood educators in early primary classrooms, there is an increasingly powerful demand for student data to be improved so

that higher standardized student learning outcomes are produced earlier, which often has resulted in the loss of developmentally appropriate practices and play pedagogies. Branscombe, Burcham, Castle and Surbeck (2013) state, "Many teachers today, concerned about test scores view work as important and play as a waste of time, because they perceive that children are not accomplishing set goals in play" (p. 149).

This current narrative about the quality of education in the wider community posits educators as the villains promoting the audit culture mentality to the general public. Schools and educators alike, have responded to this culture of increased scrutiny by increasing their focus on prescribed goals through didactic teaching methods and teaching to the test (Curraro & Nager, 2013, p. 272; New & Kantor, 2013, p. 346), departing from play pedagogies as these become increasingly seen as an aimless pursuit which will not support increased test scores. Play and active experiential learning experiences have become progressively endangered pedagogies creating what Branscombe et al (2013, p. 143) describe as a crisis with many educators regulating "play to recess time" instead of including it in the curriculum because "they perceive that children are not accomplishing set goals in play" (p. 149). Lillemy, Søbstad, Marder and Flowerday's (2011) study on play and learning in primary school revealed that play in the classroom is rare not only in Australia, but also globally. However, the large volume of research into perspectives and attitudes about the role of play in learning and teaching clearly articulates that it is highly valued (Dodge, Heroman & Berke, 2013; Edwards & Cutter-McKenzie, 2013; Fortes, 2008; Hinitz, 2013; Hunter & Walsh, 2014; New, 2008). Even recreational play is becoming a rare privilege for children in many early primary classrooms as the pressure builds to find more instructional time to improve results in high-stakes testing. The burgeoning view that only knowledge which is audited through

standardized high-stakes testing is of most worth creates a focus on raising test scores through narrowing of curriculum, displacement of experiential pedagogies, and the development of a test driven standardized curriculum.

Conflicted Binary

The notion that play pedagogies could become a dominant guiding influence in developing early primary curriculum within public schools may be hard to visualize in the current audit culture being experienced in education. However, it has been widely documented that private and alternative schools have been successful in implementing play pedagogies "by providing opportunities for creative and satisfying work; by cultivating cooperation rather than competitiveness; by offering children meaningful and stimulating rather than rote and fragmented learning; by nurturing individuality; and by furthering values of social democracy" (Cuffaro & Nager, 2013, p. 263). It is possible that the success observed is due to the greater affordance of freedom and autonomy in the decision-making processes, which non-governmental schools have in relation to curriculum priorities and design than their typical public counterparts do. This is not an assertion that play pedagogies are only being successfully implemented in these alternatives school settings. On the contrary, approaches such as the Project Approach (Katz & Chard, 2013), HighScope Model (Schweinhart & Weikart, 2013), Reggio Emilia (New, 2008) and the Piramide Method (van Kuyk, 2013) are often seen being used within classrooms where individual educators have purchased the literature in order try the approach on their own.

These meager pockets of exploration and implementation of play pedagogies in the public education system imply that child initiated authentic learning need not to be the antithesis of the existing audit culture. Schweinhart and Weikart (2013) when

disseminating the findings from the IEA Preprimary Project (2007) revealed "across diverse countries, child-initiated activities and teachers' education appear to contribute to children's later language performance; and minimization of whole group activities and a greater number and variety of materials in preschool settings appear to contribute to their later cognitive performance" (p. 235). These research results revealed that through child-initiated learning through play pedagogies that gains were made in terms of both social and emotional development, as well in the standardized markers valued by high-stakes testing. However, the hegemony of audit culture, which dictates the educational narrative, seeks to marginalize and oppress non-conformist approaches to curriculum like play pedagogies, despite the large body of evidence that clearly shows that the two can co- exist. Carlsson-Paige (2001) testifies "… current standards-driven educational climate has edged out multiple ways of seeing and being and has driven an even bigger wedge between curriculum expectations and children's views of the world" (p. 19).

This division between the curriculum expectations forced upon the profession through the audit culture and the naturalistic authentic learning approaches with which children explore the world, within which they live, clearly illustrates the binary of paradigms that exists in early childhood education. "The predominant mode of instruction in schools continues to be teaching through telling. This robs children of the opportunity to construct knowledge and ultimately robs them of their ability to think for themselves" (Branscombe et al. 2013 p. 76). It is time to acknowledge the reality that audit culture is not going away and begin to reconsider how the circumstances it has created will be met in education. "The critical early years of schooling should build on the curiosity, wonder, intelligence, and abilities that all young children bring to classrooms and lay a solid foundation for life and school success. For many children, however, these years may

not..." (Ray & Melendez, 2013, p. 128). There is a need to maneuver the energy, which is currently focused on pushing back on the audit culture, and instead redirect it to targeting the successful implication of play pedagogies in early primary classrooms to achieve audit requirements.

Current Value of Play Pedagogies in Queensland Public Schools

While it is acknowledged that the audit culture is currently impacting the pedagogies which teachers adopt in schools, it is important to establish where play pedagogies are currently posited in the early years of formal schooling and the current value which these pedagogies hold through the state department lens.

Age Appropriate Pedagogies

In 2015, the Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) approached Griffith University to develop an Age-Appropriate Pedagogy program (AAP), as well as manage the subsequent pilot in the preparatory grade within the state public school system. Fully funded by the department, the AAP became a joint initiative aimed to "inform learning and teaching practices in the early years of schooling" (Department of Education and Training, 2015, p. 2), supposedly in response to the increased pressure to introduce formal education to children at a younger age (Cheeseman, Sumison & Press, 2014). The foundation paper drafted by Griffith University clearly articulated that the rise in standardized curriculum in early childhood classrooms "resulted in whole-class teaching and the use of direct instruction" (2015, p. 4), and drew upon several decades of research into early childhood pedagogical approaches to create the framework for the AAP program.

The foundation paper outlines eleven characteristics of age appropriate pedagogies: active, agentic, collaborative, creative, explicit, language rich and dialogic,

learner focused, narrative, playful, responsive and scaffolded (Department of Education and Training, 2015). When compared to previous Queensland-specific early childhood curriculums mentioned earlier in this chapter, the value of play pedagogies has decreased from being the predominant feature of an early years classroom (Preschool Curriculum Guidelines, 1998) to less than 10% of the endorsed pedagogies (Age Appropriate Pedagogies, 2015) in just over a decade. An additional concern is that whilst both the foundation paper and the DET Age-Appropriate Pedagogy website utilizes the terminology of 'early years of schooling', the focus is limited to the preparatory grade only. Ironically, the Department of Education and Training itself defines early years of schooling as the classes from preparatory through to second grade (Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2015), yet the first and second grades were clearly missing from the discussion.

In 2016, just over 12% of all public primary schools in Queensland were participating in the Age-Appropriate Pedagogies program, although the participation was predominately limited to the preparatory grade level. The Age Appropriate Pedagogies Program Progress Report (2016) which reiterated the vision and beliefs outlined in the foundation paper, also provided some insights into how the program was being received by administrators, teachers, children and the community. The narratives provided depicted positive responses from those involved in the program within the preparatory grades, although research findings demonstrated that while there was a clear alignment between existing research on age appropriate pedagogies and children's views, there was "not as strong an alignment between these aspects and the practices occurring in schools" (Department of Education and Training, 2016c, p. 9). When looking forward, the report acknowledges the narrowed focus on the preparatory grade and states "we are committed

to expanding the reach of the program into Years 1, 2 and 3" (p. 16) although it does not provide any information on how the department or Griffith University intend to do this.

Through the literature, not only the potential to advance the learners' personal development through the adoption of play pedagogies can be seen—but also and as equally important—the educational potential to address prescribed goals and standards is also illuminated. Current scholarship in this field suggests "that a curriculum that emphasizes child-initiated meaningful learning tasks is more likely to strengthen dispositions such as to seek mastery, to exert real effort in the face of difficulties, and to persist at challenging tasks—as well as many others usually alluded to in lists of goals and desirable educational outcomes" (Katz & Chard, 2013, p. 284). Therefore, the role of the teacher in developing curriculum is to identify and make connections between the children's interests in their play and the prescribed standards required by the national curriculum. By guiding "the choice of project topics into areas rich for learning that will sustain children's in-depth inquiry…" (Branscombe et al, 2013, p. 158) teachers would be able to utilize play pedagogies to deliver curriculum that identifies and assesses curricular sequences that are connected to standards. Play pedagogies provide these deeper learning opportunities because they allow "children to build connections across disciplines…[fostering] intellectual growth, social connection and a joy in learning" (Tomlinson, 2009, p. 259).

Intellectual Context of Early Childhood Teachers

Whilst it is clear there has been a definite shift from emphasizing play as a pedagogy to a standardized curriculum through the promotion of the C2C materials in Queensland, this is not the case within initial teacher education (ITE) programs which specialize in preparing early childhood teachers. In contrast, these programs continue to

consistently focus on training teachers to employ the developmental theories of John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Urie Bronfenbrenner, when considering curriculum design (Australian Catholic University, 2018; CQUniversity Australia, 2018; James Cook University, 2018; Queensland University of Technology, 2018; Southern Cross University, 2018; University of Southern Queensland, 2018; University of Sunshine Coast, 2018). In addition, these programs promote the pedagogies of play, relationships, place, possibility and provocation to ensure a holistic approach to teaching and learning with young children aged birth to eight years (third grade) (Australian Catholic University, 2018; CQUniversity Australia, 2018; James Cook University, 2018; Southern Cross University, 2018; University of Southern Queensland, 2018; University of Sunshine Coast, 2018). This presents preservice teachers with a conflicted professional learning experience between the theory and methods they learn at the higher education institute and the practice they encounter on their professional placements during their degree programs.

This professional conundrum continues when they enter schools as graduate teachers and are required to use the C2C documents which are prescriptive and promote didactic methods of curriculum delivery, forcing them to abandon their expertise as play pedagogues which they developed during their undergraduate degree. These circumstances strips the graduate teachers of their role as play pedagogues and plants the seeds of doubt in their own ability to design and deliver a high quality curriculum when compared to the promoted exemplar model of the C2C. Whilst early childhood educators in grades one and two may still hold strong beliefs about play pedagogies, the C2C restricts the use of these pedagogies in favor of using standardized didactic methods.

Now is the time to ratify that further research is clearly needed within the first and second grade spaces to go beyond identifying the personal and academic benefits of play pedagogies. There is a distinct opportunity to investigate in more depth the specific teaching techniques that early childhood teachers in grades one and two in the public education arena are using to support child-initiated authentic learning that occurs within the scope of these pedagogies. Re-examining teacher practices within the profession itself through leadership of the implementation of play pedagogies, it is hoped educators will be empowered to be the trailblazers in reinstating the importance of play in early primary curricula.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The increased focus on standardizing curriculum in order to address and meet the requirements of the standardized tests in early childhood primary/elementary classrooms has resulted in a significant increase in didactic teacher focused pedagogies. This swing to teacher focused, data driven practices have come at the expense of child focused, developmentally aligned pedagogies such as play, which have been the cornerstone of early childhood education for over a century. This chapter outlines the methodology employed to understand how teachers working in grades one and two of public education within the Mackay Region of Education Queensland are using play pedagogies in particular to deliver the standardized curriculum known as Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) materials, which are state endorsed. The embedded assumptions about reality and the nature of knowledge will be discussed together with how these influence the worldview taken within this study. The advantages of using a developmentally appropriate lens, focusing specifically on play pedagogies as a theoretical framework, will also be argued. A definition of the research design, including the sampling strategy, data collection and data analysis, and of particular importance the trustworthiness and potential ethical issues will be outlined.

Statement of the Problem

The existing scholarship outlined in the previous chapter clearly illustrates the division between the standardized curriculum materials which early phase teachers in Queensland public schools are strongly encouraged to implement, and the play pedagogies which are the pillar of early childhood curriculum design. This conflict between the audit culture promoting the use of standardized C2C materials and the historic approach to teaching and learning in early childhood education, although cogently apparent, holds an underlying shared goal of cultivating student knowledge and understandings. The problem which becomes obvious is how the dualism of these pedagogical approaches undermines the goal of each to improve student outcomes, rather than working in unison to achieve desired results.

Purpose of Study

The provocation for undertaking this research study was (1) to explore how, if at all, teachers in public education within the Mackay region are using play pedagogies, and (2) how are they using play pedagogies to deliver the Australian Curriculum through the State Government standardized framework of the C2C planning documents. Focusing on the pedagogical practices of early childhood educators in grades one and two in the early year's phase of public primary schooling, it was expected that this study would provide a platform for these educators to have their voices heard and their stories told. Additionally, it was anticipated that the study would also identify successful strategies and potential barriers in implementing play pedagogies to deliver standardized curriculum within these grades.

Research Questions

How, if at all, are early childhood educators in grades one and two in public education currently using play pedagogies to deliver C2C curriculum?

a) Which key learning curriculum areas are most likely to be delivered through the implementation of play pedagogies?

b) What strategies do teachers use to include play within the enacted curriculum?

c) What obstacles do teachers encounter in not only adopting but also consistently using play pedagogies in early primary classrooms?

d) Where do educators seek support and guidance in developing the enacted curriculum?

Methodological Philosophy

Paul (2005) states that research is positioned in a particular time and cultural space and this impacts what exactly is being examined, the methods used, the perspective taken, and ultimately how it is interpreted. Understanding that the inquiry is situated in a given point of time and was observed through a specific lens, highlights the importance of employing a methodology which complemented and assisted in addressing the overarching research question. The ontological understanding that multiple realities exist at any given point in time, as realities are constructed through the experiences one has with the world around them to create their own known truth, is integral to this study. Berger & Luckmann (1966) explain that although they live in a common world with others, it is through the individual's own experience and interaction with the world around them, that their reality is created and therefore, they acknowledge that "others have a perspective … that is not identical with mine" and "that there is an ongoing correspondence between my meanings and their meanings in this world, that we share a

common sense about its reality" (p. 37). This is clearly illustrated through the disconnection between play pedagogies which are central to the work of early childhood teachers (Hunter & Walsh, 2013) and the audit culture that permeates the education profession (Taubman, 2009; Kumashiro, 2012).

This research is grounded in the assumption that the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known is developed through interactions between each in order for knowledge to be created. Guba and Lincoln (1998) describe this postulation as a constructionist epistemological stance where "findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds" (p. 207). The knowledge created through these findings obtained during the course of the interactions with the participants were socially constructed, illuminating perspectives and understandings of early childhood teachers regarding play pedagogies through their work. Through an examination of existing scholarship in the field of early childhood education, it is evident that play as a pedagogical approach is held in high esteem and often framed within a developmentally appropriate practice model (Branscombe, et al 2013; Fortes, 2008; New, 2008; Hinitz, 2013; Dodge et al, 2013; Schweinhart & Wikart, 2013; Cuffaro & Nager, 2013; Katz & Chard, 2013; van Kuyk, 2013). The value placed on play as a medium for teaching, learning and assessment served as a conduit in the inquiry process, as it is this feature of pedagogical beliefs and practice which is being examined in this study. Adopting an interpretivist's perspective, this study focused on developing meaning and understanding through the exploration of the multiple realities within the common space of early childhood education in the Mackay region.

Worldview

As there is not one set paradigm which frames this study, rather there are a set of embedded assumptions which inform the perspective for the research, it is more appropriate to describe this standpoint as a worldview (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The foundational embedded assumption in this study is that reality cannot be known with certainty and like any assumed theory it is always revisable. Reality is not a literal concept, rather it is a perception of truth at any one understood point in time and therefore it stands to reason that multiple realities must exist simultaneously depending on one's perspective. Because it is assumed that truth is relative to the current viewpoint one takes, there are no absolute truths, only what is known to be true thus far, to what Dewey referred to as warranted assertions. The assumption that the nature of knowledge develops as a collective of understandings gathered through one's personal experiences and interactions with the world and others around them is woven throughout the study. Dewey (1920) argued that we recall the past as individuals because it adds value to the present, resulting in our present understanding of truth being current only at this moment. It is through these collective understandings we develop familiarity and create a schema of known experiences and expected outcomes, which becomes our knowledge. Piaget (2003) claims that all interactions with the world and others around oneself, presents situations where one's current schema will be challenged thus creating disequilibrium, an inner conflict requiring schemas to be adjusted to accommodate this new knowledge.

Acknowledging that there are multiple realities, all of which are socially constructed, at any juncture invariably means there is also an assumption that there will be commonalities, but also differences arising amongst these realities. This is a naturalist perspective which understands that these differences cannot be resolved (Erlandson,

Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993), rather than seeking to do so, one should honor these differences as they enhance each other's meanings. The research questions guiding the study reflected these embedded assumptions as they sought to discover not only the commonalities being experienced by the early childhood educators, but also the uniqueness of each educator's experience, especially in the final phase of the study. The value in these unique experiences provided the final findings with robustness and authenticity as this study sought to give a voice to the sometimes marginalized voices of practicing teachers. Likewise, the research questions recognized that the realities associated with the use of play pedagogies change dependent on perspective and experiences, and therefore inquire about differences in curriculum content areas and how these impact educator's realities and this study sought to explore each of these spaces beyond the general pedagogical practices of the day. This research aimed to reflect the "lived" realities, rather than provide further rhetoric relating to practices in the early primary grades.

Theoretical Lens

Ecological. Recognizing that there are many facets of society that not only interact with each other, but also influence each other, this research is informed by Urie Bronfenbrenner's *Ecology of Human Development Theory*. Within this model, Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines development "as the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain or alter its properties" (Purpose and Perspective section, para. 23). It is this concept of the individual's development through interactions with others, their environment and the notion that each influence each other, which this study is grounded within. Extending upon this, the assumption that play is the innate medium through

which children naturally explore and learn about the world around them, their place within this environment and the relationships that exist between the two; is evident in this study. Through this theoretical lens, children's play can be clearly seen as a context within which opportunities for authentic learning to arise, however it is recognized that play alone does not ensure that learning and knowledge creation occurs, hence the importance of centering the attention on early childhood educator play pedagogies.

Social Constructivist. The lived professional experiences of early childhood teachers in public schools within the Mackay region working with young children in the grades one and two, and the interactions they have with policy and mandated curriculum, work together to construct their reality. Lincoln & Guba (2013) state "constructivists recognize that it is rarely the raw physical reality which shapes our behavior and our response to the physical environment" rather it is "the meanings we associate with any given tangible reality or social interaction which determines how we respond" (p. 12). Whilst it is acknowledged that each individual teacher will have different experiences, contexts, students and leadership; it is also recognized that there will be elements of similarities amongst their realities. Acknowledging that each individual teacher may share common threads within their individual realities, it is these shared understandings that this study aims to uncover and explore.

Naturalist. Once uncovered, the common threads that are woven through the various realities held by early childhood teachers in early primary classrooms in the Mackay region would also highlight contrasting views and strategies. Erlandson et al (1993) state "a naturalistic paradigm assumes that there are multiple realities, with differences among them that cannot be resolved through rational processes or increased data" (p. 14). These differences are also an important element to be explored and

explained, as they are the contextual weft that creates the unique perspectives and understanding of the early childhood teachers at their given school sites. These "multiple realities enhance each other's meanings; [whereas] forcing them to a single precise definition emasculates meaning" (Erlandson et al, 1993, p. 15).

Research Design

Posited within a curriculum theory framework, this study aimed to understand how teachers are using play pedagogies to deliver the standardized C2C curriculum within their early primary classrooms. The need to understand the quantitative aspects of the use and value of play pedagogies across the context of this region in grades one and two; coupled with wanting to provide a voice to these teachers lived experiences, a mixed-methods approach was utilized.

Appropriateness of the Research Design

Predominantly, research conducted in Australia around and within education is qualitative in design, yet policy and curriculum decisions are primarily based on quantitative data, which is collated through the standardized testing regime and analyzed through the neo-liberalist perspective that has been adopted by the Australian Government. It was anticipated the implementation of such a research design would provide a greater breadth and depth of understanding of what percentage of early years teachers in formal school settings are trying to implement aspects of play pedagogy in their delivery of the C2C, and out of those identify the areas of the C2C syllabus which are most likely to being implemented through play pedagogy. Accepting that realities are constructed through experience with the world, and that multiple can exist at any one given point in time, this study strived to understand the realities and experiences of early

childhood educators within the Mackay region working in a system absorbed in an audit culture.

The methodology chosen for this study was a mixed methods sequential explanatory mixed design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), with a two phase process. The researcher defined mixed methods research as employed by this study, as the coming together of diverse methods to collect and analyze data to best address the research question. The purpose of integrating quantitative and qualitative methods in this study was so that the initial data set could provide "information for subsequent data collection and analysis procedures" (Guest, 2012, p. 148). The first phase was quantitative in design consisting of a Likert scale survey that was developed specifically for this study. This survey was based on the current understandings from the literature review, combined with some questions seeking demographic information, and was reviewed by an experienced researcher for appropriateness. This survey was then distributed to the approved public school early childhood teacher population in the Mackay region, in an effort to illuminate how/if these educators in grades one and two are currently attempting to use play pedagogies to deliver C2C.

