THE MEANING OF PLAY TO BEGINNING

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*In the discipline of early childhood education, the word play continues to
be used in different ways by early childhood teachers, ... Each brings to
the concept a different set of values, beliefs and images concerning play...*

Klugman & Fasoli, 1995, p. 200

Background

"I am working them in the morning and letting them play in the afternoon."

This comment was recently made to me by a former colleague of mine, a full-

day kindergarten teacher. She described play as valuable for the release of energy and

believed her students needed to engage in educational experiences in the morning when

they were more attentive. We had collaborated on many projects and had shared many

materials and resources. I had always felt our perceptions about most concepts were

nearly identical; however, her statement in this regard brought the realization that our

views were entirely different on the issue of play.

I see play as a tool through which children learn. I believe children learn through

their play experiences throughout the day and that play is a powerful educational tool.

My former colleague apparently viewed play as an outlet for stored-up energy. I

wondered: How many different ways do early childhood teachers perceive play?

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Children's lives and learning are centered around play. Most would agree that play serves a vital function in the development of children. Reifel & Yeatman (1993) suggest the way "...we think about play reflects how we think about children" (p. 365). Play has been declared one of a child's basic rights along with other basic rights such as nutrition, housing, health care, and education (United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1959; International Association for the Child's Right to Play "IPA", 1990).

Guidelines from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Association for Childhood Education International and the International Play Association affirm that play is essential for a child's development. According to these organizations, play has many benefits, including:

1. Developing social and cultural understandings

2. Allowing children to express themselves

3. Fostering divergent thinking

4. Providing opportunities to solve problems

5. Developing language and literacy skills

6. Providing opportunities for children to make sense of their world

(Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Isenberg & Quisenberry, 1988).

The International Association for the Child's Right to Play endorses the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959). Article 7, paragraph 3 of the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child declares:

> The child shall have the full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this right.

Play opportunities can provide children with many diverse experiences, challenges and successes. Play allows children the opportunity to socialize, disagree and negotiate. All of these experiences are vital to early childhood growth and development.

Play has been the topic of much research, yet play is still not completely understood. Research and theory both indicate that play has a significant role in children's social, emotional, cognitive, language and physical development (e.g. Bruner, 1972, 1983; Erikson, 1963; Freud, 1958; Gallahue, 1993; Garvey, 1974, 1984; Lieberman, 1977; Pelligrini, 1991; Piaget, 1962; Rubin, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). Despite the growing amount of research on the benefits of play, many believe children are being provided less time to play (Elkind, 1987).

Although controversial, play-based education is not a new concept. Play has long been at the heart of early childhood curriculum and is central to early childhood theory and practice. The value of play can be found in the early writings of Plato and Aristotle. Rousseau (1955), Froebel (1907), Piaget (1962), and Dewey (1916) all developed theories based on play. Even today, one of the core principles of developmentally appropriate practices or "best practices," is that children learn best through playful interactions with objects, people and their environment (Bredekamp, 1987). The developmentally appropriate practice guidelines have greatly influenced the curriculum in early childhood education. The National Association for the Education of Young Children position statement on play urges teachers to use play as an instructional strategy for teaching and assessing children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

While most teachers value the contribution of play to early childhood learning, many have different visions and expectations of the role of play in today's classroom.

To understand what play means to early childhood teachers and what they experienced as they applied play in their classrooms, this study explored both of these issues with beginning early childhood teachers through phenomenological inquiry.

The Problem

Play is a complex issue and is particularly hard to define. In the realm of early childhood education, play has multiple meanings and is used in various contexts. There is a broad spectrum of perceptions regarding play. The problem is the scrutiny of play in and out of the classroom. Although the importance of play has been well documented throughout history, the role, value and purpose of play in early childhood education is an issue of debate. To be able to defend play and advocate for its role in education, there is a need to first understand what play means to teachers.

A variety of theorists have offered many definitions of play (e.g. Fromberg, 2002; Garvey, 1990; Gulick, 1920; Piaget, 1962; Reifel & Yeatman, 1993; Sutton-Smith, 1979). Play has been defined in terms of categories of physical behavior, rough and tumble behavior, social behavior (Parten, 1933) and cognitive behavior (Piaget, 1962). Klugman (1995) explained how the term play is used generically and that there is a need in early childhood education to discuss children's play in theoretical terms with "clarity and specificity".

The perceived value of the role of play in educational settings varies greatly from teacher to teacher. Bennett, Woods, and Rogers (1997) found that teachers, ranging from novice to experienced, had quite diverse theories of play and the role it might have in the classroom.