The results from this survey were analyzed to identify frequency of issues, as well as commonalities and differences amongst the early childhood teachers in these two grades within the district. To further develop understandings from these initial findings, further examination studied the high and low extremes of these results to identify the direction in which the qualitative strand should examine further. During the examination of the high frequency issues that have been identified through the findings in phase one, unresolved ponderings and opportunities for further investigation was developed for a greater depth of understanding. Once recognized, the spaces pleading for further

explanation provided the impetus for the development of the qualitative strand of this study. It was at this point that open-ended focus questions were developed in response to the unanswered questions from the first phase in order to garner explanations, and to provide early childhood educators with the opportunity to tell their stories.

Finally, the second phase involved in-depth interviews with four educators from a range of primary school demographics: rural [<50 students enrolled], regional [50-200 students enrolled], suburban [200-500 students enrolled] and urban [>500 students enrolled]. In addition to the in-depth interviews, the participants were asked to provide copies of their personal curriculum planning which outlined their daily plan and practices for a period of one school term (ten weeks). These schools provide education for students from Prep (four to five year olds) through to Grade Six (ten to eleven year olds). The aim of this phase was to uncover the authentic narrative of their work relating to play pedagogies and to collect additional data in an effort to explain findings from the first phase.

A visual representation of this sequential mixed design can be seen in Figure 1.
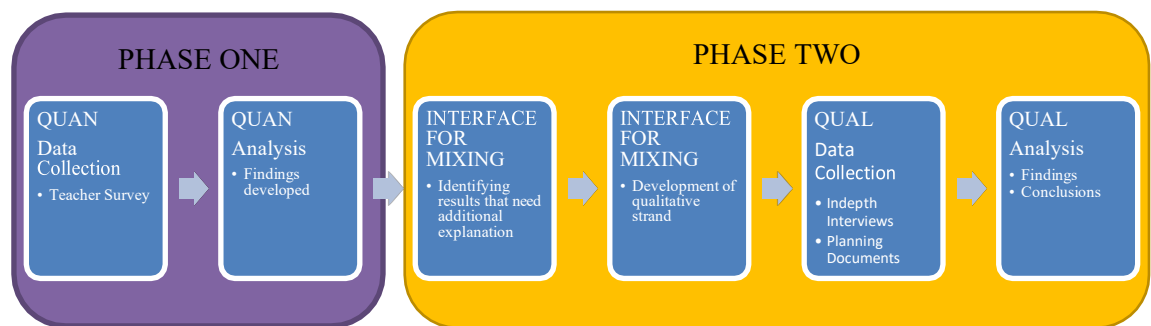

FIGURE 1. Procedural Diagram of Study

This design ensured that trends identified through the quantitative phase could be clarified and explained through the qualitative data collection phase (Smart, 2014). It was anticipated that by employing a mixed method research approach to this research, I would

be able to gain a greater breadth and depth of understanding of how many teachers in the region are currently attempting to marry standardized curriculum with play pedagogies. Aiming to understand how the binary of standardized curriculum and play pedagogies could be married to achieve the common goal of furthering a child's knowledge and understandings of curriculum content through a mixed methods approach, provided philosophical symmetry as I attempted to combine quantitative and qualitative methods in order to explain the current state of play in more depth. Morse (1991) refers to this approach as methodological triangulation, as there are at least two different methods being used to address the same problem, and likewise there are several different philosophical assumptions behind the design. Certainly, the first phase, the quantitative portion of the study, is firmly grounded within a post-positivist perspective to develop the survey instrument, measure the variables and assess the statistical results. Using a deductive process, the assumptions then shift in the final phase to a constructivist perspective, aspiring to obtain in-depth narratives to develop deeper understandings.

Sampling Strategy

The study population of phase one was selected through a purposive sampling method to ensure that the target population of early childhood teachers employed to work within early primary classrooms (first grade and second grade) in the Mackay region are surveyed in order to garner some generalizable findings within the geographical educational context. Traditionally in the State of Queensland, the first grade has been the beginning of compulsory schooling, although there has always been a year of state education available to four year olds prior to this grade, first in the form of Pre-School Education [1973-2007] then in the offering of the Prep grade if families wished to access this program for their children. Until 2017, this grade has been a non-compulsory year of

education, although it was considered beneficial for young children to attend the prep grade in order to develop foundational understandings for academic success (Queensland Government, 2016). This entry level grade had customarily been focused on creating programs that catered to the children's interests and developmental needs through the provision of play pedagogies (Logan & Clarke, 1984) yet this has changed with increased focus on improving student performance on the national standardized testing, National Assessment of Performance in Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN]. Both the Queensland Preschool Curriculum Guidelines (1998) and the Early Years Learning Guidelines (2006) which encompassed Prep through Second Grade, had play as the core pedagogy advocated to deliver these curriculums, however with increased audit culture and the inclusion of the Prep grade in the national curriculum, there has been a distinct decline of play pedagogies in early years classrooms from Prep through to Second Grade (Breathnach, O'Gorman & Danby, 2016).

Since 2015, the Age Appropriate Pedagogies program (AAP) (Department of Education and Training, 2015), a joint initiative between the Queensland Department of Education and Training (DET) and Griffith University, has been advocated and supported to 'inform learning and teaching practices in the early years of schooling' (p. 2), in response to the increased pressure to introduce formal education to children at a younger age (Cheeseman, Sumison & Press, 2014). While the foundation paper for this program clearly recognizes that there has been an increase in the implementation of a "formal, content-oriented curriculum [which] has resulted in whole-class teaching and the use of direct instruction methods in many early years' classrooms" (2015, p.4), the focus of the research component is limited to collecting data from the Prep Grade only. Early years of schooling are defined by DET to be the classes Prep through to second grade

(Queensland Department of Education and Training, 2015) and while the AAP research project focuses on teachers within the Prep Grade using a variety of pedagogies when working young children, this project focuses on educators in grades one and two and how they are using play pedagogies.

In order to delve deeper into the findings from the first phase to start developing deeper understandings, convenience sampling of a much smaller population took place in order to develop illustrated case studies. The purpose of developing these case studies will be to provide a window into the lived experiences of early childhood teachers working in grades one and two within the region. Mann (2006) supports this approach stating that illustrative case studies are "descriptive; they utilize one or two instances to show what a situation is like" (p. 70). Through the provision of four illustrated case studies, one from each of the four different contextual settings, the researcher is aiming to build deep descriptive and constructive interpretations of the current realities faced by early primary teachers. When striving to understand the experience being studied, case studies are a superb method because it allows the researcher to gain more fine-grained insights within the wider spectrum of the context being observed (Stainthorp & Hughes, 2004). It is clear that the realities experienced by these early primary teachers would influence their praxis and therefore these realities are affected by the context in which they are formed. Thus, to understand how play pedagogy is being used by early primary teachers, it is necessary to understand the viewpoint of the teachers as a whole and how it fits within the context of curriculum in those schools.

Sample Size. Phase one aimed to survey all early years teachers employed to teach within the early years' classrooms in public primary education in the Mackay region, which currently is approximately 252 teachers. The Mackay region is within the

Central Queensland Department of Education and Training District, and houses the districts' head office. This region encompasses a wide range of school contexts from one teacher-principal schools which have less than twenty children enrolled (Band 5) to schools with over a thousand students enrolled (Band 10). Historically, a district of agriculture, the Mackay region is a diverse community with a significant immigrant population, with almost twenty percent (19.9%) of the citizens in the area having been born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016). Although a fifth of the community are born overseas, English remains the primary spoken language (72.5% speak English only), with other top languages being Tagalog (3.6%), Filipino (2.4%), and Mandarin (1.1%) (ABS, 2016). There is a slight gender imbalance amongst students in the early years' phase of schooling with the 2011 census showing that 52% of the population aged five to nine years of age are male and 48% female.

In order to gain access to the teacher population within the first and second grades in the Mackay region, both the Oklahoma State University's Institutional Review Board and CQUniversity's Ethics Committee (the researcher's employer) was obtained prior to seeking approval from the Queensland Department of Education and Training's [DET] Office of Research to conduct research within their schools. Approval was received from DET's Office of Research in late November 2017, with the provision that permission was sought from the Principal at each school approached to participate in the project. There was a total of eleven school Principals out of the sixty approved by DET which indicated they would not be willing to support this research project. Two school principals did not respond to requests either by phone or email to arrange an appointment to meet to discuss the study and possible participation; and three did respond to state that they would not approve the research project being advertised in their schools. Five

provided a polite "we are not interested in participating in this project at this time" and two cited existing workload commitments within the classrooms as a reason for non-participation in the project. Of particular note, was the response of one particular principal who stated via phone they unequivocally did not want their first and second grade teachers to be discussing or thinking about anything that was off the school focus of explicit teaching and achieving outcomes, and therefore they would not be willing to endorse the study. This reduced the potential pool of participants from 252 early phase teachers in the district to 110 early phase teachers, as these were schools which had a larger enrolment base. Once approval was received from the remaining schools the study which was a mixed methods sequential explanatory design began.

Once approval was received at the local level, a project information sheet with a link to the first phase of the study, an online Likert scale survey, was distributed to all grade one and two teachers in the participating schools in an effort to illuminate how these educators are currently attempting to use play pedagogies to deliver C2C. To incentivize participation in phase one, there were three one hundred dollar gift vouchers from EDSCO (a local educational supplier), which were randomly allocated to three teachers from the participant pool. From the possible 110 surveys distributed, it was projected that with the public education organizational support that approximately 30% of the participants would return the survey completed, yet this project received a response rate of almost 32% with thirty-five early childhood teachers participating.

Phase two selected four early years' teachers, with at least one teacher in each of the different school demographics (one rural, one regional, one suburban and one urban). These participants were identified through a call for volunteers at the end of phase one and a participant from each of the different demographical classifications was randomly

selected. It was important to garner a volunteer from each of these different environments so that both threads of commonality and shared experiences could be recognized, as well as unique issues that are endemic to each demographic school context could be identified. Like the first phase, there was an incentive to participate with each participant in this phase receiving a one hundred and fifty dollar gift voucher from EDSCO.

Data Collection

    Teacher survey. With the intention of being able to create a clear vision of the current reality faced by early childhood teachers, the purpose of the first stage of data collection was to inform the current state of play in the field. This involved collecting quantitative data in relation to the frequency of play pedagogies being planned and implemented to deliver C2C across the Mackay region. This was done through a Likert scale survey (Appendix A) that was distributed to early childhood teachers in public education to complete. Purposefully developed for this research project, the teacher survey draws upon the six distinct areas identified in the existing scholarship – standardized curriculum, play pedagogies, project-based learning, teacher oriented practices, audit culture and the historical early childhood curriculum documents in Queensland.

    Beginning by gathering some generic demographical information, the teacher survey addressed these six topics through an additional seventy-nine questions using a five point Likert scale where "each response is assigned a point value, and an individual's score is determined by adding the point values of all questions" (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012, p.157). Although the questions were evenly distributed amongst these areas, they were randomized and there was no explicit indication which topic was being addressed with each question. These questions were further subdivided between two distinct aspects

of early childhood teachers' lived experiences: their pedagogical beliefs and their pedagogical practices.

In-depth interviews. Following this, phase two collected qualitative data collection to construct a deeper understanding of the process of how teachers are attempting to bridge the divide between mandated standardized curriculum and authentic learning through play. This was initially done through the implementation of semi-structured in-depth interviews with four teachers across the various demographics of the Mackay region. Continuing the worldview that knowledge is socially constructed, these interviews were guided by Miller & Crabtree's model of depth interviewing where the focus was "on facilitating a co-construction of the interviewer's and an informant's experience and understanding" of the experience being studied (Miller & Crabtree, 2004, p. 188). Through the interface for mixing, results which required further explanation were identified and these were the "conceptual domains around which an interview guide can be developed" (p. 189). Thus, a list of open-ended questions for the interviews was developed (Appendix B) from the analysis of the results from the first phase data. With the aim to elicit authentic narratives from the teachers working in the early primary classrooms, the interviews were conducted in an everyday conversational style "sharing and hearing within a study-specific, confidential, open-ended discourse" (Miller & Crabtree, 2004, p. 185).

Planning documents. Also, within this second phase, the interviewee's personal planning documents, spanning at least six weeks was collected for analysis. Similarly, to the in-depth interviews, the purpose of reviewing these documents was to understand the practicalities of how teachers in the early primary years are using play pedagogies in their daily delivery of the standardized curriculum. Patton (2002) states that "program records

can provide a behind-the-scenes look at program processes and how they came into being" (p. 294). It was anticipated that these documents would complement and extend upon the authentic narratives garnered through the in-depth interviews.

Forms for recording information. For the quantitative data collection, the online software SurveyMonkey was utilized for ease of access to participants and automated analysis of data. During phase two, face to face in-depth interviews were recorded using a digital recording device, and accompanying planning documents from the teachers were collected as a digital file.

Analysis

As the purpose of this study was to investigate how early years' teachers in state primary schools within the Mackay region are trying to deliver the standardized curriculum through the medium of play, it was necessary to choose the most suitable methods of data analysis to ensure that the data is explored thoroughly and that any conclusions established could be verified. Phase one of the study, which consists of the quantitative data collection through a teacher survey, was analyzed using univariate analysis to identify frequency distribution. Huberty & Morris (1989) state "univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) [is used] when a single outcome variable is involved", which in this phase is play pedagogy. During the analysis, survey items will be grouped into clusters that address the same issue and total scores will be developed across each item cluster. Gay, Mills & Airasian (2012) support this approach stating it "improves reliability of the results themselves" (p. 195). Once the frequencies were identified, these hot topics informed the direction and development of the in-depth interview questions which become phase two.

As stated earlier, the final phase involved in-depth interviews which were transcribed for analysis. In an effort to reduce the quantity of data that I was working with after collection, the transcripts were analyzed through open coding, that is, coding data for major categories [or themes] of information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The process began by first of all reading through all the data safeguarding that it was read without bias, without the research questions in mind. Next during the second read through, review comments were made for each subject that emerges and these formulated the immediate themes. After the immediate themes were identified, then the data was analyzed a second time using focused coding to reveal the emic issues that appeared. At this point, the analysis focused on the planning documents and whether these corresponded to or contradicted the hot topics found in the survey data and/or the themes in the interviews. This involved a review of each document, one at a time, cutting and pasting the data chunks, sorting them according to the themes that emerged. Each theme was given a title and a color code. I used the patterns that emerged between the teachers' interviews, planning documents and the survey data, used these as focal points for analysis. This enabled clarification and refinement of themes, allowing me to visualize common threads that were woven through the context being researched.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study is of utmost importance. To ensure that this project is credible and valid, a member check was employed to ensure that the interpretation of the data is accurate, in addition to providing a space for a declaration of researcher bias to be acknowledged. Throughout the in-depth interviews in the second phase of the study, member checks were conducted both in action by using paraphrasing and summarization for clarification to ensure that the intent of teachers was correctly

identified and understood; and again, after the initial revision of the transcripts.

Reliability was attained through revising transcripts once completed against the audio

recordings to ensure that they did not contain any obvious mistakes and by developing an

audit train in my findings chapter (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Once the transcripts were

confirmed for accuracy, they were then provided to the teachers interviewed to validate

the accuracy of the analysis and identification of findings. Triangulation to improve

validity was achieved by examining the data collected through the teacher survey,

planning documents, in-depth interviews, member checks, and critically examining the

evidence from these for converging themes. Guest (2012) supports this approach stating,

"collecting several types of data from different sources is generally accepted as good

practice that enhances a study's validity" (p. 143).

Potential Ethical Issues

Every researcher approaches a topic with a personal journey behind them which

informs how they view the world and interpret the interactions within it. As such it is

important to acknowledge and discuss the potential ethical issues which these biases may

raise within the scope of this research project.

Researcher Bias

I am myself, an early childhood educator, having obtained a Bachelor's degree in

Education specializing in Early Childhood in 1997. Since this time, I have gained twenty

years of experience teaching in a variety of settings within the early childhood

profession. I have taught both for private organizations and public schooling in Australia

and was a play pedagogy trainer for the state Department of Education in Queensland.

During that time, I was also the Head of Mentoring, not only at the school level but

also for the school district. I am currently working as an education lecturer at

CQUniversity

Australia, Mackay City Campus, teaching undergraduate students who are studying within education programs. As an experienced early childhood educator, I am not only aware of the importance of play, but I am also an active advocator for play pedagogies as a vehicle for learning and teaching in a developmentally appropriate manner. Thus, this study investigates the use of play pedagogy, not whether or not it is the correct approach to teaching young children. I am also aware from observing teachers in the field both in Australia and abroad, that play as a method for teaching and assessing in standardized curriculum is rapidly dwindling.

Protection of the Rights of Participants

As I am a regular visitor, in my capacity as the university supervisor to preservice education students engaged in professional practice field placements within the school district this research is proposed to take place in, I have already established professional relationships with senior management and the organizational leadership team members. This could potentially cause the participants to be reluctant to participate if they feel that I am reporting back to their supervisors. Participants were informed of my role in this project and that the only persons to view the project data gathered prior to de-identification will be themselves and myself. Each participant, and any identifying aspect in the data was assigned a pseudonym, and the data was stored in a confidential locked file, which was identified by a research code only on the researcher's professional computer.

Prior to the project going ahead, an Ethics Committee Review application was submitted to CQUniversity Australia; an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was submitted to Oklahoma State University and an Application to Conduct Research in Education Sites with Education Queensland was submitted. The research did not go

ahead until approval was obtained from all three organizations. Whilst the aim of this study was to find credible answers to the research questions, as Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) points out these "answers are only acceptable if they also ensure the well-being of the participants in your study" (p. 198).

Researcher's Resources and Skills

There are several resources that were needed to complete this study, the most essential of these being time. Time to step away from teaching in order to conduct interviews, review planning documentations, analysis of data and to write up the findings. A computer to collect as well as analyze the survey and planning document data was also needed. The computer was also needed to transcribe the interview data and publish findings in addition to an mp3 digital recording device to record the in-depth interviews. I employed skills in non-parametric analysis, designing and conducting in-depth interviews, transcription and coding; gained through successful completion of coursework as part of my doctoral program.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Since mid-2017, the public education department representatives within the
Mackay Region of Central Queensland District have extended their promotion of the age-
appropriate pedagogies (Department of Education and Training, 2016a) through
professional discussions and professional meetings to include first and second grades, yet
all physical documentation and professional development training available in the region
still specifically targets and focuses on supporting teachers in the prep grade (the
equivalent to American Kindergarten - children aged five to six years). This reveals a
hidden curriculum (Moroye, 2013) implying that serious learning only occurs in grades
after the preparatory (prep) year. It is within this space that the hidden curriculum lies
that the study is situated to explain how teachers in grades one and two are using play
pedagogies to deliver the Australian Curriculum through the standardized framework of
the C2C materials.

Challenges in Accessing Schools

There were sixty schools identified in the region which were open and operating
in 2018 and from these, forty-nine Principals approved information about the project

being disseminated to the first and second grade teachers in their schools. There was a total of eleven schools which indicated they would not be willing to support this research project. Two school principals did not respond to requests either by phone or email to arrange an appointment to meet to discuss the study and possible participation; and three did respond to state that they would not approve the research project being advertised in their schools. Five provided a polite "we are not interested in participating in this project at this time" and two cited existing workload commitments within the classrooms as a reason for non-participation in the project. Of particular note, was the response of one particular principal who stated via phone they unequivocally did not want their first and second grade teachers to be discussing or thinking about anything that was off the school focus of explicit teaching and achieving outcomes, and therefore the principal would not be willing to endorse the study. Once approval was received from the remaining schools the study began.

From the potential 110 grade one and two teachers in the participating schools (N = 110), thirty-five teachers completed the survey ($n = 35$), resulting in an almost 32% response rate. The results from this phase provided the foundation for the development of the qualitative questions to be used in the second phase of the study. Participants from the first phase were asked if they would like to volunteer for the second phase and from the seven educators that responded positively to this request four were identified from a cross-section of school contexts through the region. The second phase involved in-depth interviews in order to delve deeper into the initial findings, coupled with collection of the teachers personal planning documents in order to explain the reasons been the resulting trends and/or recurrent themes arising from the survey. Through the interviews and

analysis of curriculum planning documents it was possible to uncover the authentic narrative of the work of early phase teachers in this study.

Trends

Through the analysis of the data collected in first phase there were distinct variables that stood out as significant, school context and teachers' career stage. The school contexts demonstrated that there were particular school demographics which were more inclined to have teachers that held pedagogical beliefs and practices aligned with the standardized curriculum and those that are more aligned to play pedagogies. Participants in rural school settings (school enrolment size smaller than 50 students) indicated that they were least likely to hold beliefs aligned with standardized curriculum in their responses to questions 11, 23, 25 and 37 on the teacher survey (Appendix B) that standardized curriculum was of little or no importance to them (Figure 2). There was no variance within the responses to the questions regarding pedagogical beliefs related to standardized curriculum.
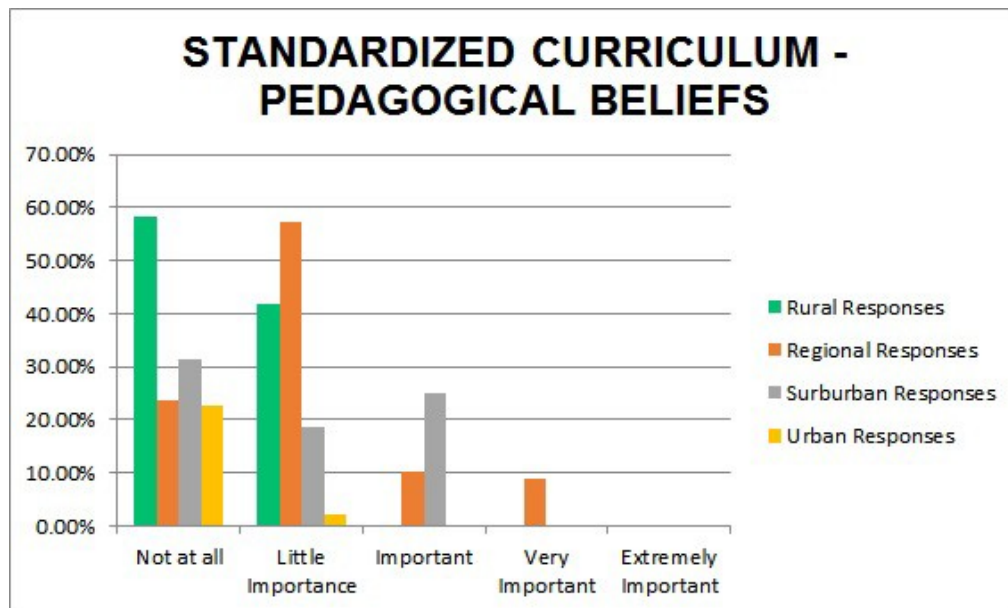
Figure 2. Pedagogical Beliefs about Standardized Curriculum

In contrast 89% of grade one and two teachers in rural school settings acknowledged through questions 39, 40, 42, 43, 57, 70, 72, 73 and 79 on Teacher Survey (Appendix B) that they regularly implement practices which align to standardized curriculum (Figure 3). There was some variance in responses from the teachers on questions 42 & 43 regarding pedagogical practices related to standardized curriculum, and these are outlined in Table 1.
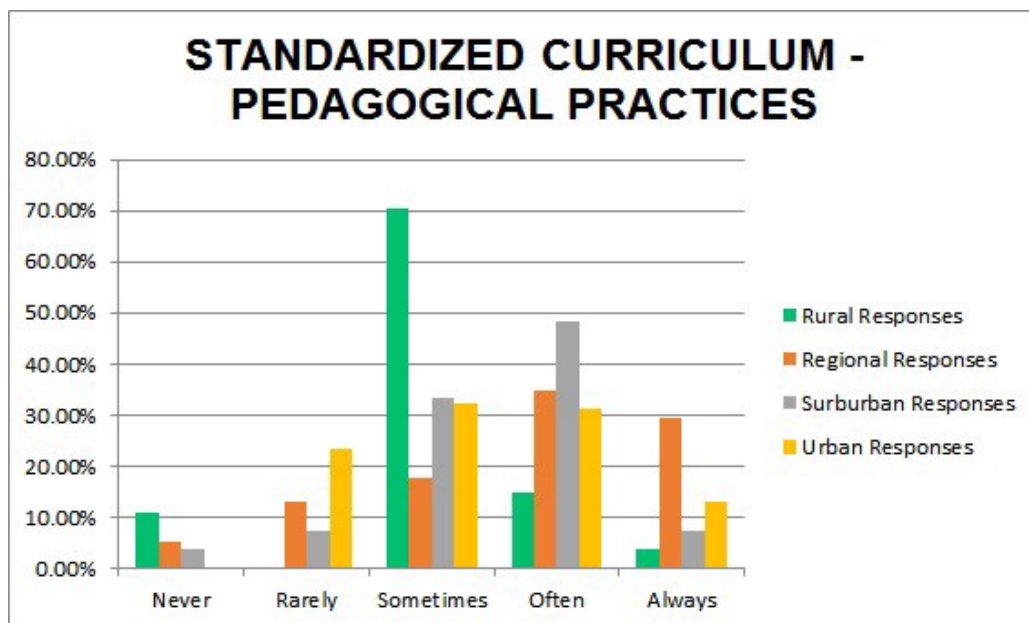
Figure 3. Pedagogical Practices about Standardized Curriculum

Rural Responses – Standardized Curriculum Pedagogical Practices			
	X (Rural Mean)	s'' (Variance)	σ_x (standard deviation)
Q42. Use Education Queensland's C2C in combination with the Australian Curriculum	4 (often)	1.5	1.23
Q43. Use Education Queensland's C2C as a guide when planning	3 (sometimes)	0.5	0.71

Table 1: Rural Responses – Standardized Curriculum Pedagogical Practices

Interestingly, 75% of this cohort of teachers also indicated they held pedagogical beliefs that aligned to the expectations of accountability and audit culture (Figure 4) and

that they implement practices which align with this culture (Figure 5). There was no variance in the teacher's responses regarding their pedagogical beliefs related to audit culture although there was variance in response to question 77 regarding pedagogical practices related to audit culture, and this is outlined in Table 2.
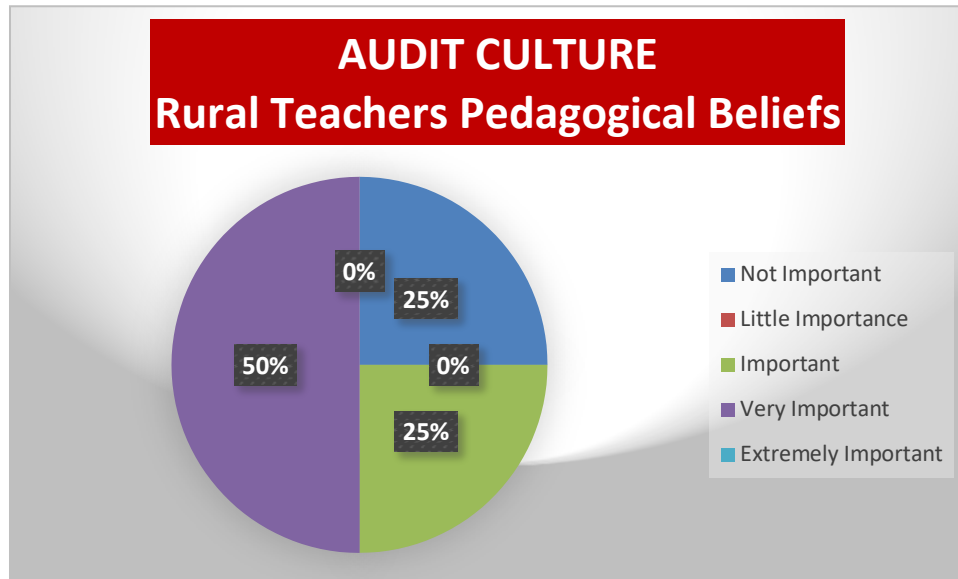
Figure 4. Rural Teachers Pedagogical Beliefs about Audit Culture
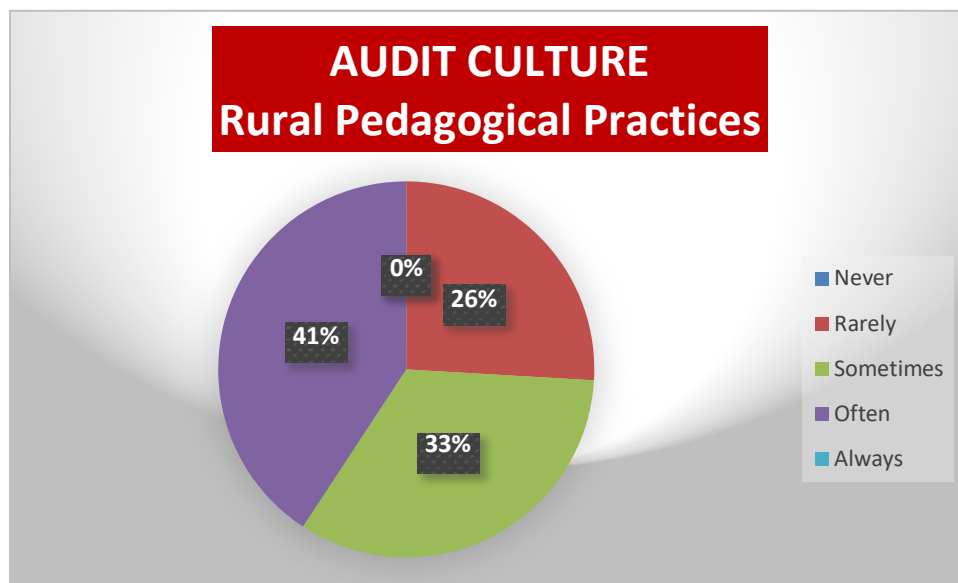
Figure 5. Rural Teachers Pedagogical Practices about Audit Culture

Rural Responses – Audit Culture Pedagogical Practices			
	X (Rural Mean)	$s^{"}$ (Variance)	σ_x (standard deviation)
Q77. Feel play is valued as a pedagogical approach by your administrator	3 (sometimes)	1.5	1.23

Table 2: Rural Responses – Audit Culture Pedagogical Practices

Teachers in suburban schools (school enrolment size between 200 and 500 students) all indicated they believe play pedagogies were important (Figure 6) and teachers in this context indicated they were most likely to implement practices which align with these practices with 93% indicating this (Figure 7). There was no variance in response to questions regarding play pedagogical beliefs, however variance was seen in response to each question regarding pedagogical practices related to play and these are outlined in Table 3.
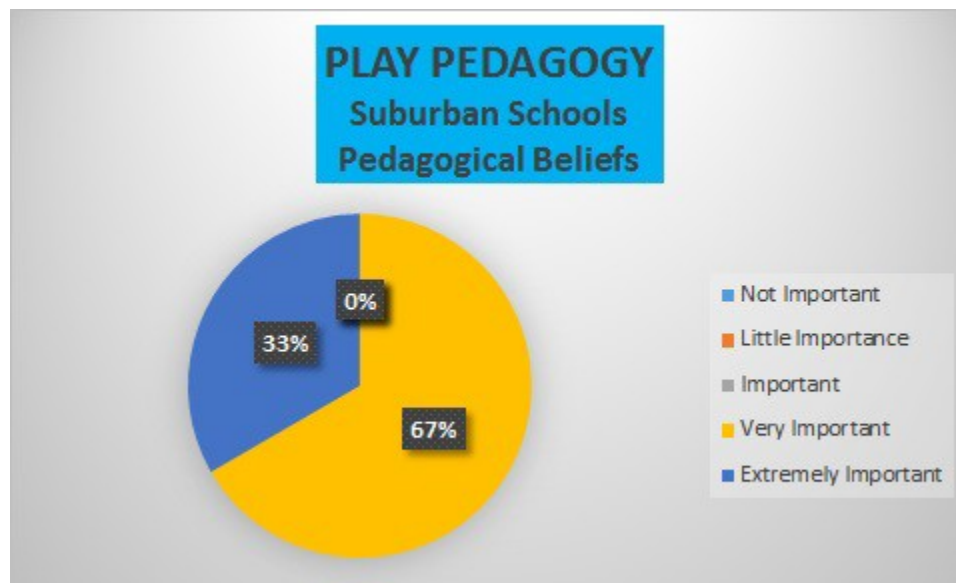
Figure 6. Suburban Teachers Pedagogical Beliefs about Play Pedagogy
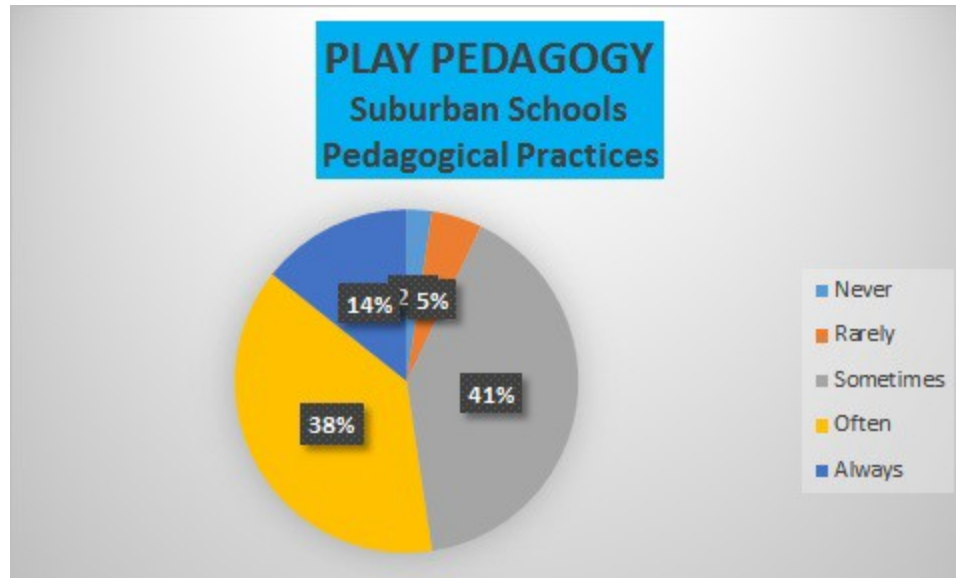
Figure 7. Suburban Teachers Pedagogical Practices about Play Pedagogy

Suburban Responses – Play Pedagogy Practices			
	X (Suburban Mean)	s'' (Variance)	σ_x (standard deviation)
Q44. Regularly engage children in play experiences within Mathematics learning experiences	3 (sometimes)	5	2.24
Q45. Actively seek ways to include play in your daily curriculum	3 (sometimes)	4	2
Q49. Feel confident in planning play-based learning experiences	3 (sometimes)	5	2.24
Q50. Have access to play spaces to extend learning beyond your classroom	3 (sometimes)	4.33	2.08
Q51. Regularly engage children in play experiences within English content learning experiences	2 (rarely)	2	1.41
Q53. Ensure there are places for students to play with manipulatives in your classroom	3 (sometimes)	4	2
Q60. Plan regular opportunities in your classroom for students to play with games and puzzles	3 (sometimes)	4.33	2.08
Q62. Regularly engage children in play experiences within Humanities and Social Sciences	2 (rarely)	2.33	1.53
Q71. Regularly engage children in play experiences within the Arts	3 (sometimes)	3.67	1.92
Q74. Regularly engage children in play experiences within Science	2 (rarely)	2	1.41
Q76. Guide children to discover knowledge through play	3 (sometimes)	3.33	1.83
Q78. Feel there are benefits to teaching and assessing through play	3 (sometimes)	4	2
Q82. Regularly engage children in	2	2.33	1.53

play experiences within Technologies	(rarely)		
Q83. Want to include more play opportunities for your students in your class schedule	3 (sometimes)	5.67	2.38

<p align="center">Table 3: Suburban Responses – Play Pedagogy Practices</p>

Particularly thought provoking were the trends seen throughout the career stages of teachers. While it would be expected that as teachers progressed through their career, both their pedagogical beliefs and practices would change, findings demonstrated that these changes were not always aligned with each other. Almost 80% of graduate teachers (those within their first year of teaching post-graduation) participating in the study indicated that teacher oriented approaches held little to no importance to them (Figure 8), yet by the end of their career this had declined to less than half (47%) of lead teachers (career of over twenty years) placing importance on these approaches (Figure 9).
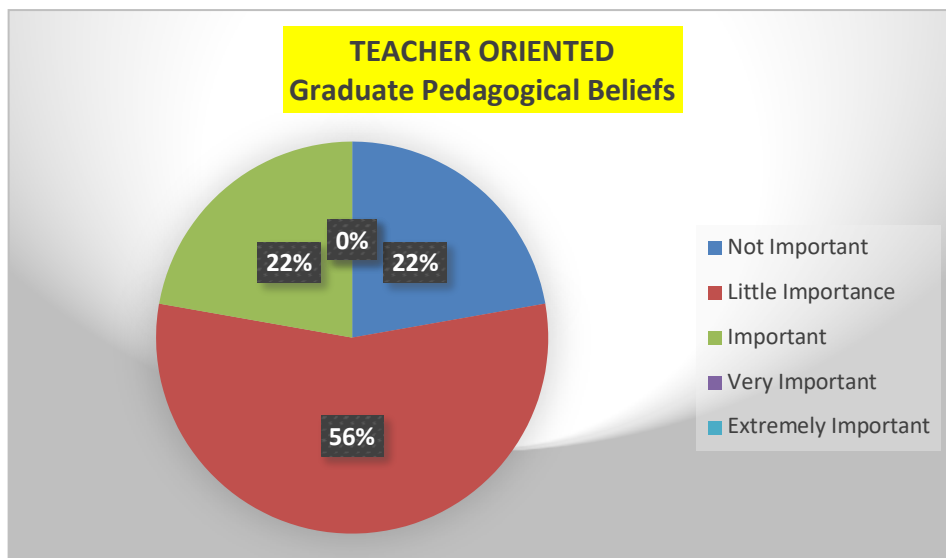
<p align="center">Figure 8. Graduate Teachers Pedagogical Beliefs about Teacher Oriented Approaches</p>
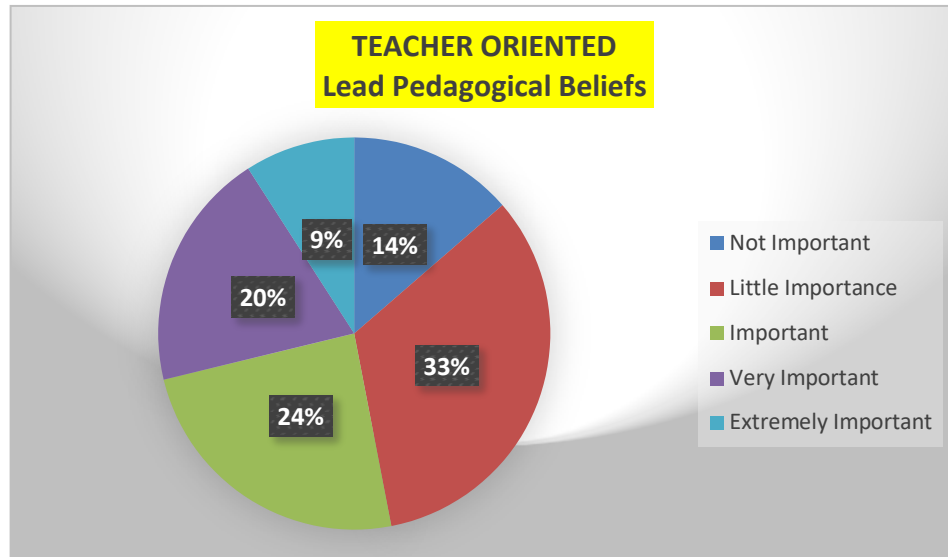
Figure 9. Lead Teachers Pedagogical Beliefs about Teacher Oriented Approaches

There was some variance in the responses from graduate teachers on questions 13, 15 and
17 relating to pedagogical beliefs about teacher oriented approaches and these are
outlined in table 4. There was also variance in the lead teacher responses to questions
about their pedagogical beliefs regarding teacher oriented approaches and these are
outlined in Table 5.