Teachers can influence children's play by providing appropriate environments, allotting appropriate time, utilizing materials necessary to facilitate play and by participating in children's play. According to Bennett, et al. (1997), ideologically and theoretically, the importance of play in early childhood education is well supported, however, "in spite of continued endorsements, its place in the curriculum remains problematic" (p. 1). Gaps remain between current research and academic thinking about play and what is actually practiced in the field (Dyson, 1986; Pelligrini and Galda, 1991).

Confusion concerning the appropriate application of play in early childhood classrooms continues. Many important questions remain to be answered to develop an understanding of the role of play in early childhood classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the understandings of play in relation to the complexities of teaching. It is important for educational researchers and teacher educators to understand the views of beginning teachers for establishing a positive learning environment for both students and teachers (Bullough & Baughman, 1997; Dollase, 1992). Beginning teachers' prior knowledge and experiences influence their pedagogic knowledge. Teachers tend to draw on their past childhood school memories, professional education and other lived experiences to develop their own meaning of teaching. Each teacher's own meaning of teaching often influences their ideas of play and their application of play in the classroom. This research was directed toward identifying and understanding what play means to beginning early childhood teachers and what it is like for them to attempt to implement play in their early childhood classrooms.

Through the course of this study, I interviewed four early childhood teachers that were considered to be beginning in their teaching experience. The interviews provided information about each participants' meaning of play and their utilization of play in their classrooms (see Appendixes A, B, C & D).

The overriding research problem concerned a deeper understanding of play in the early childhood classroom environment. The question of focus for this study was:

What is the meaning of play to beginning early childhood teachers?

According to Fromberg (2002), "When you understand something, you understand its meaning. Meaning is the center of human experience and the shared center of learning and play. It is an internal, personal experience. More than just concepts or ideas alone, meaning also consists of emotions and motives" (p. 5). Van Manen (1990) described a lived experience as the way a person understands or experiences something in their own life. He stated that "lived meanings describe those aspects of a situation as experienced by the person in it" (van Manen, 1990, p. 183). The purpose of this research was to develop an understanding of the meaning of play to beginning teachers. I wanted to understand the many ways teachers perceive play and what the teachers experienced as they attempted to implement play in their curriculum.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this study, several terms were consistently used. In order to provide the researcher and the readers of this study a common understanding of the meaning of these terms, the terms are, for purposes of this study, defined as follows:

Play: Play has been defined by many as the behavior that is intrinsically

motivated, freely chosen, process oriented, pleasurable, and nonliteral (Garvey, 1977,

1990; Hughes, 1995; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999; Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg,

1983). For this study, I used Klugman & Fasoli's (1995) proposed working definition of

play for use in the field of early childhood education:

> Play is a major interactive process through which children learn about
> themselves, their environment, the other people in that environment, and
> the interrelationship among all of these. Play is intrinsic, self selected,
> active, mind involving, and a focus for personal powers. It is intriguing
> and captivating and frequently involves practice of needed mental and/or
> physical skills. Play engages and fulfills the player. Authentic play
> involves choice on the part of the player and can be self-perpetuating.
> Play takes a variety of forms. Some of these are exploratory, functional,
> constructive, symbolic and games with rules. (p. 200)

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): DAP is a framework of guidelines

for instruction advocated by the National Association for the Education of Young

Children (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The guidelines promote age

appropriateness and individual appropriateness. The DAP guidelines set standards for

application in early childhood programs. The guidelines promote methodologies and an

integrated curriculum that support children's wide ranges of interest and abilities.

Beginning Teachers: For purposes of this study, beginning teachers were in

their second year of early childhood teaching. The teachers in this study were not under

the guidance of a cooperating/supervising teacher.

Early Childhood Teachers: Early childhood teachers are considered teachers that

work in schools or programs that service children birth through age eight. In public

education, early childhood certification permits teachers to teach through the third grade.

Pre-kindergarten: Pre-kindergartens are sometimes referred to as four-year old programs. In this study, the pre-kindergartens were half-day public school programs.

Transitional First Grade: Sometimes referred to as pre-first or developmental first grade. Transitional first grade is a kindergarten retention alternative program. The children in these programs are judged to not be ready for the academic environment of first grade. Transitional first grade provides students with an extra year before attending first grade.

Teacher-Directed Instruction: An instructional approach that is highly adult structured and emphasizes recitation and memorization. The teacher directed curriculum is usually prescribed and consists of structured tasks that are presented in large or small group settings.