Graduate Responses – Pedagogical Beliefs about Teacher Oriented Approaches			
	X (Graduate Mean)	$s^{"}$ (Variance)	σ_x (standard deviation)
Q13. Using one set approach for reading and writing instruction	1 (not at all)	1.2	1.10
Q15. Structured reading or pre-reading experiences	2 (little importance)	0.4	0.63
Q17. Having workbooks in the classroom	2 (little importance)	0.4	0.63

Table 4: Graduate Responses – Pedagogical Beliefs about Teacher Oriented Approaches

Lead Responses – Pedagogical Beliefs about Teacher Oriented Approaches			
	X (Lead Mean)	s" (Variance)	σ_x (standard deviation)
Q13. Using on set approach for reading and writing instruction	3 (important)	1.8	1.34
Q15. Structured reading or pre-reading experiences	4 (very important)	0.6	0.78
Q17. Having workbooks in the classroom	2 (little importance)	0.5	0.71
Q18. Children working individually at desks or tables most of the time.	2 (little importance)	0.2	0.45
Q24. Keeping the learning environment quiet	2 (little importance)	0.6	0.78
Q29. Maintaining classroom order	4 (very important)	0.7	0.84

Table 5: Lead Responses – Pedagogical Beliefs about Teacher Oriented Approaches

Responses on the teacher survey also indicated that practices aligned with teacher oriented approaches also declined in use from 81% as a graduate teacher (Figure 10) to 59% as a lead teacher (Figure 11).
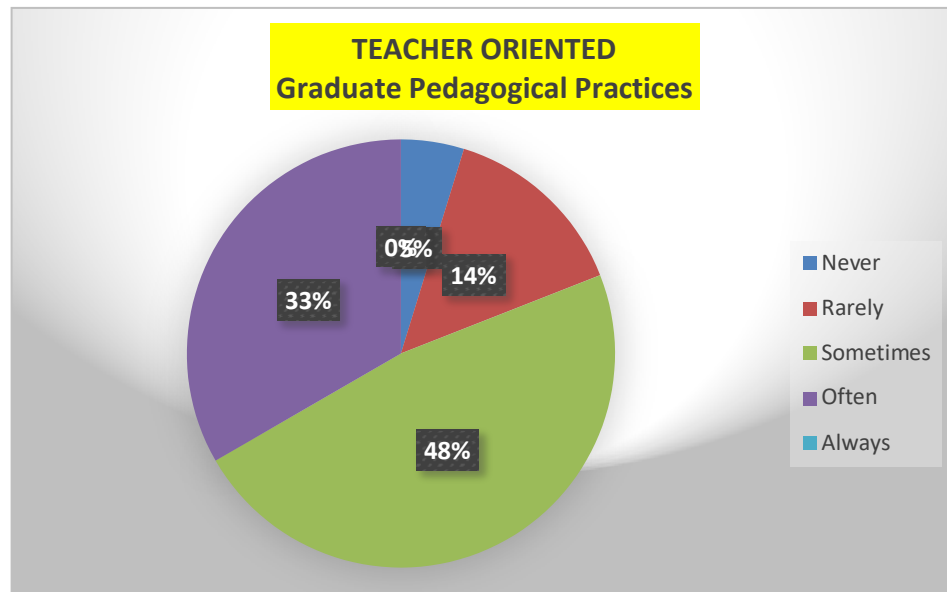
Figure 10. Graduate Teacher Use of Teacher Oriented Practices
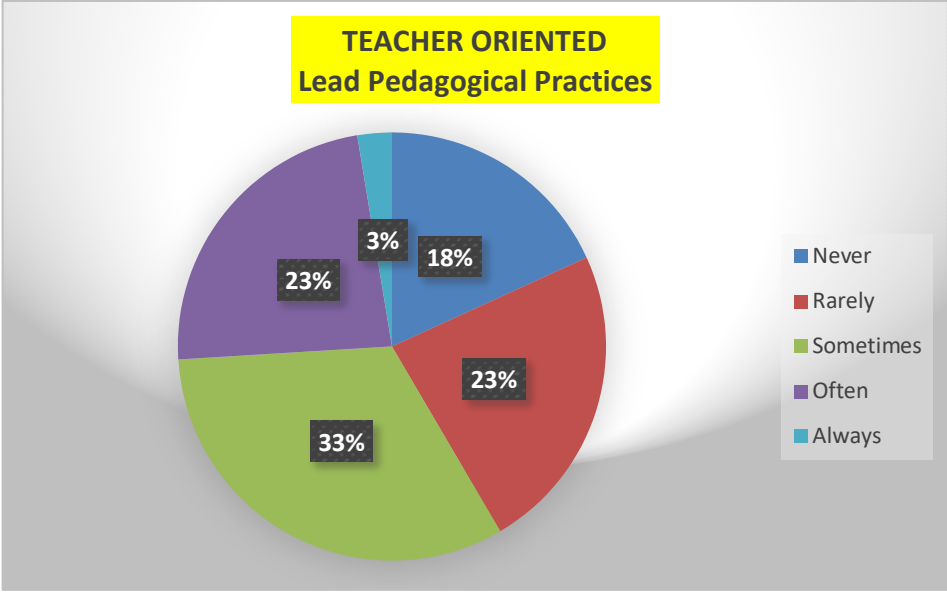
Figure 11. Lead Teacher Use of Teacher Oriented Practices

From the data it was apparent that all teachers held play as important to extremely important in their pedagogical beliefs throughout their career, yet they indicated their use of play pedagogical practices decreased from 90% as a graduate teacher (Figure 12) to 63% as a lead teacher (Figure 13).
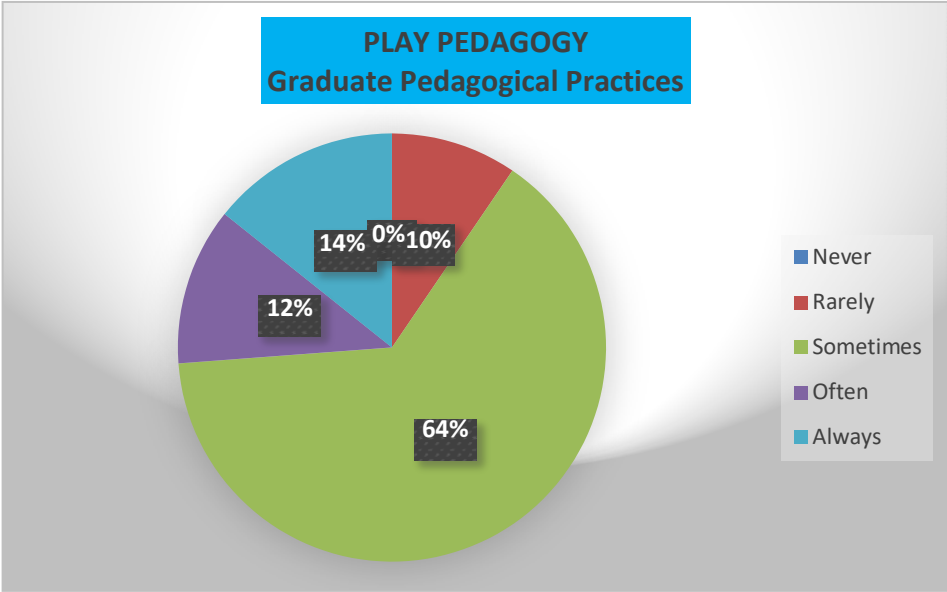
Figure 12. Graduate Teacher Use of Play Pedagogical Practices
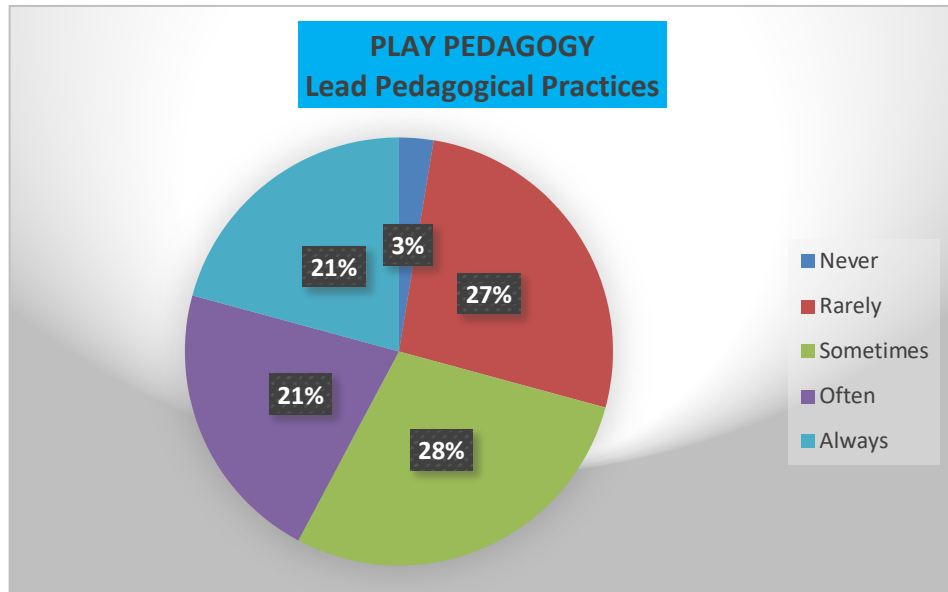
Figure 13. Lead Teacher Use of Play Pedagogical Practices

This indicates that the enthusiasm of using play pedagogies is stifled as teachers'
progress through their career, possibly by the expectations of an audit culture which
requires accountability through the use of a standardized curriculum. This would support
Jay & Knaus' (2018) findings that "teachers found it a struggle to fit everything in that
they were expected to teach and that this impeded their ability to implement a play-based
program" (p. 121).

**The Journey between Talking the Talk and Walking the Walk: The Difference
between Philosophy and Practice**

While it is apparent that teachers in the region hold play pedagogies as an
important aspect of their pedagogical beliefs, there is a distinct space between how they
perceive themselves as play pedagogues and the practical application of fulfilling the
expectations of others in delivering standardized curriculum.

Play Pedagogy: A Localized Definition

The survey revealed that all teachers indicated play pedagogies (100 %) were important and almost all of teachers (96 %) indicated that developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) were important. As demonstrated in the literature review, play pedagogies and associated learning approaches have been a persistent pillar of early childhood curriculum design for over a century, and certainly teachers in this study indicated that they were endeavoring to include play within their pedagogical practices. However, how they indicated play was enacted in their day to day practices varied amongst teachers, with a range of strategies being employed from designing learning experiences which involved young students using materials which can be manipulated with their hands to designing learning experiences which require young students to being actively involved in investigations beyond the confines of their classroom. Jeanette, a lead teacher within a rural setting stated "we tried to introduce some play in the classroom … you know that hands on manipulative materials that are just so important"; Debbie included "a lot of outside investigation" to connect with the standardized curriculum in her urban setting; for Samantha in a regional school "it's hands on, it's movement, it's not paper and pen, it's out of our desks"; and Veronica described it as "whole body learning" in her suburban setting.

The use of manipulative materials which are hands-on, concrete learning resources such as unifix cubes, unit blocks, puzzles, counters, plastic animal's etcetera, allows students to play with the materials in order to mentally and visually see the learning concepts they are working on. This strategy was common with Jeanette, Samantha and Debbie all describing the use of these materials in their classroom practices, typically in the key learning area of Mathematics. Pedagogical practices such

as "classroom dramatic play opportunities and play based strategies including games with rules; using manipulatives and hands-on activities and active child inquiry" (Jay & Knaus, 2018, p. 115), all of which are developmentally appropriate were predominantly important (96 %) to teachers in this region, and this was also highlighted through the interviews. The use of whole body learning as described by Veronica involved kinesthetic learning opportunities such whole body spelling (tapping a part of one's body as they spell the word); dramatizing math equations; tapping out syllables of words; and using a variety of strategies from the *Jump Into Number* (Diezmann, 2008) project. Moving beyond the confines of the classroom walls, Debbie indicated that she encourages her students to explore answers to their questions out in the sandpit and playground. While all the teachers took different pathways in order to include play approaches in their teaching, all are taking steps to move away from traditional didactic teaching methods to deliver more physically and actively involved learning experiences. It is evident through this research that the shared definition of play pedagogies in this region is instructional guidance occurring through movement, and often accessing alternative learning spaces from the inside of the classroom.

Finding the Cracks in the Concrete

The use of kinesthetic learning opportunities whilst not strictly play in itself, allows for the fracturing of the traditional didactic approach for both teachers and students to be more playful while engaging in the standardized curriculum. Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2013) described this as purposefully framed play when the teacher actively interacts and engages in play with the children having imposed expectations and structure of that play to meet predetermined outcomes. Clearly early phase teachers within this study are finding spaces in their individual contexts to include play within

their pedagogical practices. Whilst these spaces and the strategies to include play vary, they do align with the pillars of early childhood education as outlined in the literature review. The use of manipulative materials as a method to include play in the curriculum aligns with purposefully framed play as defined by Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2013) and Hayes (2016). This strategy allows teachers to still conform to the standardized curriculum while finding the crack in the concrete to cultivate the space for students to play with materials. Samantha openly stated she was seeking ways to break free from the traditional mode of teaching, wanting her students to be out of their desks and to be more involved in the experience of learning. While she indicated she was just beginning to seek ways to find these opportunities in the physical constraints of the curriculum as a graduate teacher, her philosophical stance can already be seen to be pursuing an experiential approach to education. Debbie as a highly accomplished teacher (five to twenty years teaching experience) in the middle of her career, indicated she now seeks these spaces beyond the confines of the classroom walls, supporting her students to seek answers to their questions and explore possibilities in order to meet curriculum standards. This view of planning learning as an experience which is authentic and meaningful to oneself is central to the experiential education approach as described by Dewey (1993) and Lewis and Williams (1994), as it is a process that is experienced rather than a preconceived outcome which is drilled into the students in a thirty minute lesson.

While these pedagogical aspects were cemented in the grade one and two teachers pedagogical beliefs in the region, nearly a quarter (22 %) of the teachers still indicated they rarely to never practice play pedagogies and nearly one-third (30 %) designated they rarely to never implement developmentally appropriate practices. From the data it was clear that early childhood teachers working in first and second grades are conflicted

between their beliefs and their practices. While the survey data alone did not clearly indicate what specifically these obstacles were, it was evident through the in-depth interviews that standardized curriculum had a significant impact on their work. This can also be seen in recent scholarship with Ang (2014) noting "a strong productivity agenda in policy has increased focus on education and less on care has resulted in less opportunities being provided for children to play within the classroom" (p. 187).

Talking the Talk

When discussing play pedagogies, all participants regardless of school context kept referring back to the preparatory year (Prep) as where play mostly takes place. Jeanette noted that Prep gave her the opportunity "to have a play based system happening" and that her Prep students "go and participate in the playgroup." Likewise, Samantha stated "my preps get a lot more play than my year ones, I do admit that". This continued perception of play pedagogies being appropriate for Prep, but not necessarily first and second grade may be due to the Prep grade evolving from a historically rich play pedagogical background; dating back to the mid to late twentieth century in Queensland when curriculum was developing through play and the original Preschool Curriculum Guidelines (1998) endorsing and promoting play pedagogies. Though Jeannette as a lead teacher in the late stages of her career reflected that play is also declining in this grade level, commenting that:

> …we used to go out in a preschool classroom go out every morning to do gross motor activities. You'd have the obstacle course all set up every morning and every child would do that, shoes off, but that just (gestures throwing out window) doesn't happen, but they were able to introduce it once a week which is great for them, but it wasn't an everyday thing.

Whilst this study is focusing on the use of play pedagogies in grades one and two in public education, it is apparent that the introduction of the standardized curriculum has impacted the pedagogies of the entry grade level of primary schooling also.

Findings of studies conducted by Breathnach et al (2016) also observed that while recognized as a fundamental approach to teaching and learning in non-compulsory early childhood education and care settings; play pedagogies are not commonly supported in compulsory education (p.78). While the public education department in the region is verbally promoting age-appropriate pedagogies through professional discussions and professional meetings, one of which is play pedagogies in the first and second grade, teachers are still perceiving play to be only appropriate practice in the Prep grade.

The *Lifting our Game* report released in late 2017 was commissioned by all state and territory Early Childhood Education Ministers "to consider how best to strengthen early childhood education in Australia to foster improved student achievement and whole of life outcomes" (Grace, 2018, para. 11). This report was distributed widely through not only the Queensland Department of Education website, but also promoted through the Early Childhood Teachers Association and Early Childhood Australia for outline of recommendations for achieving excellence. Acknowledging that play pedagogies are a pillar of early childhood education in the report, Pascoe & Brennan (2017) dismiss prioritizing them as a pedagogical approach in schools stating, "Early childhood education is not the same as school education" (p.14).

Debbie referred to these different expectations between grade levels in her interview stating that "We always say that Prep is a different planet" and that "the really hard thing has been going from Prep back to Grade One because I know and can see all the benefits of the play based, but because of our curriculum expectations we are so

confined in what we can do". Samantha in her interview also recounted a recent past experience at a local school where there was,

> …a principal that supported play based learning, but only in prep. So, the prep classrooms had dress ups, they had home corner, they had everything. They had developmental play; they did all the hands on stuff, and then Year 1 it was all stripped away.

Undoubtedly this situation reveals the hidden curriculum that play pedagogies are appropriate in Prep and the early years learning settings prior to formal schooling, but not for grade one and beyond.

Despite this, almost three quarters (73%) of the teachers in the study indicated that actively seek ways to include play in their daily practices, and certainly the teachers interviewed provided insight into how they attempt this inclusion. Jeanette states that in her classroom she has "managed to include some gross motor stuff, they do actually go downstairs every day and um, you know do woodwork for their gross motor skills and then they have a fine motor focus". These learning experiences are not explicitly addressing a key learning area of the standardized curriculum, yet they are building developmental skills needed in order to be successful in engaging with the curriculum requirements, such as having the small muscle strength to be able to hold a pencil. Engaging activities such as woodworking promote experiential learning through playful approaches. While Jeanette utilizes these, she states "I include the concept of play in my definition of activities and learning, [but] I've never used the word play, except at lunchtime".

Samantha too described how the students do not view the play they engage in as learning, yet she makes a point to highlight their learning in the play they have engaged in during the day.

> Like today they were like 'today we did absolutely no work' and I was like 'no you just counted how many bricks you needed, put together a Lego house, you know, told four, you know I have a rotating dress up corner. When one leaves, one can come in, so [you] have monitored that all day. Oop, you've learnt that's three [and] I can add one more, yeah sure you've done no learning.

Beyond the moments of child initiated play in her classroom, Samantha also stated that she finds math rotational activities an area where she finds she is most likely to find space to include play in her practices. Like Jeanette, she uses a great deal of manipulative materials for children to work with in order to have them engage with the concepts they are learning. This was a common strategy as Veronica also described how she also provides students with "a lot of rotational activities with fine motor skills which appeals to those kids whose mindset is more towards construction. Or working with their hands, so it's giving those kids that opportunity to do that".

Pressure to Perform and Conform

While just over half of the teachers (53 %) indicated that teacher oriented approaches such as explicit and direct instruction, which was the regions focus between 2011 and 2014, held little to no importance to them, yet 65% still implemented practices which aligned with these approaches. This is possibly due to the pressure to perform and conform being felt in the region since 2008. Jeanette, who has been teaching for the state Department of Education for over thirty years, commented on the how the increased

focus on high stakes standardized testing has impacted the pedagogical practices of teachers.

> In 2008 we started NAPLAN and all of a sudden Queensland was measured against the rest of Australia, and it didn't come up roses. So that came out and they said right we are going to have this curriculum put in, you're not going to have to do anything, all you have to do is teach it. We are giving you the what, you just have to do the how. But of course, that wasn't particularly successful because the what, was just overwhelming for people. Then 'oh ok that's not been successful, we are going to have to tell you how, so you're going to use explicit instruction, or you're going to use Mazarno's, or you're going to use this.

Debbie concurred stating "there's lots of pressure to do certain things, get certain places and we have assessment tasks we have to do. We always seem like we are assessing. Um, it's a fact of doing C2C guidelines." She went onto say,

> the really hard thing has been going from Prep back to Grade One because I know and can see all the benefits of the play based, but because of our curriculum expectations we are so confined in what we can do and it's trying to be able to try to explore and have that play based pedagogies in there and we just don't, we don't seem to be able to do it as much as we would like. So, we don't have that flexibility any more.

Apple (2005) asserts "the widespread nature of these evaluative and measurement pressures, and their ability to become parts of our common sense, crowd out other conceptions of effectiveness and democracy" (p.15). This sustained sharp focus on assessment which is an organizational expectation is indicated to be 69% of teacher's daily practices, yet just over half of all teachers (54 %) believed that this particular drive

within the audit culture held little to no importance. This is clear as the teachers discuss the narrowing focus on assessment and raising student learning outcomes, at the expense of being able to choose pedagogies which best serve their students development and engagement in learning.

Although all teachers in the study indicated that play pedagogies were important to them, it was clear that there was a decline in the value of play as they progressed through their career with 90% of early career teachers actively indicating that they implement play oriented practices, compared to late career teachers at 70%. Jeanette pointed out that:

> As well as valuing play, I'm also very routined. I'm very structured because I have to be, so in order to give each child the best opportunities we can, we need to structure our time very closely. Today was the first time, maybe all year, but certainly all term that they have had any amount of free time, um, because we some exhibits for the pioneer valley show, and a couple of kids had finished early, so I said well you can choose what you would like to do. So, they had about 20 minutes, I think I did call it free time, so they knew the concept of it.

It is apparent here that the importance of having students achieve standardized outcomes out ranks the value she places on play pedagogy, as her language reinforces the perceived binary of traditional teaching methods as work versus play pedagogies which are a frivolous and not meaningful in the learning process. Yet as Samantha as a graduate teacher discussed in more detail how she values play and how she is actively reflecting on her work as a play pedagogue regularly:

> I try, I really do try, because I love it as well. Like today, I loved just being with them and talking to them and doing stuff with them. It always, you know, because

my idea of play is, it's not (sigh) necessarily just kids with toys, and that's play. My idea of play is that it's hands on, it's movement, it's not paper and pen, it's out of our desks, it's an alternate learning space, it's anything like that. So, with science we do lots of, you know, like we've got to learn what's waterproof and what's not. We fill the trough up, we get all the materials, we put all the materials in, we play with the materials. Whose material is disintegrating? Whose is floating? All of that stuff. Um, so I (Sigh), yeah like I said, once I get more confident in my teaching, it will become a lot easier but at the moment, there is a percentage of I have to get this, this, this, this and this done by this date.

As a teacher in her first year teaching in formal schooling, Samantha explains,

At the end of the day I love play, but I also need a job, you know what I mean. Like, I can't not do the set assessment or the set testing or any of that, because I won't have a job and then I can't do any of what I love.

This would indicate that early phase teachers are being stripped of their expertise as a pedagogue and are instead being viewed as the vessel to deliver the standardized curriculum in a particular way to achieve desired results. Yet despite this, early phase teachers are finding space in their planned practices for play pedagogies.

Walking the Walk

Teachers in the early phase of primary schooling have held unyieldingly to their pedagogical beliefs that play is the principal tenet of their work. While they are often flexible in their pedagogical approaches in order to develop learning experiences which make connections between the children's interests in their play and the prescribed standards required by the national curriculum, they continue to cling to play pedagogies as the optimal approach as they navigate the obstacles. Their ability to challenge the

expectations of the audit culture is very much dependent on their own self-image and self-efficacy.

Whilst the majority of the teachers personal planning was spent addressing the delivery of the standardized curriculum (an average of 60-70%), there were clear attempts to include play pedagogies. Samantha's planning demonstrated how she was creative in her instructional delivery to include play daily, mostly through Mathematics (colloquially known as Math) rotations and the use of teaching strategies from play-based phonics programs such as Jolly Phonics and Letterland. She explained that even though she used the standardized language program THRASS [Teaching, Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills] promoted by her school, she alters the deliver for it to be more play based.

> Like I put animals and bits of junk in rice and you find me something with the 'fff' sound or something with the 'sss' sound or as in 'k' sound as in cat. And they look through and find the letter K as in cat. So, I use a lot of the THRASS language, but I pair it with a lot of the play based ideas from Jolly Phonics and Letterland and what not.

Additionally, Samantha schedules time for her students to participate in a daily run (fifteen minutes daily), self-directed inside play (fifteen minutes daily) and project time once a week for thirty minutes. Through this deliberate and purposeful planning, she is able to dedicate almost a quarter (23%) of her time with students using play pedagogies to enhance learning.

A proficient teacher in her first five years of teaching in a suburban school, Veronica stated she felt guilty having to deliver the standardized curriculum to her young students with its heavy focus on assessment, stating "I've got them sitting at their desks

having them to write, write, write; or read, read, read. You know, where is the bit of fun and self-directed learning? Where are those opportunities?" Veronica's planning did show a 65% focus on standardized curriculum and assessment, however she discussed how the leadership within her school only mandates her to utilize the assessment documents from the C2C documents.

> We have the luxury of how we teach to the assessments, so we tend to backwards plan, backwards map from the assessment. What will they know and do, what will they need to know and then I very much pick and choose what they really need to know. And I feel sometimes that I am teaching to the test, I really am teaching what they need to be successful in the assessment.

Despite this narrowed focus on curriculum, Veronica still tries "to incorporate as much movement as I can into my teaching, to give them that bit of play", with her personal planning indicating she has planned to deliver 35% of her program through play pedagogies. Again, this was mostly through Math rotations (an hour every day) and a weekly creative arts/rewards session (total two hours per week).

Albeit constrained by requirements, Debbie still includes some opportunities to use play pedagogies in her practices (8%). Like her colleagues, Math rotation instructional experiences which are more hands on learning for the students is the most accessed area of the curriculum to include play. She has also included one hour once a week for art and dance within the curriculum which she has ear marked as play oriented space. When sharing her personal planning documents Debbie was particularly concerned about conveying how she was addressing the standardized curriculum stating, "I didn't feel I was able to show the idea of what we were planning to do in the classroom and what our aim of the lessons were". Undoubtedly, Debbie has been conditioned to justify

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her planning and approaches to demonstrate how she is meeting expectations in her daily practices. Tellingly she commented,

> This doesn't really sit with my educational philosophy, at all. So, you just think to yourself, this is not good teaching and you want to go back to your good teaching, but you can't. You are stuck in this confined regimented program that you must do and complete.

The journey between meeting the expectations of the audit culture pushing the standardized curriculum and fulfilling one's own personal pedagogical beliefs is clearly a difficult road to travel with many obstacles to overcome.

Notable though is the parallel between how these teachers articulate their play pedagogical beliefs and the spaces they plan for play opportunities which students experience in the daily curriculum. Samantha and Debbie both talk about play as being non-traditional, not paper and pencil, so many of the learning experiences they had designed were predominately about using materials which are designed to meet the standardized outcomes but in a more playful approach such as the rotational activities focusing on mathematical curriculum content. Veronica sought to design experiences which were considered fun as her concept of play pedagogy and this manifested as movement through mathematical games and rotational activities in her daily program. Whilst these teachers communicated, they would like to include more ways to include play within their enacted curriculum, they feel constrained by expectations of what is acceptable. Undoubtedly the definition and implementation of play pedagogies are socially negotiated and constructed as teachers' beliefs and practices are continually influenced by not only the standardized curriculum and audit culture, but also the needs and expectations of their learning community.

Bowing to and Subverting Audit Culture

The Queensland Department of Education and Trainings' Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) materials were not accessed in order to comply with the departments' research office requirements to obtain approval to conduct this project. However, through the provision of the participants personal planning, the journey between the two ideals was illuminated. In an urban school setting, Debbie's personal teaching plans revealed a heavier focus on delivering the standardized curriculum (70%) and conducting assessment (22%). Like her colleague Veronica, Debbie has expressed that she often feels she is teaching to the test in the first grade and feels the pressure to conform to a standardized approach.

> We just finished report cards and we've just done two units of English, so we have had two major assessment tasks and they are usually about three or four pages each. And then you've got your Maths assessments and so we've done two major concepts, but we had three major assessments within those two major concepts and then you look at your Science, you have an assessment task for Science. You have an assessment task for HAS *(History and Society)*, you have an assessment task for health and all those individual things, and usually they have three or four stages each, so you do feel like you have to teach to the test. We have to be consistent and I understand why it is, but we all have to be consistent and there's admin being pressured from regional office. And I'm sure regional office have pressure coming from head office. So, it's just a pressure on effect from every single person and I guess being in the front line we are the ones that have to try and make it work.

While the teachers recognized the need for consistency, they also communicated they felt compelled to create learning experiences which were authentically meaningful to the personal needs of their students. This stretch between pedagogical beliefs and practices is created by the drive for accountability, yet the measure of this tension is dependent on how confident teachers are to subvert the audit culture.

Confidence and Competence

Grade one and two teachers in this study indicated their own confidence and perceived competence was also a factor in their capacity to implement play pedagogies. Having the confidence in one's own knowledge and abilities to not only be competent in delivering the curriculum through the use of play pedagogies, but also to be a proactive advocate for this marriage of approaches appeared to be a key factor for both graduate and more experienced teachers a like. Even though Samantha has several years of experience using play pedagogies to teach in the early childhood education and care settings, she lacked the self-confidence in enacting such practices in the formal school setting. She was particularly candid about her lack of confidence during the interview saying,

> I probably feel because I can't talk the talk, I can't get away with putting [play] in there. Um it's my probably weakness as well, in my own learning so therefore I don't understand as much how to make it fit. I'm sure it could be done, but I'm not at that level yet where I can do it, if you know what I mean. Like I'm still trying to get my head around teaching them what they need for the assessment, carrying the assessment out, marking the assessment, getting the result back.

As a graduate teacher new to teaching in the primary school context, Samantha's description of how her lack of confidence impacts her ability to use play pedagogies more

frequently, is quite understandable when beginning her career in public education. She states during this first year she "just want to do the job well". Obviously, she is cognizant that she is still within her probation period and is being observed by her school principal and that he is judging her ability as a teacher. Persistently reflecting on her own practices through the lens of another's agenda is clearly impacting her own confidence and perceived competence in being able to marry her pedagogical beliefs with her practices.

A highly accomplished teacher having taught for the organization for more than ten years, Debbie also noted how her own confidence and perceived competence in using play pedagogies to deliver standardized curriculum has evolved during the past decade, stating that even as recently as,

> …five years ago, I would have just changed schools rather than fight it. But I think I've almost got to the stage now where I have enough confidence to say if someone questions, 'no I am teaching' and then when assessment gets done, then assessment gets done because it's more important to teach the content than to tell them about it and then assess them.

Debbie's reflection would indicate that gaining confidence and competence in one's own ability to marry play pedagogies with standardized curriculum is an evolving process that is forever incomplete. Building one's self image and confidence as a play pedagogue that can also clearly address the accountability measures requires an unwavering intrinsic commitment to play pedagogies and being a reflective practitioner. Such a commitment through a career which potentially spans decades would be difficult to sustain due to the constant pressure the audit culture forces upon teachers. As Debbie has highlighted the requirement for teachers to implement accountability measures and teach towards these is a heavy burden to carry whilst building the confidence to stand up against this rolling

nothing called Audit Culture. Certainly, the survey findings support this conclusion showing the decreased use of play pedagogies as teachers' progress through their career, even though their beliefs about the importance of play pedagogies remains persistently unbroken.

Finding the Loopholes: Key Learning Areas and Teaching Strategies Engaged

Although the teachers are constrained by the ropes of the standardized curriculum, they have found the areas which have some give to them enabling them to utilize places where play pedagogies can fit. Math seemed to be the key learning area (KLA) that provided the most flexibility to include play pedagogies in the curriculum, with 94% of all teachers stating they regularly engage children in play experiences sometimes to always within Math learning experiences. Providing manipulative materials for students to engage with while trying to understand Math concepts during rotational activities was a key feature of this KLA's delivery in the region. Veronica stated "I give them a lot of rotational activities with fine motor skills which appeals to those kids whose mindset is more towards construction. Or working with their hands, so it's giving those kids that opportunity to do that". Jeanette commented she also used this strategy to include play stating "we tried to introduce some play in the classroom, some rotational work and even just some, talking about play, it wasn't even structured play, and you know that hands on manipulative materials that are just so important".

While the teachers personal planning denoted that the small group rotation activities were the prime space to include these, Debbie also explained that in her classroom during this term (Term 2, 2018 – April through June),

> … we did do a lot of outside investigation and play, because we were doing lots
> of directional language and positional language. We did lots of hide and seek,

getting kids to give instruction to find certain things, and things like that. So next

term we are doing capacity and measurement, so we will be going outside into

the sandpit and getting a lot of capacity and measurement practice out there.

Addressing the standardized curriculum by designing learning experiences which take

place outdoors in the playground to achieve Math learning outcomes was a common

approach. Veronica described how she,

…had them partner up and do the obstacle course. And direct [each other] using

that positional language to do the obstacle course and they loved it. It was a bit of

play, but it was also a gauge to see if they were getting those concepts.

Uncovering space within this KLA is particularly interesting given its prioritization in the

curriculum and national assessment agenda. While numeracy is one of seven general

capabilities across the national curriculum, it is only one of two assessed in the high

stakes testing of NAPLAN which underpins the standardized curriculum C2C documents.

Plainly, the teachers are actively attempting to counteract the rigidness of the curriculum

and provide balance to the learning experiences students encounter in their learning

environments.

The Arts was another KLA that stood out to be a space where teachers are able to

provide openings for play. Almost three quarters (74%) of the teachers in the region

indicated that they use play pedagogies to deliver The Arts curriculum. Found in each

teacher's personal planning documents was a regular schedule addressing the KLA The

Arts, typically during the last period on a Friday. This was clearly an opportunity for

students to be able to direct their own learning to some degree with teachers labelling it

everything from 'The Arts' to 'Project Time' to 'Arts/Rewards'. When asked for further

clarification about this scheduled time, they said it was often a time for students choose

their own activities within the scope of The Arts curriculum and it often involved "a lot of active, noisy, fun drama activities" stated Jeanette.

Samantha noted in her interview that she used this time to also link the students' self-directed activities in The Arts to other areas of the curriculum, while she participates in parallel activities with them.

> Then with coloring in, I've been printing out a lot of those really in-depth ones, so one of my little girls said, 'oh Miss your cat looks really good'. I said 'oh yeah I've used symmetry. Do you know what that is?' They were like 'no'. So, I went and got a little mirror and I said, 'see if I put my mirror here, I can see the same, but when I lift it, I've already done that on there.' And what I can pick up from that play to what I can then connect, like now I know when symmetry does come up for the year ones later on in the year, I can print out more of those pictures and you have to color this side and now you have to make this side match.

Possibly the flexibility of this KLA is due to this being an area of curriculum which is not involved in high stakes testing, as teachers also noted that if students have not finished assessment in other areas then they must do this before participating in this scheduled experience.

Literacy is another top priority general capability through the national curriculum and within the English curriculum content the third likely space for play pedagogies is found, with 65% of participants indicating that they sometimes to often use play to deliver English learning experiences. Veronica described how she used play pedagogies to have her young students re-engage in English curriculum at the beginning of the year. She indicated that her students were very much disengaged from the English curriculum at the end of Prep (previous grade), stating "they weren't writing when they entered

Grade One, but they are now writing, and they are now actively trying because they want to please [me] because they have that relationship now". To get them to write she said,

> …we've done sand writing, air writing, all these things that are much more playful in our approach than pen and paper. We've painted our writing, we've done it in sand, we've done it with playdough, we've done it with crayons, but that's what got the kids into writing.

She said her approach was very much about observing her students' level of engagement and being responsive in the moment to the students and their needs at the time.

> You can't just shove this down their throats because it's not going to work. You know we did a poetry unit this term and I didn't think they were getting anything. I was jumping up and down using funny voices trying to engage them as it was very much listening. You know there wasn't anything for them to do. So, it was, you know, getting them up to stomp their feet to do like the rhythm and the beat, and clap their hands, just trying to get that in. Just to get that across, instead of having them sit there nah, nah, nah, listening to the poems.

Evidently teachers in the region are working hard to find the loopholes and space to include play pedagogies in their daily practices.

Teacher Perception of Student and Implementing Play

Reoccurring throughout the interviews was the how many young students did not yet have the social and emotional skills required to cope with the expectations of 'how to do school'. While traditionally, "recognition of letters and numbers have been used as important indicators of school readiness" (Mann, Hund, Hesson-McInnis & Roman, 2016, p. 22), there has been an increasing recognition that young children's social and

emotional skills, or lack of, impact their ability to succeed at school when accountability

is such a principal focus. Jeannette highlights this stating "You can't assess in term 1. You can do it orally and you can scribe for them, but you can't, they are still learning how to be at school". Social emotional skills such as cooperation, sharing, following directions, taking turns, listening, persistence and emotional resilience were found by Mann, Hund, Hesson-McInnis and Roman (2017) key to school readiness as they are "interrelated [to] academic achievement" and that "classrooms should provide multiple modalities of learning that addresses the needs of children" such as "play facilitation to foster inhibitory control and social interactions" (p. 28). Samantha explains:

> For me, readiness for school has always been social emotional factors it's never come into pencil grip, ABCs, name. None of that, because of what I know of child development, a teacher can teach all those things. But if the social emotional skills aren't there it's really hard to teach those things. But if a child can make friends, they want to learn, if they can investigate something, they will learn all that other stuff.

Through her first year of teaching in formal schooling, Samantha confirms she now knows,

> that being school ready is social emotional because my little preppies are picking up all the other stuff because my assistant and I have put so much time into the social emotional because they didn't have that to begin with.

Evidently this is not an issue that is restricted to the Mackay Region of Central Queensland District, with the number of school-based action research projects in the early phase of schools which specifically focused on social emotional development of children's learning, ranking as the second highest focus after oral language and communication (Department of Education and Training, 2016c, p.15). The Department of

Education (2018a) acknowledges in the recently released Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework that "a supportive environment that combines a focus on wellbeing with a focus on learning is optimal — without one, the other will not happen" and schools can do this by "explicitly teaching and modelling social and emotional skills" (p. 1-2). Suburban teacher Veronica stated she would love to have a drama corner in her classroom and the time for the students to be able to use it, as this would assist with their social and emotional skills as well as allowing them a space to consolidate and practice what they have learned in a more authentic and safe space. Jay & Knaus (2018) found in their study "paying attention to whole child development should be taken into account, particularly when applied to children in the early years when social and emotional development and attitude to learning and school are being developed" (p. 117).

Additionally, Veronica felt with the large Indigenous population in her class, it was important to meet their social and emotional needs given that social aspect is significantly important to their culture. "Having opportunities for play and movement in our classroom is significantly important for those students" stated Veronica. Culturally Australian Indigenous children do not respond positively to traditionally didactic teaching approaches due to the expectations and assumptions which are embedded in these approaches. For example, as a sign of respect to their elders, young Indigenous students will not look at the person of authority while they are speaking, and they will not answer a question if they realize that the elder already knows the answer (Hale, 2000). Rather young students are more engaged in learning through collaborative small group learning experiences and respond positively to active participation in learning experiences (McRae et al. 2000). Through the provision of play and movement in her classroom, Veronica is

meeting not only the developmental needs of her students; she is also creating a culturally appropriate learning environment.

Perceptions of Play

The perceptions of others, particularly middle management such as principals and deputy principals, was a strong point of contention for teachers when considering their use of play pedagogies. These perceptions, whether or not they are real or are actually the intention of their supervisors, are not the focus or intention of this study. However, it could be argued that because the early phase teachers believe this is indeed others perception, it is their lived reality and therefore is important to note. Debbie was the most vocal of the participants about these perceptions in her interview stating,

> Some members of admin don't see play based learning the way we've planned it to be. They just see it as kids playing so it's I guess, perception of other people coming down as well, so we are then also turned off because we don't want to be seen as lazy and just putting stuff out for the kids to play. So that's another facet that we are always thinking about too. So other people's perceptions of what we deem as teaching and what they deem as play [matters]. It was very much a perception that no, you shouldn't be outside in the playground you should be in the classroom and you should be learning in the classroom. So that's what many of us were trying to tackle or get around while we are trying to do that kind of learning outside.

This is not an isolated situation as Jeanette points out "it wasn't really well received by principals, well by admin".

As there is no requirement for principals and other middle management to have experience in primary grades, not to mention early childhood before obtaining these

positions in primary schools, educators in these roles do not necessarily have an understanding of early childhood philosophies or practices. Debbie told how in her school the middle management have come from an upper primary background "so they don't get that play based learning. They don't understand the philosophies or pedagogical approaches in the same way". Similarly, Samantha states that she does not believe "there's enough people in the education system that understand the benefit of play, or even understand how it can be used". School leadership teams that do not understand or support the use of play pedagogies, position early phase teachers with a difficult choice; risk disciplinary action or put aside their pedagogical beliefs and conform to expectations. Debbie states "I feel as we have to close the door on that conversation [of using play pedagogies because] we can't be seen to go off track or on a tangent, because then you're not being a team player". Once these perceptions are established within the mind of the teacher as representing the school ethos, it becomes their modus operandi even if there is a change of leadership. Debbie indicates this in her further comments about the administration perceptions of play pedagogies when she states,

> …the person I'm referring to is someone that has been and gone. Another upper school person, say from grade five to six, has come and taken that person's place, you still, even though it's not as openly said, you can still tell that that perception is still there.

With the perceptions of others, particularly those in supervisory and authoritative roles, influencing the practices which teachers employ, it is important to consider the need for early phase teachers to be encouraged to find a strong mentor whom would provide support and guidance in how to deliver the standardized curriculum through a play pedagogy framework.

The Importance of Mentoring

Over three quarters (79%) of participants indicated that they would like to include more opportunities for play within their daily practices and yet it is clear that marrying play pedagogies with standardized curriculum is difficult for most teachers. Through the course of the in-depth interviews, participants spoke of how senior experienced early childhood teachers played a vital role in supporting them in their efforts to seek ways to use play to deliver the standardized curriculum. Debbie, now a highly accomplished teacher, highlighted her experience of having a mentor when she first began in the early primary grades having moved from upper primary.

> Because my mentality, it was very schooling classroom based, very regimented, and very structured, that kind of thing. And then after going to prep it opens your eyes to a different kind of teaching into the play based. When I moved here, we had *Vicki (a locally recognized leader in Early Childhood) as one of our Prep teachers and she and another great teacher that had come up from Kindy. So, we had really a lot of really good kindy orientated play based teachers that moved up from Kindy into Prep and some really great play based preschool teachers that stayed in that Prep space when it changed over. So, we had lots of knowledge and experience to learn from and models and ready to mentor, me in particular, in that play based stuff.

Jeanette supported the idea of the more experienced early years teacher being able to successfully being able to use play pedagogies to deliver the standardized curriculum and the new teachers finding this difficult, stating "older early year's teachers are holding onto it, and they are managing to incorporate play because they know the curriculum so

well in a variety of different ways, and it's working really nicely for them, but for a new teacher coming in, it's just too hard".

The difficulty for teachers new to the early primary grades can be met with strong mentoring from experienced early childhood teachers successfully marrying play pedagogies with standardized curriculum. Hudson (2016) state mentors which share their "experiences by divulging their pedagogical weaknesses with tangible solutions to mentees as a method of modelling open self-reflection and that [demonstrating] as experienced teachers they are not infallible but rather on a continued learning journey about teaching" develop partnerships in learning and teaching (p.41). This was also seen in Hall, Draper, Smith & Bullough's research study (2008) which concluded that "mentor teachers must model effective practice and provide opportunities for beginning teachers to observe and critique practice, and coach the beginning teacher including engaging in dialogue focused on practice" (p.342).

Although Samantha is a graduate teacher in her first year of teaching in a formal school setting, she is a seasoned play pedagogue having worked in the early years prior to formal schooling for several years before graduating from her degree. Within her current role she is a mentor to her teaching assistant regarding play pedagogies, and she reflected in her interview about this process.

> I get to foster, like you know if I can get someone else to value play-based learning as well, then if we ever go our separate ways, that's two people out there preaching it. She notices a big difference in the kids; their behaviors, their social and emotional levels, um, lots of that stuff. It was quite good actually because having to have to explain to her why we are doing something made me think of

why we are doing something. And then after that it made it easier to talk the talk

then.

The positive effect the mentoring process has both on the mentee and the mentor is

evident. Debbie's reflection demonstrated how a mentoring relationship can positively

impact and guide both pedagogical beliefs and practices. Likewise, Samantha's story of

how mentoring a colleague regarding play pedagogies has provided her with a sense of

empowerment in being an advocate for this pedagogical approach, solidifies the

importance of the mentor relationship.

The paradoxical situation which Samantha finds herself in as the graduate teacher

in her school is that she although she is an experienced play pedagogue, as a new teacher

in the primary school context she also requires guidance on how to navigate the

curriculum and assessment requirements whilst holding onto her pedagogical beliefs. As

such, Samantha lacks mentorship and coaching herself from a more experienced other,

which may influence her ability to increase her use of play pedagogies or even sustain the

enthusiasm she currently holds in using these pedagogies. Hudson, Hudson, Gray &

Bloxham (2013) found that these "interactions within the mentoring relationship can

provide a voice for a balanced and nurturing curriculum" and that the "more interactions

and experiences a mentee receives, the greater the possibility of acquiring professional

growth" (p.1295). If Samantha is to maintain her passion and pursuit of using play

pedagogies she will undoubtedly need a mentor to guide her through this period to gain

greater self-confidence and competence in this approach in all areas of the curriculum.

Debbie's ability to become more confident in expressing her own competence and

pedagogical beliefs, may be a direct result of the mentoring and coaching she received

from the more knowledgeable early childhood teacher Vicki, earlier in her career. Jay &

Knaus (2018) recently found in their study of first and second grade teachers that "colleagues' practices had helped [teachers] to visualize and consolidate [their] understanding of the hands-on, more play-based approach to early learning" (p.119). Likewise, Kraft, Blazer & Hogan's study (2018) found large positive effects of coaching on teachers' instructional practice and raised student performance on standardized tests (pp.561-562). Evidently Debbie's experience of being immersed within a genuine community of learning through teacher mentorship and coaching, she had the opportunity to gain the skills to improve her own instructional practice whilst also raising student performance. She stated,

> Being in Grade One, this is my third year of teaching Grade One at this urban school, so having the knowledge of prep and building on that to get into Grade One I now have, I have more confidence, more experience, more knowledge.

While it is understandable that the experience of having a strong mentor and coach assisted in bolstering Debbie's self-confidence and competence, it is important to note the even after several years she still struggles in reconciling her pedagogical beliefs with what she feels are expected in her pedagogical practices. This would indicate for practices to become not only obtainable but more importantly sustainable long term, it is imperative that a community of practice is developed amongst the teaching faculty.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This dissertation grounded itself in the recognition that the education profession is currently engulfed in an audit culture (Hardy & Boyle, 2011; Taubman, 2009; Thompson & Cook, 2013). It aims to understand how audit culture has impacted play pedagogy in the work of early phase teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practices, specifically in the first and second grades of the Central Queensland Mackay Region. Consequently, this study had the overarching research question: How, if at all, are early childhood educators currently using play pedagogies to deliver the standardized C2C curriculum? In an effort to clarify and explain early year teachers' experiences in using play pedagogies in their daily practices, the project also sought to understand which key learning areas were more open to these pedagogies and the strategies which the teachers use to include play within their enacted curriculum. Equally important was the need to understand the obstacles which teachers experience in using these pedagogies and, finally, where they seek support and guidance in their use of play pedagogies.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss a theoretical interpretation of the findings from this research study in depth. This chapter will also provide a series of recommendations for additional research to be conducted.

Teacher Language around the Application of Audit Culture

While public education in Australia has been regulated by government since the late 1800s, it evident that within the last twenty years, there has been an unequivocal shift of pedagogical control from teachers and school administrators to political policymakers. During Prime Minster Howard's first term in government (1996-1998), his party proudly "increase[d] school accountability and strengthen[ed] the ability of parents to choose the best school for their child; [as well as] encouraging one of the highest levels of private investment in education and training in the world" (Liberal Party of Australia, n.d., para. 15). From this point forward, there was a significant increase in government interest and control over primary education in Queensland, particularly in relation to early primary grades. This change of guard is clearly articulated in the second paragraph of the *Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians* a federal bipartisan policy, where it states "[s]chools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion" (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2009).

With the introduction of the Australian Curriculum in 2010, the Queensland Government developed their own strategies and interpretation of this national requirement, manifesting in the publication and instructed use of the Curriculum into Classroom (C2C) materials in 2012. The C2C consists of lesson outlines that clearly direct how material should be taught (Department of Education and Training, 2015b, p. 1).

Not only are the lessons directed, the teaching of them is monitored as well. As all of the C2C materials are housed on the organization's online business transformational initiative OneSchool (Department of Education, 2018b), teachers are aware that all their work is being documented and cross-referenced with student performance. Jeanette explained that "to set up that assessment schedule … you actually got to have a unit [from OneSchool], so that it rolls through with the kids".

This online recording of the use of the standardized curriculum supports a panopticon approach to managing the work of their staff, as it induces them into "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1995, p. 201). In addition to monitoring teachers work through the OneSchool platform, the state Department of Education and Training ensures that all schools, administrators and teachers are held accountable for student performance, thus providing a sense of constant observation from not only the authority of the department, but from each other. Schwan and Shaprio (2011) explains how this panopticon method "appears [to be] superficially democratic, since everyone … seems to be equally bound up within its optics" (p.131). While all personnel in schools are involved in the accountability processes, it is the teachers themselves that are bearing the brunt of this systemic approach. Jeanette explains,

Schools were classed as Red Schools if they had bad NAPLAN [results] and they had five week plans. There was a lot of pressure. This has been the way since about 2010-2011 in this particular region. If you're a red school, you've got a five week plan. [They're] going to oversee you and are going to micromanage you to the point you feel ground to the dust. Teachers were really feeling it.

As a result, teachers are being trained to change their behavior and thus "become the principle of [their] own subjection" (Foucault, 1995, p. 203). Participants are not only being told what to teach and how to teach it, but they are also required to collect the multiple layers of data from the standardized testing by which they will be held accountable to. Veronica explains,

> This semester alone we've done five English assessments. You know, we've done seven Maths assessments. That's a lot, and that's not including all the other subjects. It's just so much assessing, and a lot of it's one on one assessment too. That's where I can't get that play assessment in, because I'm doing one-on-one assessment for the C2C.

Sleeter and Stillman (2013) state that such testing goes beyond trying to improve student learning; rather it reasserts "who has a right to define what schools are for, whose knowledge has most legitimacy, and how the next generation should think about the social order and their place within it" (p. 266). The shift from valuing teachers as the pedagogical experts that contextualize instruction and learning to standardization, conformity and accountability, has cultivated the growth of the audit culture.

Despite this new regime, it was clear that participants held strong pedagogical beliefs throughout their career about the importance of play as a process for learning. 100% of all teachers involved in the study indicated that play pedagogies were vital and almost all of the participants (96%) indicated that developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) were important. Jeanette observes that "older early years teachers are holding onto it, and they are managing to incorporate play because they know the curriculum so well in a variety of different ways and it's working really nicely for them". This eternal belief about the importance of play has proven to be strong amongst the teachers throughout

their career, keeping the light of hope alive that one day these pedagogies will conquer the existing standardization of education. Whilst recognizing the rigidness of the standardized curriculum and the increased pressure of the accountability measures they must address, the teachers within this study have found the cracks in the concrete within which to find the space and opportunities to realize their pedagogical beliefs regarding play and learning.

Learning versus Play

Despite this overbearing system, the teachers in the study still expressed a preference for play in the language they used to describe their day-to-day work. This struggle to break free from standardized approaches towards an experiential learning method is not new and has been ongoing for over a century. Written in 1897, Dewey's *My Pedagogic Creed* stated,

> …the active side precedes the passive in the development of the child…the neglect of this principle is the cause of a large part of the waste of time and strength in school work. The child is thrown into a passive, receptive or absorbing attitude. The conditions are such that he is not permitted to follow the law of his nature; the result is friction and waste. (Dewey, 1897)

It is this friction that continues through to the present day, dividing those within education on either side of the point of resistance, cultivating the binary of experiential approaches such as play pedagogies versus traditional didactic methods.

Whilst the definition of school readiness has shifted from being academically ready to being developmentally ready amongst the teachers themselves, the audit culture continues to hover above dictating a standardized focus and approach to teaching. Teachers in this study reported their direct supervisors, often administrators, directly

impacted their pedagogical approaches in the classroom, with 76% indicating that having their supervisors approve of their teaching approach was important. Jeanette described the impact of teacher superiors not only her work, but also the work of her peers stating,

> They said right, we are going to have this curriculum put in, you're not going to have to do anything, all you have to do is teach it. [It was] to the point where the lessons [and] all the warm ups were structured. They had to be done by a PowerPoint and they had to be this particular structure. So, you weren't allowed to do counting, oral counting or clapping, you had to be watching your screen and that was right down to Preps. Another school I worked at, they started off talking about explicit instruction in every lesson every day.

It is clear that the atmospheric pressure of accountability and assessment have become the tools of oppression in order to control the curriculum within this region. This micromanagement of teachers' pedagogical practices heightens their sensitivity to how their work is being perceived and gives clear messages both spoken and unspoken about what approaches are appropriate and which are not.

Participants cited the perceptions of others regarding the value and appropriateness of play in grades one and two, specifically their direct supervisors in middle management had a considerable impression on the pedagogies they used. Of particular interest, 41% of participants noted they felt that play pedagogies were rarely if ever, valued as a pedagogical approach by their administrator and 35% of participants said they only sometimes feel that play pedagogies are valued by their supervisors. Furthermore, 62% reported being actively discouraged in using play as a medium for teaching and assessing by their administrators. However, they also reported that while their supervisors viewed the use of play pedagogies as not appropriate for first and

second grade, they did recognize that play was a fundamental approach to teaching and learning in Prep, and therefore was appropriate in that context. It is presumed this is a result of the Queensland Department of Education and Training's (2016c) explicit promotion and endorsement of the Age Appropriate Pedagogies program within this transition grade level since 2015, where play is one of eleven recommended pedagogies. While there has been some promotion of this program beyond Prep in some schools statewide, this is the currently the exception in the Central Queensland Mackay Region and not the rule, and therefore the focus is still on utilizing the standardized Curriculum into Classroom (C2C) materials in the first and second grade.

Additionally, until recently Prep was a non-compulsory grade level and therefore it is possible that there is a residual mindset held by middle management and teacher supervisors that "formal learning" begins from grade one onwards. This would account for the considerable fixation on exclusively utilizing the C2C materials which in turn devalues teaches ability to use their expertise to decide on the pedagogical approach which will best cater for individual students (Barton, Garvis & Ryan, 2014). While play pedagogies are approved in the Prep grade context within the region, 74% of teachers in this study specified they rarely to never feel that play pedagogical approaches are a dominant feature of the early primary programs at their school. As highlighted in the literature review, the participants are not alone in feeling this pressure to conform as early childhood educators have grieved the loss of "familiar resources such as painting easels, blocks, costumes and manipulative equipment [which] have been pushed aside for desks as teachers feel pressure to implement the teacher-directed, formalized learning of the scripted C2C units with accompanying worksheet-style assessments" (Scheu, 2016, p. 47). This finding reinforces the theory that play pedagogies are distinctly discouraged by

those responsible for leading curriculum in the school. Yet all participants had the inner belief that play pedagogies were valuable and important, so they actively work to find ways to appease the enforcers while making play add up.

The foundational belief in the importance of play in grades one and two was unmistakably voiced by the early phase teachers as they discussed the need for play in their classrooms. Samantha highlighted the need for the social and emotional impact of play in her classroom, after experiencing a spontaneous full day of play when the school sports day was cancelled due to weather.

> They needed it so badly, they are exhausted. They are so down, like low in their emotions they are breaking out into tears because we are asking them to pick thing up off the floor and so yeah, at the end of the day they want smiles on their face again, so I am hoping we, that you know that can get us through the next three and a half weeks.

Veronica supported this view that the standardized curriculum, and thus teaching approaches, had taken a toll on the young students referring to the emotional and social developmental skills they were yet to acquire if they were to be successful academically. She states

> You know like, Year 1, these are still little kids they're five and six years old. You know they need an opportunity to play. They still need to work on those fine motor skills and they need some of that self-direction as well as self-regulation to teach them how to interact with each other. You know so I think it's very important socially, as well as academically for them to have that.

Participants in the study actively discussed how play is often viewed in opposition to learning and how this impacts the work they do with young children. Debbie explains how she has experienced administrators "walking down and saying, 'oh you're not learning'." But she continues, "You are learning even though you are in the playground or the sandpit, you are still learning". As those in supervisory roles continue to view play and learning as a binary, early phase teachers are not only reimagining and redefining play pedagogies, but they are actively avoiding using the term play to avoid the negative connotations supervisors have of this approach. Jeanette explains,

> The definition of play is often used in complete opposition to the idea of work, so I wouldn't use the word play in my teaching at all, because that definition of we are not actually working. That's why I talk about activities, working, curriculum and the subject areas. I include the concept of play in my definition of activities and learning, I've never used the word play, except at lunchtime.

This dichotomy highlights the opposing viewpoints of the practitioners who have an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of early childhood education and the administrators who are just trying to stick to the stated curriculum. In last two decades there has been an increased recognition of the work being done by early childhood professionals in Reggio Emilia, in particular the project approach they take when working with young children (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). While the project approach which involves three phases: project selection, investigation and representation, and culminating and debriefing events (Clark, 2006), can be traced back to the work of John Dewey, it was the travelling visual documentary *The Hundred Languages of Children* at the annual National Association for Education of Young Children conference in 2002 that brought it to the forefront of the profession. This recognition has brought to

the profession an affirmed understanding that experiential methodologies such as play pedagogies shape knowledge construction, develop skills and supports practice which accentuates and advances not only the individual within, but also society as a whole (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). New and Kantor (2013) states because "they use what they are learning about children – their interests as well as their understandings – to design challenging project work that promotes the development of new skills and understandings, including those that children will be expected to master as they move through the educational process" (p. 338), they are able to marry these pedagogies with the curriculum requirements.

Developing a learning community through the use of play pedagogies is not a new trend, rather it is one that can be seen through various cultures throughout the world. It is just described differently due to the language requirements of the audit culture. Rather than discuss the group as playing, the teachers describe it as "learning from the more knowledgeable other". Fortes (2008) reports that Tale children of Ghana "receive their education not only from the adults but also from older children and adolescents who are always transmitting from what they know of the cultural heritage to their younger brothers and sisters and cousins" (p. 36). Learning from more knowledgeable others within the community through play can also be seen in Italy, where it "serves not only adaptive purposes related to setting in which these children were to function, but also provides opportunities for learning" (New, 2008, p. 221). The experience of being supported within one's own community to be both the learner and the more knowledgeable other promotes the development of the whole child as they develop a sense of belonging, being and becoming. This encapsulates the Early Years Learning Framework, Australia's first national document to guide early childhood educators work,

which promotes "children are connected to family, community, culture and place" recognizing that "their earliest development and learning takes place through these relationships, particularly within families, who are children's first and most influential educators" (p. 7). This is particularly important for Australian First People's where the "presence of familiar faces, familiar understandings, and familiar languages within the school ... help promote a strong Aboriginal identity" (Dockett, Mason & Perry, 2006, p.141). Due to these social needs, the teachers will not give up play in the classroom, but rather will just describe it differently.

It is important to note that while the C2C curriculum does not significantly address diversity in the classroom, the Indigenous populations in the study's teachers' classrooms made it impossible to ignore. Creating a culturally appropriate learning environment was raised throughout interviews with the teachers in the region. Veronica believed with the large Indigenous population in her class, it was important to meet their social and emotional needs given that social aspect is crucial to their culture. "Having opportunities for play and movement in our classroom is significantly important for those students" she stated. Through the provision of play and movement in her classroom, Veronica is meeting not only the developmental needs of her students, she is also creating a culturally appropriate learning environment. Dockett, Mason and Perry (2006) state culturally Australian Indigenous children are nurtured through socialization practices to have "equable relations with adults" (p. 141) and that these often challenge the expectations and assumptions which are embedded in traditional standardized approaches. For example, as a sign of respect to their elders, young Indigenous students will not look at the person of authority while they are speaking, and they will not answer a question if they realize that the elder already knows the answer (Hale, 2000). Rather

young students are more engaged in learning through collaborative small group learning experiences and respond positively to active participation in learning experiences (McRae et al. 2000). Without a doubt, teachers in this region value creating these collaborative learning experiences and opportunities in their daily practices to assist students with their social and emotional development, with over three quarters (76%) indicating they are very to extremely important.

Reimagining Play to Continue Privileging in the Classrooms

Whilst the teachers in grades one and two in the Mackay region still honored play pedagogies within their pedagogical beliefs, it was clear that making this a reality in their classrooms posed challenges. As a result, these teachers had to reimagine and redefine play in order to continue privileging it within their classrooms.

Changing up the language

This change in language is leaking into how the children themselves are viewing the work they do in the classroom. Samantha recalls,

> Like today they [the students] were like 'today we did absolutely no work' and I was like 'no you just counted how many bricks you needed, put together a Lego house, you know, told four, you know I have a rotating dress up corner. When one leaves, one can come in, so [you] have monitored that all day. Oop, you've learnt that's three [and] I can add one more, yeah sure you've done no learning.

Despite the administrative view and even the view of the students themselves of their own actions within the classroom, play continues to come to the forefront of what the teachers do. Veronica summed it well, stating "if they are not engaging in it themselves then it's a lot harder to engage them in the learning. So, they need to find something that they like to do". As a result, these early phase teachers are designing

learning experiences where children can be involved in new learnings in a meaningful and personally authentic manner, as they interact with others and the world around them. Debbie explains "this term we did do a lot of outside investigation and play, because we were doing lots of directional language and positional language". In this mode, children can draw upon their prior knowledge and experiences connecting these within new understandings in order to develop depth of knowledge and application within which they world they live.

There are other reasons why the teachers resisted the idea of taking play entirely out of the curriculum. Of particular concern amongst the participants of this study was the lack of social and emotional skills their students had in order to cope with the expectations of 'how to do school'. Students have been arriving without the social capacity to jump into an academic curriculum, and thus the teachers have had to address those deficiencies—often with play. The definition of school readiness has shifted from the tradition view of knowing one's ABC's and 123's to having gained emotional resilience and social skills such as cooperation, turn-taking and following directions. Jeanette concurred that this shift can clearly be seen in these first few years of formal schooling where it is "very much a period of getting to know school, and the socialization" of students to understand their role as a learner. Being school ready, Samantha stated,

> For me, readiness for school for me has always been social emotional factors it's never come into pencil grip, ABCs, name. None of that, because of what I know of child development, a teacher can teach all those things. But if the social emotional skills aren't there it's really hard to teach those things. But if a child

can make friends, they want to learn, if they can investigate something, they will

learn all that other stuff.

All participants in the study felt that providing opportunities for developing social skills

and cooperation among the students was of utmost importance, with 71% of teachers

ranking it as extremely important and 29% as very important. As a result, teachers were

using play pedagogies as a developmental approach to address the lack of social and

emotional skills students were coming with, which impacted their ability to succeed at

school. The practice of providing regular movement breaks between periods of

standardized curriculum delivery through didactic methods was also commonly seen to

keep students engaged in learning. Strategies such as using online resources like

GoNoodle, a website with a collection of videos, games and activities focused on

introducing short bursts of physical exercise in the classroom; were accessed to provide

opportunities to move, stretch, cooperate and develop mindfulness.

The teachers in this study clearly feel it is important to focus on more than just

having their students achieve academically within the standardized curriculum. Through

their work they are actively taking a more holistic approach to ensure they meet the

development needs of their students through play. Reflecting upon when she first

graduated and was excited to be using play pedagogies to teach and assess with, Veronica

states,

I was very excited about it and very hopeful. Thinking yay, kids get time to play

still. And then I got to school and found there was not much time to assess

through play. I try to give them those options but it's more social skills [I'm]

teaching them.

Scheduling for the social development of their young students was a common feature seen in their personal planning documents. Veronica and Debbie both had thirty minutes programmed in their class timetable once a week to work on social skills with their students. While Veronica used the generic label of 'social skills', Debbie was more specific indicating the use of the school wide positive behavior learning program with a focus on 'appropriate school language'. Samantha had scheduled a higher frequency of opportunities for her students to practice their social skills, having two opportunities a day. At the beginning of the day she has 'inside play' scheduled in addition to the 'end of day routine', and through these opportunities she indicated she had set up play opportunities for the students to practice their social skills. Samantha explains how through her experience of working in early years learning centers, coupled with her studies in early childhood pedagogies, she seeks the opportunities for play and where she can include these to benefit her students stating,

> I think pro play based, years of experience in early years, and a passion for early years and then the degree in early years, all combined together mean you will look for it. You will find it where you can, you will pull it out, you will take the C2C assessment and you will find some way to put it in there.

"Learning community" rather than "playtime"

The teachers in this study also changed how they discussed the group aspects of play, focusing on "community" rather than "playing together". Taking a step back to consider how she can better assist the young learners entering her classroom to be better prepared socially, Jeanette has been proactive in establishing a learning community through the use of play. From a rural school setting, she has been able to work collaboratively with her local playgroup (community organized informal sessions where

families meet together so children can engage in play to meet the needs of the children attending) to host their meetings on the school site so that her young students could have the opportunity once a week to play and develop those much needed social skills. This enabled the development of an authentic community of learners engaged in play, whilst also addressing her community engagement requirements to increase student enrolments long term and promoting play as a vehicle for learning. Consideration of the context within which the learning occurs, including the wider community and the values they hold, was clearly articulated in the literature as being best practice in developmentally appropriate programs (Branscombe et al., 2013).

Redefining Play Pedagogies

The new visions of play incorporation also changed how teachers in the study defined play as its own entity. Teaching methods which were inherently kinesthetic were widely cited within this study as play, especially as they produced the juncture which could displace disengagement through traditional didactic approaches affording both teachers and students the freedom to be engaged in the experience of learning. Some teachers discovered the gap for introducing play into their daily program through the use of "you know [those] hands on manipulative materials that are just so important"; by taking learning outside the four walls of the classroom by including "a lot of outside investigation", and most commonly teachers described those opportunities as being "hands on, it's movement, it's not paper and pen, it's out of our desks". Samantha explains her definition of play pedagogy stating, "I like to use the word developmental play. My idea of play is, it's not necessarily just kids with toys, and that's play. My idea of play is that it's an alternate learning space, it's anything like that". Likewise, active, hands-on personalized learning experiences are widely cited in the literature as being

hallmarks of play pedagogies (Grieshaber, 2010; Lillemyr, Søbstad, Marder & Flowerday, 2011; New, 2008; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008; Synodi, 2010). Veronica discusses how for her, play is about meeting her students' needs through movement.

> Because I have kids that because of their diagnosis, and some that are in the process of being diagnosed, if I did not incorporate play and movement in the classroom then I wouldn't be able to keep those children engaged. These are the kids that were very much disengaged at the end of Prep. They weren't writing, but they are now writing, and they are now actively trying because they want to please me because we have that relationship now. And to get them to write, we've done sand writing, air writing, all these things that are much more playful in our approach than pen and paper. We've painted our writing, we've done it in sand, we've done it with playdough, we've done it with crayons, but that's what got the kids into writing. Again, it comes back down to relationships and celebrating.

Highly contextualized to each school context and the teacher themselves, there were several strategies identified for including play within the curriculum. While acknowledging the use of playful approaches in learning, Jeanette discusses how she has redefined play pedagogies in her learning community,

> I would talk about age appropriate pedagogies, but I wouldn't talk about play. Even in your conversations with parents you know, if you talked about they're playing with the Lego, I wouldn't use that language. But I would say we are using the Lego to construct a city, they've got to collaborate to plan and construct their city, etcetera, etcetera. I wouldn't say we are playing with the Lego, although the kids do use that language.

Although not always strictly employed to address content areas of the curriculum, it was always identified as being used to address the developmental needs of students.

Like the students they work with, where they located the fissures and how play was planted within these spaces, was highly individualized and contextualized amongst teachers. Throughout the study teachers reported embracing elements of experiential education (Dewey, 1993; Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012), developmentally appropriate practices (Branscombe et al, 2013; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Chen & McNamee, 2013; Cuffaro & Nager, 2013; Hinitz, 2013; Powell, 2013; Ray & Melendez, 2013), project approach (Fortes, 2008; New, 2008; Clark, 2006; Katz and Chard, 2013), and play based learning (Edwards & Cutter-MacKenzie, 2013; Hayes, 2016). While they were not actively using all of these at the same time, nor were all teachers using all approaches within their practices, the teachers did choose the elements based on how well they would meet the observed developmental needs of their students. In deciding upon a suitable approach, participants drew upon knowledge they had gained through higher education studies, early childhood education curriculums—both past and present, the Age Appropriate Pedagogies program, and/or mentorship from more knowledgeable others. Debbie explained, "It's planned, its teaching children from within, it's looking at ways they want to investigate" in conjunction with how well these approaches will fit into the crevices that appeared in the curriculum within their own teaching contexts. Therefore, the definition of play pedagogies as being active, hands-on personalized learning experiences was socially negotiated and constructed throughout the region as the participants were seen to be influenced by multiple facets of their professional community.

Using Mathematics as a Springboard for Play

Mathematics is one of the two key learning areas which are subject to regular standardized high stakes testing through the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in grades three, five, seven and nine in Australia. Yet, mathematics was found to be the most common key learning area where teachers uncovered the opening which afforded them the ability to engage play pedagogies defined as active, hands-on personalized learning experiences. This is not to say it is not possible for other learning areas to provide opportunities for play pedagogies to be enacted, rather this was the area within which teachers readily identified as providing the space for play. 65% of teachers in the study revealed they often to always engage children in play experiences within the instructional design of Mathematics learning experiences. The practical nature of the mathematics curriculum in early primary years, particularly in the strands of number, measurement and geometry tends to lend itself to lesson designs which are hands-on and make use of concrete materials. Within the Central Queensland Mackay Region this was predominantly seen through the use of rotational activities involving students engaging with manipulative materials such as unifix cubes, scales, dice, counters, pattern blocks, and geoboards. 62% of teachers stated they often to always ensure there were places within the classroom for students to play with manipulatives, and a further 32% said they sometimes do this. This provides young children with the opportunity to regularly engage in play experiences whilst allowing teachers to guide them to achieve desired learning outcomes.

The use of mathematical manipulatives was a dominant feature of play pedagogies in participants' classrooms within this study, and the teachers described their use as play. This in itself is not surprising as other studies have shown "the use of

mathematics manipulative materials such as counters and Base Ten Blocks is common in many Australian classrooms" (Marshall & Swan, 2008, p. 338), yet the use of this approach as a way of subverting audit culture and finding a space for play pedagogies was enlightening. With comments from participants such as "you know that hands-on manipulative materials that are just so important", and "I give them a lot of rotational activities … working with their hands, so it's giving those kids the opportunity to do that"; it was clear that this particular approach was valued highly. While some of the participants described play pedagogies being as hands-on, others described it as being more physically involved through movement. This was seen in Veronica's comment, "You know again, it's that whole body learning. You know I figure whilst I'd love to get more play in, you know I've got to settle for just movement", to achieve desired learning outcomes in this key learning area. The use of learning experiences such as obstacle courses for directional and positional language, were also cited along with movement games which required students to physically respond to mathematical challenges posed to them. The regular practice of playing games to engage students in learning was a strategy that 94% of participants identified they use sometimes to always in their instructional design.

Having students physically involved created purposeful learning experiences where they could accentuate their own knowledge and understanding of the content being taught or consolidated, fits well with Jay & Knaus's (2018) definition of play. Unfortunately, 76% of participants indicated they only sometimes have access to play spaces to extend learning beyond their classroom, and yet 15% indicated they always have this. When discussing the use of outdoor spaces to engage students in play pedagogies while addressing mathematics curriculum content Debbie states,

We did lots of hide and seek, getting kids to give instruction to find certain things, and things like that. So next term we are doing capacity and measurement, so we will be going outside into the sandpit and getting a lot of capacity and measurement practice out there. So, it's trying to get out there as much as we can but it's not always as simple that. Also, sometimes, if we look at admin, some members of admin don't see play based learning the way we've planned it to be. They just see it as kids playing so it's I guess, perception of other people coming down as well, so we are then also turned off because we don't want to be seen as lazy and just putting stuff out for the kids to play so that's another facet that we are always thinking about too.

This has been a struggle for over a century, as Dewey (1993) stated "the logically formulated material of a science or branch of learning, of a study, is no substitute for the having of individual experiences" (p. 126). Clearly early phase teachers are still fighting for a greater understanding of play pedagogies so that their work with play pedagogies can be recognized and validated.

While the use of mathematic manipulatives and kinesthetic learning experiences took a direction off the traditional didactic pathway of teaching, this journey never compromised the teacher's ability to fulfil their obligations in addressing the standardized curriculum. Teachers (100 %) within the study indicated that following the C2C curriculum as it was written held little importance to them, however they acknowledged they still needed to use these materials as directed by their supervisors with 82 % stating they use them as a guide when planning learning experiences. This enabled participants to be successful in manipulating the existing binary of play versus work to become a unified partnership. With just under half of early phase teachers (41 %) identifying they

regularly feel confident in designing instructional opportunities which engage play pedagogies, mathematics is undoubtedly a space where they feel confident in their own abilities to marry standardized curriculum with play. Samantha clearly reflects on this stating,

> I probably feel because I can't talk the talk, I can't get away with putting it in there, whereas with maths, because of all the early numeracy stuff I've done for years I can make it click. They need concrete materials and they need this, and they need that, and play provides all of that.

As existing scholarship recognizes, the use of manipulatives in the area of mathematics has a long history in Australia (Howard, Perry & Conroy, 1995; Marshall & Swan, 2007; Marshall & Swan, 2008; Swan, Marshall, de Jong, Mildenhall & White, 2007) and therefore it is probable that mathematics is a space within the curriculum where teachers feel enough self-confidence to attempt to include play pedagogies, as they can legitimately demonstrate they are addressing a high priority standardized learning area through these approaches.

Mentorship and Confidence as Essential to Play Survival

One of the forecasted benefits of this study was the possibility that participants would experience self-critical reflection through the process of completing the survey and participating in the interviews with the researcher. This came to fruition when it was evident during interviews that teachers were going through a metacognitive process as they were relaying their experiences and explaining their feelings about their own self competence and confidence. When discussing if there was an area in the curriculum that did not get as much play, Samantha reflected,

Definitely with English, definitely. Um it's my probably weakness as well, in my own learning so therefore I don't understand as much how to make it fit. And as well it's probably an area in child care which wasn't like we did early literacy skills with the kids, but as you know, in like writing text or creating text or decoding text, it's not something we focused on in child care so therefore I probably can't see the connection as well. It's certainly an area I want to improve on because of that.

Samantha's acknowledgement of how her self-competence and confidence impacts her ability to utilize play pedagogies in the key learning area of English is enlightening. While it was anticipated that this project would provide teachers with the opportunity to be a reflective practitioner, it was unexpected to discover teachers own self-confidence and perceived competence was often a barrier to utilizing play pedagogies.

One of the perceived results of audit culture is causing a lack of self-confidence in the early career teacher. If the curriculum is prescribed and surveillance is constant, one could not be expected to build confidence in one's own competence as a teacher. Whilst this lack of self-confidence certainly did improve through the course of the teacher's career from 33% feeling confident in planning play-based learning experiences in their first year of teaching to 73% after twenty years of teaching; it shows that a lack of self-confidence and competence prevails throughout their career. As a highly accomplished teacher with over ten years of teaching experience, Debbie acknowledges it has been a long process of building confidence in her own competence and she has not quite got there yet,

I've almost got to the stage now where I have enough confidence to say if someone questions, 'no I am teaching' and then when assessment gets done, then

assessment gets done because it's more important to teach the content than to tell them about it and then assess them. Five years ago, I would have just changed schools rather than fight it.

Without the self-confidence and competence to push back on the promoted rote and standardized learning approaches, early phase teachers are being thwarted in their ability to effectively unite the two desired outcomes of delivering the standardized curriculum and being an agent of pedagogical change towards play pedagogies. Clearly, the journey towards uniting the expectations of the audit culture and fulfilling one's own personal pedagogical beliefs is a holistic process which must begin from within oneself whilst working to clear the obstacles placed on the pathway by others.

The audit culture possibly does more than just increase the pressure to conform and shift the expertise to policymakers; it may very well change the physical being of the teachers themselves. However, as the results of this study shows that self-confidence in using play pedagogies to subvert the audit culture does increase somewhat in the later stages of the teachers' career, it is important to discuss how experiences with mentorship around the use of play pedagogies earlier in their career influenced their image of themselves as pedagogues. It is plausible that this lack of self-confidence and competence is due to the systematic shift of pedagogical decisions from the teachers themselves to the policy makers within the organization. The audit culture which has deemed teacher's incompetent to make pedagogical decisions to ensure student success has in effect changed how they see themselves and their competence as pedagogues. Han, Northoff, Vogeley, Wexler, Kitayama & Varnum's (2013) review of the literature in cultural neuroscience supports this view stating,

People engage in the complex composed of materials and social rules or practices

… of their respective local communities, and by doing so, they have their brains

changed in such a way that the resulting brain functions are attuned closely to the

surrounding sociocultural environment. (p. 339)

As already discussed, it was very pronounced that professionals holding positions

within middle management such as Principals and Heads of Curriculum were the

enforcers of the standardized curriculum and associated pedagogies. Debbie

acknowledged middle management's role in the audit culture verifying,

We have to be consistent and I understand why it is, but we all have to be

consistent and there's admin being pressured from regional office. And I'm sure

regional office have pressure coming from head office. So, it's just a pressure on

effect from every single person and I guess being in the front line we are the ones

that have to try and make it work.

Paradoxically it is the educators within these positions of power that are the very same

direct supervisors whose perceptions around the appropriateness of play pedagogies in

grades one and two, that participants identified as being an obstacle to their ability to

implement their pedagogical beliefs. Moreover, while it is often the role of these very

professionals to enforce the requirements of the standardized curriculum and the audit

culture which drives it, these are the people whom teachers are most likely to seek

guidance and support from in developing curriculum.

The Need for Mentorship

Exploring where early phase teachers sought support in their use of play

pedagogies, this study discovered that teachers utilized two avenues: middle management

and senior experienced early childhood teachers. Gaining guidance from those in middle

management, which the participants had already indicated that had perceptions that play pedagogies are not appropriate in first and second grades, seems counter intuitive to developing positive pedagogical mentorship. With over three quarters (76 %) of participants indicating that having their supervisors' approval of their teaching approach was important, they are without a doubt developing a relationship which is complicated and fraught with potential points of friction. Jeanette emphasizes this relationship tension stating, "we tried to introduce some play in the classroom…but it wasn't really well received by principals, well by admin". The need to have a supervisor's approval of the pedagogical practices the teachers embrace is a strong indication of the effects of the audit culture encompassing education. When discussing her attempts to design learning experiences which embrace play pedagogies, Debbie states "I feel as we have to close the door on that conversation we can't be seen to go off track or on a tangent, because then you're not being a team player". While participants were quite firm on their pedagogical beliefs about the importance of play, they still want to be seen to be meeting expectations both within their pedagogical practices and through student performance outcomes. This tumultuous pathway seeking mentorship from those whose job it is to enforce accountability measures and standardized curriculum within the audit culture, may account for the decline of applied play pedagogies through the course of an early phase teachers' career.

The alternative avenue participants pursue in seeking support and guidance is drawing upon the experience of a more knowledgeable other. Although just over half (59%) of the participants indicated that having their colleagues approve of their teaching approach was not important, the participants that were interviewed did indicate that they sought the guidance and advice from senior experienced early childhood teachers which

were recognized as such within the local early childhood community. When discussing the impact, a mentoring relationship had on her pedagogical beliefs and practices earlier in her career Debbie explained "because my mentality, it was very schooling classroom based, very regimented, and very structured, that kind of thing. And then after … it opens your eyes to a different kind of teaching into the play based". Like Debbie's experience, mentoring relationships were predominantly sought early in the teachers' career, with 67% of graduate teachers indicating they sometimes consult a teacher mentor to support or guide their practices. Participants expressed having a successful early childhood teacher guide them through the journey of marrying standardized curriculum with play pedagogies was vital in developing understanding of where and how this can be achieved. This provides confirmatory evidence that like the findings of a recent study by Jay & Knaus (2018) engaging in mentoring and coaching improves first and second grade teachers' ability to visualize and affirm their understandings of play pedagogies. Further evidence supporting the benefits of mentorship and pedagogical learning communities may lie in the findings of Hudson, Hudson, Gray & Bloxham (2013) which found it promotes professional growth for all involved; and the recent study by Kraft, Blazer & Hogan (2018) which established engaging in such experiences raised student performance on standardized tests.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Through the course of this study the voice of the grade one and two teachers in the Central Queensland Mackay Region was not only raised but more importantly it was heard. The data collected has presented a very illuminating representation of the current realities faced by these teachers trying to marry play pedagogies with the standardized curriculum. There were many encouraging aspects that a union may not only be possible,

but that teachers in grades one and two are actively walking down the aisle towards this coupling. The standout findings were the localized definition of play pedagogies as socially constructed and negotiated by the teachers in the region, and that the standardized key learning area of mathematics was the space where teachers have found footing to start this journey, due to the wide acceptance of the use of manipulative materials in Australian classrooms. From this starting point, teachers within this region have used the historically accepted use of hands-on materials to define and implement play pedagogies which are inherently kinesthetic, incorporating whole body movement experiences and investigating concepts beyond the confines of the classroom. Early phase teachers whom hold dual roles as both teacher and principal, were able to travel further down this pathway as they are empowered through the provision of greater freedom through their role as a principal, to use play pedagogies to deliver the standardized curriculum.

Recommendation one: Duplicating this research project on a larger scale, encompassing not only the entire Central Queensland Region, but also the other six regions in the state.

It was clear through the findings in this research project that teachers still hold strong pedagogical beliefs about the importance of play and want to enact these pedagogies within their daily practices in first and second grade classrooms. While the project provides a contextualized understanding of the realities early phase teachers are encountering in their daily practices, it was unquestionably limited to the Mackay District of the Central Queensland Region of the Department of Education and Training, and therefore cannot be generalized. Duplicating the research project across all seven regions of the state of Queensland would allow for findings from each region to be compared

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with each other, as well as exploring possible geographical differences and commonalities. Additionally, looking at the whole organization across the entire state would allow for results to be generalized, thus providing results which are better positioned to inform policy and curriculum review related to early phase of schooling as the organization moves forward. Such research would also assist in advising the cabinet members of parliament that are handed the education portfolio, so that are kept abreast of the current realities in early primary classrooms.

Recommendation two: Further research must be conducted on how the Age Appropriate Pedagogies program is being adopted in grades one and two, and the influence this has on administrators/teacher supervisor understandings of the use of play pedagogies to deliver the standardized curriculum.

Currently the Queensland Department of Education and Training's explicit promotion and endorsement of the Age Appropriate Pedagogies (AAP) program across the state, with a documented focus of implementation in the Prep grade level only, continues to reinforce the perception that play pedagogies are not a supported approach beyond this transitional grade. While the Mackay Regional Office of the Department of Education and Training verbally promotes the use of play pedagogies as part of the Age Appropriate Pedagogies program beyond the prep grade level, this message is not produced in the published AAP literature on the organizational website, thus teachers receive mixed messages. The provision of research into how the Age Appropriate Pedagogies program is being adopted in grades one and two, and the influence this has on administrators/teacher supervisor understandings of the use of play pedagogies to deliver the standardized curriculum would support the regions efforts in promoting the AAP beyond Prep. Furthermore, uncovering the messages received by middle management

from both senior management and the teachers, themselves, and how these influence their understandings of play pedagogies are important to understand if those responsible for leading curriculum decisions in schools are to effectively support teachers in their pedagogical practices.

Recommendation three: Research into the effectiveness of courses within initial teacher education programs in Queensland higher education institutions, in building self-confidence and competence in applying play pedagogies.

Without the support of coaching and mentorship of more knowledgeable others, teacher's self-confidence and self-competence is systematically being oppressed through the audit culture in order to gain compliance. Investigating how effectively initial teacher education programs are building preservice teachers' self-confidence and competence as they work towards graduation, and how this is impacted by the realities of placement in the school environment would provide an understanding of how effective the coaching methods in using play pedagogies are through these programs. Additionally, the mentor relationships during the professional placement component of their studies, and how effective these are in supporting the use of play pedagogies would illuminate the journey of building self-competence in using these pedagogical approaches post-graduation.

Recommendation four: Research is needed on the impact of pedagogical learning communities on early teachers' efforts to marry play pedagogies with standardized curriculum.

Teachers in the early phase of primary schooling have indicated in this study that they have benefited from early career mentoring relating to the use of play pedagogies to deliver standardized curriculum. Understanding who identifies possible mentors for

teachers, supervisors or the mentees themselves; and how these relationships are initiated would illuminate the conditions under which mentoring occurs for early phase teachers in different school contexts throughout the region. Exploring how mentoring relationships are maintained and sustained throughout the early childhood teachers' career, and how strategies identified support the longevity of such mentor and coaching relationships has the potential to uncover the influence these have on the implementation of play pedagogies. Discovering how early phase teachers connect with each other to share successes, challenges and ideas could possibly highlight opportunities for educational organizations to consider how they can best support their teacher's professional development.

Recommendation five: Pedagogical research needs to be conducted in partnership with early phase teachers to ascertain which specific play pedagogies are being used and the impact these have on student learning outcomes.

Teachers indicated they are working hard to hold onto their pedagogical beliefs and engage play pedagogies in their classrooms, specifically in the key learning area of Mathematics. The Department of Education and Training are focused on improving student performance outcomes on standardized testing such as NAPLAN and more broadly TIMMS. In an effort to continue investigating how the binary of these outcomes can be reconciled to become one, research needs to be conducted in order to investigate the impact of using play pedagogical approaches has on both students understanding of mathematical concepts and their performance on standardized tests. The findings from such a project would highlight the effectiveness and value of such pedagogical approaches in the long term.

Concluding Remarks

Early childhood teachers have a long and rich history of recognizing children's play as being a vital component of how the child develops, interacts with and learns about their world. For over a century, this focus on development through play has been internationally recognized as being of utmost importance (Branscombe et al., 2013; Brisbane Kindergarten Training College, 1937; Carlsson-Paige, 2001; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Fröbel & Hailmann, 1887; Logan & Clarke, 1984; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Smith & Vollstedt, 1985), and without a doubt has become an integral part of early childhood teachers' professional identity. Acknowledging the strong pedagogical ties to play throughout the profession, it is no wonder that teachers in this field are feeling personally aggrieved by the audit culture that is stripping back their ability to use these approaches. The ever expanding standardization, conformity and accountability requirements of this rolling nothing has prompted teachers to stand up, have their voice heard and begin to push back, albeit behind the door within the safety of the classroom.

Like the young warrior Atreyu from *The Neverending Story* (1984) who faces the rolling nothing's apathy and cynicism consuming a world of possibilities, the teachers in this district will not let play pedagogies die easily, for they too are warriors. They will not let the despair of being disparaged as experts in their field; devalued as pedagogues through the application of the C2C materials; and relegated to being a delivery system of content; overcome their own pedagogical beliefs. While as individuals they experience doubt over their self-competence and therefore lack self-confidence in their abilities to marry play pedagogies with the standardized curriculum, they are discovering means of including play pedagogies in their work to ensure that all their beliefs are not lost.

As an early childhood teacher, I am encouraged that teachers in grades one and two are pushing back on the audit culture by reimagining and redefining play pedagogies. Through the consideration of the young students needs in their learning community, they are exploiting the cracks in the concrete to change the system from within. Gorlewski, Gorlewski & Ramming, (2012) supports this stating "all political change has local effects and all local actions have the potential to influence society" (p. 6). These acts of restoring the existence of play pedagogies in the early phase classrooms through their own imagination, impacts not only the quality of engagement their learners have with the curriculum content, but also the wider profession as the frontiers of this change. Through these actions early childhood educators are not only being advocates for play within the primary classrooms, they are beginning to create a play pedagogy movement and have become the agents of change as they lead by example.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Teacher Survey

BACKGROUND INFORMATION					
1. How old are you?	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
2. What is your employment status as a teacher?	FT	PT	CT	███	███
3. What is the highest level of formal education that you have completed?	Bachelor Degree		Masters Degree		Doctoral Degree
4. How long have you been working as a teacher? *Where possible exclude extended periods of absence (e.g. career breaks).*	<1st year	1- 5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years	> 20 years
5. How long have you been working as a teacher <u>at this school?</u> *Where possible exclude extended periods of absence (e.g. career breaks).*	<1st year	1- 5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years	> 20 years
6. What is the approximate enrolment size of this school?	Rural <50	Regional 51-200	Suburban 201-	Urban > 500	

PEDAGOGICAL BELIEFS					
How important to you is …	Not at all	Unimportant	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
7. Play as a method of teaching and learning					
8. Planning based on observations of children's abilities					
9. Responding to children's interests within the curriculum					
10. Differentiation of curriculum to cater for differences in development					
11. Teaching each subject area independently					
12. Providing opportunities for children to select many of their own activities					
13. Using one set approach for reading and writing instruction					
14. Letting children create their own learning experiences					
15. Structured reading or pre-reading experiences					
16. Providing a variety of learning areas with concrete materials					
17. Having workbooks in the classroom					
18. Children working individually at desks or tables most of the time					
19. Extended periods of time for children to plan and design their own projects?					
20. Children being able to write by inventing their own spelling					
21. Providing opportunities for developing social skills and cooperation among children					
22. Having children develop their own learning goals?					
23. Providing the same curriculum and environment for each class					
24. Keeping the learning environment quiet					
25. Following the C2C curriculum as it is written					

26. Having all the students conform to the one learning experience?					
27. Learning experiences that integrate multiple subjects					
28. Scaffolding children's learning rather than telling them exactly what to do or what the answer is?					
29. Maintaining classroom order					
30. Using observations, anecdotal records; and artefacts, such as drawings and stories to build an assessment portfolio of children's learning and current abilities?					
31. Ensuring students have all work completed prior to engaging in play?					
32. Making learning visible in the classroom					
33. Collaborating with children to plan learning experiences					
34. Children's input into planning learning experiences					
35. Having colleagues approval of your teaching approach					
36. Having supervisors' approval of your teaching approach					
37. Getting children ready to take a test/assessment					
38. Collaborative learning experiences and opportunities					

PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

Do you….	Never	Rarely	Someti	Often	Alway
39. Use Education Queensland's Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) unit plans?					
40. Use Education Queensland's C2C as one of many resources when writing curriculum plans?					
41. End a project once children lose interest and stop generating their own questions to explore?					
42. Use Education Queensland's C2C in combination with the Australian Curriculum?					
43. Use Education Queensland's C2C as a guideline when planning?					
44. Regularly engage children in play experiences within Mathematics learning experiences?					

45. Actively seek ways to include play in your daily curriculum?					
46. Encourage students to design spaces in your classroom that support their learning through play?					
47. Use worksheets as a teaching tool?					
48. Ensure that students are doing as they are instructed to do?					
49. Feel confident in planning play-based learning experiences?					
50. Have access to play spaces to extend learning beyond your classroom?					
51. Regularly engage children in play experiences within English content learning experiences?					
52. Require children to sit and listen for long periods of time?					
53. Ensure there are places for students to play with manipulatives in your classroom?					
54. Engage children in child-chosen, teacher-supported play activities?					
55. Conduct lessons outside your classroom?					
56. Support children in initiating units of study which are sustained and involve in-depth experiences to develop deep understanding?					
57. Have children participate in whole-class, teacher-directed instruction?					
58. Have the children work with materials that have been adapted or modified to meet the children's needs?					
59. Prioritize content children are expected to know when designing lessons?					
60. Plan regular opportunities in your classroom for students to play with games and puzzles?					
61. Allow children to only play during designated breaks?					
62. Regularly engage children in play experiences within Humanities and Social Sciences learning experiences?					
63. Have the children regularly practice handwriting on lines?					
64. Consult a teacher mentor to support or guide your practices?					
65. Have children participate in solving real problems using real objects found in the classroom?					
66. Feel the need to demonstrate to families and administrators that you are teaching the Australian curriculum standards?					
67. Feel supported in your teaching practices?					

68. Have student desks in rows within your classroom?					
69. Feel play pedagogical approaches a dominant feature of the early primary programs at your school?					
70. Schedule the class timetable according to learning areas/subjects?					
71. Regularly engage children in play experiences within The Arts learning experiences?					
72. Consider yourself as the provider of knowledge to children?					
73. Prepare students to do well on the NAPLAN tests?					
74. Regularly engage children in play experiences within Science learning experiences?					
75. Regularly engage children in opportunities to practice test taking?					
76. Guide children to discover knowledge through play?					
77. Feel play is valued as a pedagogical approach by your administrator?					
78. Feel there are benefits to teaching and assessing through play?					
79. Discouraged by colleagues and/or administrators in using play as a medium for teaching and assessing?					
80. Use play as a reward when children have completed their work?					
81. Consider play as an experience that children should only engage in during breaks?					
82. Regularly engage children in play experiences within Technologies learning experiences?					
83. Want to include more play opportunities for your students in your class schedule?					
84. Have students develop their own learning portfolio, so that they can visit, revisit and reflect on their own work and to take ownership of their progress by assessing and selecting work that best represents their current level of thinking?					
85. Expect children to get all the questions on curriculum content correct?					

APPENDIX B

Themed Questions from the Teacher Survey

THEME – STANDARDIZED CURRICULUM	
39	Use Education Queensland's Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) unit plans?
40	Use Education Queensland's C2C as one of many resources when writing curriculum plans?
42	Use Education Queensland's C2C in combination with the Australian Curriculum?
43	Use Education Queensland's C2C as a guideline when planning?
25	Following the C2C curriculum as it is written
79	Discouraged by colleagues and/or administrators in using play as a medium for teaching and assessing?
73	Preparing students to do well on NAPLAN tests?
23	Provide the same curriculum and environment for each class?
37	Ensure children are ready to take a test/assessment
11	Teaching each subject area independently
70	Schedule the class timetable according to learning areas/subjects?
72	Consider yourself as the provider of knowledge to children?
57	Have children participate in whole-class, teacher-directed instruction?

THEME – TEACHER ORIENTED	
13	Using one set approach for reading and writing instruction
15	Structured reading or pre-reading experiences
17	Having workbooks in the classroom
18	Children working individually at desks or tables most of the time
24	Keeping the learning environment quiet
29	Maintaining classroom order
47	Use worksheets as a teaching tool?
48	Ensure that students are doing as they are instructed to do?
52	Require children to sit and listen for long periods of time?
81	Consider play as an experience that children should only engage in during breaks?
63	Have the children regularly practice handwriting on lines?
68	Have student desks in rows within your classroom?
75	Regularly engage children in opportunities to practice test taking?

THEME – PLAY PEDAGOGIES	
7	Play as a method of teaching and learning
44	Regularly engage children in play experiences within Mathematics learning experiences?
45	Actively seek ways to include play in your daily curriculum?
49	Feel confident in planning play-based learning experiences?
THEME – PLAY PEDAGOGIES	
50	Have access to play spaces to extend learning beyond your classroom?

51	*Regularly engage children in play experiences within English content learning experiences?*
53	*Ensure there are places for students to play with manipulatives in your classroom?*
62	*Regularly engage children in play experiences within Humanities and Social Sciences learning experiences?*
71	*Regularly engage children in play experiences within The Arts learning experiences?*
74	*Regularly engage children in play experiences within Science learning experiences?*
76	*Guide children to discover knowledge through play?*
78	*Feel there are benefits to teaching and assessing through play?*
82	*Regularly engage children in play experiences within Technologies learning experiences?*
83	*Want to include more play opportunities for your students in your class schedule?*
60	*Plan regular opportunities in your classroom for students to play with games and puzzles?*

THEME – CHILD AS COMPETENT	
9	*Responding to children's interests within the curriculum?*
12	*Providing opportunities for children to select many of their own activities?*
14	*Letting children create their own learning experiences?*
33	*Collaborating with children to plan learning experiences?*
34	*Children's input into planning learning experiences?*
54	*Engage children in child-chosen, teacher-supported play activities?*
19	*Extended periods of time for children to plan and design their own projects?*
22	*Having children develop their own learning goals?*
65	*Have children participate in solving real problems using real objects found in the classroom?*
46	*Encourage students to design spaces in your classroom that support their learning through play?*
41	*End a project once children lose interest and stop generating their own questions to explore?*
28	*Scaffolding children's learning rather than telling them exactly what to do or what the answer is?*
84	*Have students develop their own learning portfolio, so that they can visit, revisit and reflect on their own work and to take ownership of their progress by assessing and selecting work that best represents their current level of thinking?*

THEME – QLD CURRICULUM / DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE	
8	*Planning based on observations of children's abilities?*
10	*Differentiation of curriculum to cater for differences in development?*
16	*Providing a variety of learning areas with concrete materials?*
20	*Children being able to write by inventing their own spelling?*

21	*Providing opportunities for developing social skills and cooperation among children?*
27	*Learning experiences that integrate multiple subjects?*
58	*Have the children work with materials that have been adapted or modified to meet the children's needs?*
32	*Making learning visible in the classroom?*
38	*Collaborative learning experiences and opportunities?*
55	*Conduct lessons outside your classroom?*
30	*Using observations, anecdotal records; and artefacts, such as drawings and stories to build an assessment portfolio of children's learning and current abilities?*
56	*Support children in initiating units of study which are sustained and involve in-depth experiences to develop deep understanding?*

THEME – AUDIT CULTURE	
35	*Having colleague's approval of your teaching approach?*
36	*Having supervisors' approval of your teaching approach?*
66	*Feel the need to demonstrate to families and administrators that you are teaching the Australian curriculum standards?*
64	*Consult a teacher mentor to support or guide your practices?*
67	*Feel supported in your teaching practices?*
69	*Feel play pedagogical approaches a dominant feature of the early primary programs at your school?*
77	*Feel play is valued as a pedagogical approach by your administrator?*
80	*Use play as a reward when children have completed their work?*
61	*Allow children to only play during designated breaks?*
59	*Prioritize content children are expected to know when designing lessons?*
26	*Having all the students conform to the one learning experience?*
31	*Ensuring students have all work completed prior to engaging in play?*
85	*Expect children to get all the questions on curriculum content correct?*

In-depth Interview Questions

Interview Questions Background Info:

- What is the level of your education and the specifics of your degree?
- When did you graduate?
- How long have you been teaching?
- Where have your teaching experiences been?

Themed Questions

- How did you feel about teaching and assessing through play when you first graduated?
- Have your feelings changed about this since then?
- How did that change/what influenced you?

- ***What do you feel are the obstacles to teaching and assessing through play?*** *(Age – 20-29, 30-39, 50-59, School Context – Suburban, Career – Graduate, Proficient)*

➢ In the first phase it was identified that:

  ➢ Early phase teachers felt that viewing the child as competent was important yet identified they don't always implement practices that demonstrate this. ***What do you feel are the obstacles for providing the opportunities to demonstrate their competency in seeking their own learning pathway?*** *(School Context – Rural, Age – 50-59, Career Stage - Lead)*

  ➢ While play pedagogies and DAP were important to the teachers they indicated they only sometimes allow children to play during designated breaks and yet they also indicated that they always actively seek ways to include play in their daily curriculum. ***Is this an issue for you and why do you feel this is the case?*** *(School Context – Urban, Career Stage – Lead, Graduate, Proficient)*

  ➢ Teachers felt that standardized curriculum held no importance to them, along with teacher-oriented curriculum and the general audit culture holding little importance, yet these teachers indicated they do sometimes implement practices which highlight these pedagogical aspects. ***Again is this an issue for you and why do you feel this is the case?*** *(Age – 40-49, 50-59, Career – Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, Lead)*

Prompts

- Mentoring

- Relationships

- Support

- Challenged/extended (positive/negative)

APPENDIX D

Timeline for Completing the Study

MONTH	WEEK ENDING	ACTION
December 2016	Friday 30th	CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Application Submitted
March 2017	Friday 31st	Make contact with EQ Research Services to discuss conducting research in EQ schools
April 2017	Friday 21st	Oklahoma State University IRB Application Submitted
September 2017	Friday 1st Friday 15th	Oklahoma State University IRB Approval CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Approval
October 2017	Friday 27th	EQ Research Application to be submitted
November 2017	Tuesday 28th	EQ Research Application Approval
December 2017	Friday 8th	Education Queensland School Close for the Year
January 2018	Friday 19th	2018 School Year Begins
February 2018	Friday 2nd onwards	Begin contacting school principals Teacher Participant Consent Phase 1 Data Collection - Survey distribution
May 2018	Friday 11th	Close Phase 1 Data Collection
June 2018	Friday 8th	Phase 2 Data Collection • In-depth Interviews • Planning Documents
July 2018	Friday 20th	Close Phase 2 Data Collection
	Saturday 21st onwards	Data Analyses Writing Up Findings
September 2018	Friday 21st	Distribute dissertation to doctoral committee ready for Doctoral Dissertation Defense
October 2018	Thursday 4th	Doctoral Dissertation Defense

APPENDIX E

Resources Required and Estimated Costs

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	QTY	PURPOSE	SUPPLIER	COST
Laptop Computer	HP Notebook	1	Reading data, analyzing data and communicating findings.	CQUniversity Australia, Assigned within Job Role	$0.00AUD
Mp3 digital audio recorder	Olympus Voice Recorder VN-741PC Portable Handheld Recorder	1	Collecting data: Recording focus group interviews	Officeworks https://www.officeworks.com.au/shop/officeworks/p/olympus-voice-recorder-vn-741pc-olmvn741#!features	$79.00AUD
Electronic Survey Distribution Service	SurveyMonkey	1	To create, distribute and collect survey responses	SurveyMonkey CQUniversity Australia, Assigned within Job Role	$0.00AUD
				TOTAL COST	$79.00AUD

Marrying Play Pedagogies with Standardized Curriculum

<u>PHASE ONE - Project Information and Consent Sheet</u>

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/QBWHTSQ

Research organization: CQUniversity Australia and Oklahoma State University

Research team contact details:

  Principal Investigator: Jodie Riek
                       Lecturer (Early Childhood Education)
                       CQUniversity Mackay City Campus
                       j.riek@cqu.edu.au
                       (07) 4940 3214

Project Overview

This study will aim to understand how teachers in grades one and two in public education within the Mackay region are using play pedagogies to deliver the Australian Curriculum through the standardized framework of the C2C planning documents. As play pedagogy is a cornerstone of early childhood education, this study will potentially point to the ways teachers' can use play as a mode for teaching young children in these grade levels to achieve improved learning outcomes whilst still meeting the requirements of the standardized curriculum.

Participation Procedure

The first phase of this research study is administered online. Participation in this phase of the research will involve completion of an anonymous survey online that should take no longer than 45 minutes to complete. You may skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. You will be expected to complete the questionnaire once.

Benefits and Risks

As a teacher you may possibly feel a sense of affirmation or self-critical reflection through the process of completing the survey and participating in the interviews with the researcher. This may benefit your growth as a reflective practitioner and life-long learner. Other teachers may also benefit from the results so that they too can be aware of how teachers are actively utilising play pedagogies to deliver a standardized curriculum to achieve the common goal of improving student-learning outcomes. There are no risks

associated with this project which are expected to be greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Compensation

To thank you for your participation in this phase, you are invited to submit your details to go into a random draw to win one of three $100 EDSCO vouchers.

Your Rights

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time.

Surveys Housed Internationally

The survey is being conducted using SurveyMonkey, which is based in the United States of America. Information you provide on this survey will be transferred to SurveyMonkey's server in the United States of America. By completing this survey, you agree to this transfer.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained by providing you with a pseudonym in the write up of the research (i.e., any publications that result from the research). The data generated from the research will be securely stored for five (5) years after the publication date of the last publication based upon the data in accordance with the CQUniversity policy.

Outcome / Publication of Results

Results of the research will be published in peer reviewed journals and a PhD Dissertation. You can request a copy of the article and/or dissertation once published, plus a one page summary of the research by emailing the researcher (j.riek@cqu.edu.au).

Feedback

Feedback will be provided to you about the project if requested in the form of a one page research summary sheet (email j.riek@cqu.edu.au).

Questions/ Further Information

For further details please contact the researcher, Jodie Riek via email at j.riek@cqu.edu.au or by telephone on (07) 4940 3214.

Concerns / Complaints

Please contact CQUniversity's Office of Research (Tel: 07 4923 2603; E-mail: ethics@cqu.edu.au; Mailing address: Building 32, CQUniversity, Rockhampton QLD 4702) should there be any concerns about the nature and/or conduct of this research project. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

This project has been approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board *(approval number ED-17-96)*, the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee *(approval number H17/09-163)* and the Department of Education and Training, Central Queensland Office *(reference: 17/612734).*

If You Choose to Participate
By clicking NEXT, you are indicating that you:

- Have read the Information Statement and understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described to you in the information statement.
- Have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and are satisfied with the answers you received.
- Are willing to be involved in the research project, as described.
- Understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
- Understand that you are free not to participate or withdraw participation at any time, without affecting the relationship with the school, the Department or research team/organisation.
- Understand that the results of this research may be presented in peer reviewed journals and a PhD Dissertation and that the participants and the school will not be identified in publications resulting from the study.
- Understand that you can request to be provided with a copy of the findings from this research upon its completion.
- Are freely and voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study.
- Acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age.

It is recommended that you print a copy of this consent page for your records before you begin the study by clicking below.

Please, click **NEXT** if you **choose to participate**

Phase Two Consent Form

Project title: Marrying Play Pedagogies with Standardized Curriculum

Research organization: CQUniversity Australia and Oklahoma State University

Research team contact details:

Principal Investigator: Jodie Riek
Lecturer (Early Childhood Education)
CQUniversity Mackay City Campus
j.riek@cqu.edu.au
(07) 4940 3214

This project has been approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board **(*approval number ED-17-96)*** and the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee (***approval number H17/09-163).***

I consent to participation in this research project and agree that I:

1. Have read the Information Statement and understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described in the information statement.
2. Have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and are satisfied with the answers you received.
3. Are willing to be involved in the research project, as described.
4. Understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
5. Understand that you are free not to participate or withdraw participation at any time, without affecting the relationship with the school, the Department or research team/organisation.
6. Understand that the results of this research may be presented in peer reviewed journals and a PhD Dissertation and that the participants and the school will not be identified in publications resulting from the study.
7. Understand that to preserve anonymity and maintain confidentiality of participants that fictitious names may be used in any publication(s);
8. Am aware that I can request that a Plain English statement of results be made available to me via the Researcher's contact details provided in the Information Sheet;
9. Are freely and voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study.
10. Acknowledge I am at least 18 years of age.

Signature:_____   Date: _____

Name (please print): _____

Postal address:_____

Contact Number:_____

VITA

Jodie Anne Riek

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: MARRYING PLAY PEDAGOGIES WITH STANDARIZED CURRICULUM: A MIXED METHODS STUDY.

Major Field: Curriculum Studies

Biographical: Jodie has been involved in Early Childhood Education for more than twenty years, through a range of education environments including childcare, primary education, vocational and higher education. Jodie currently holds a position as an Early Childhood Education Lecturer at CQUniversity Mackay City Campus.

Education: Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education (Curriculum Studies) at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2018.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Educational Technology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, United States of America in 2013.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) at Queensland University of Technology, Kelvin Grove, Queensland, Australia in 1997.

Experience:
2012 – Present	Various Higher Education Teaching Positions
2006 – 2011	Various Primary School Positions
1992 – 2005	Various Early Years (Child Care) Positions

Professional Memberships:

2015 – Present	American Educational Research Association
2014 – Present	Common Ground Research Network
2013 – Present	National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educator
1999 – Present	Early Childhood Teachers Association
1999 – Present	National Association of Education for Young Children
1999 – Present	Early Childhood Australia