Learning Centers: Areas of the classroom where materials are organized to promote active exploration or child-centered learning. Small groups or individuals use learning centers. This type of organization is common to early childhood classrooms.

Limitations

This study investigated a select group of four beginning early childhood teachers. Their experiences and stories were unique to each of them. Whether the findings of this study have any potential application or link to other groups of teachers or schools must be left up to those researchers who attempt or desire to apply the findings of this study to other settings or situations.

Researcher's Background

Phenomenological studies involve the researcher as an instrument. My personal knowledge of play is based on my experiences, culture and education. My desire to study the issue of play stems from my experience as an early childhood teacher, college instructor and researcher. My own meaning of play has been greatly influenced by the many experiences I have had with children and by my education. I valued play as a young child and continue to value play as an adult, teacher and mother. I am drawn toward gaining a greater understanding of play in many different realms, but am particularly interested in furthering my understanding of play's place and role in education. My personal knowledge and experiences played a significant role in the interview process, analysis and interpretation of the research.

I believe play should be the centerpiece of the early childhood curriculum. I believe play encompasses interest, joy and learning. I am greatly concerned about the devaluing of play in our society, as well as the underutilization of play as a tool for learning and development. It was difficult at times to exercise self restraint and not comment on the participants' ideas, beliefs and utilization of play. Although my background and personal feelings about the benefits of play may have influenced my research, I made every effort to ensure accuracy and neutrality. I believe I remained true to my purpose and represented the teachers understandings and experiences in an accurate manner.

Significance of the Study

With play as a central focus in early childhood curriculum, there is a need for a deeper understanding of what play means to early childhood teachers and how play is being utilized in the early childhood curriculum. This study may contribute to the understanding of what play means to beginning practitioners in early childhood education.

Further, this study may provide valuable information to other teachers on how play can be implemented in the classroom and how materials, time, and space are being utilized in the context of play. I hope this study will facilitate communication among college educators and classroom teachers regarding the complexities of play. By gathering insight into the commonalties and understandings of play to beginning early childhood teachers, this study may lead to improved communication and significant interaction between researchers and practitioners.

This study may provide some insight for early childhood teacher educators. This study will hopefully encourage them to explore their former teacher candidates' perceptions of play, how they are facilitating play in their own classrooms and what constraints or barriers they are facing.

There has been much research on the benefits of play. There is a need for further research into what play means to early childhood teachers who are at the very core of early childhood programs. Such research could illuminate what play means as seen through the eyes of early childhood teachers.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*The features that make play seem to be trivial and inconsequential – the
fact that it is fun, involves make-believe, and focuses on activity rather
than outcomes – are the same factors that make play an effective learning
medium.*

J. Christie, 1995, p. 1

Play: A Nebulous Concept

Many noted theorists have attempted to develop a theoretical framework of play.

Others have attempted to develop a strict operative definition of play. The literature is

replete with attempts at defining play (e.g. Garvey, 1990; Klugman & Fasoli, 1995;

Monighan-Nourot, 1990; Reifel & Yeatman, 1993; Rubin, 1982). The mere existence of

the numerous definitions of play attests to the difficulty in defining the play phenomena.

It is likely the fact that play includes such a wide range of activities that accounts

for the difficulty in developing an operational definition of play. Fromberg (2002)

explained the difficulty in defining a term that is both a noun and a verb: "Rather than a

category, property, or stage of behavior, play is a relative activity.... [T]he shifting

functions in different settings may contribute to problems many researchers experience in

defining play" (p. 10).

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It was not the goal of this study to attempt to formulate a definition of play in the context of an early childhood classroom. Instead, it was the intent of this researcher to attempt to understand the meaning of play and the experiences in attempting to implement play in early childhood classrooms as perceived and explained by the participant teachers.

Teachers, such as the participants in this study, occupy an advantageous position for purposes of observing play activities utilized in a natural setting. It is through the eyes and minds of teachers that have actually attempted to implement play in the classroom setting that researchers can gain insight into the true meaning of play. Similarly, research and theory can benefit teachers by broadening their understanding of play.

All of the participants in this study were graduates of college programs that taught the prerequisites for state certification in early childhood education. Most teacher education programs offer courses that teach students the general concepts and theories of play. Accordingly, a discussion of the relevant literature on play is necessary to gain a more complete understanding of the concepts and theories that may have influenced, impacted and molded the participant teacher's understandings, observations, opinions, beliefs and meanings of play.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the literature on play and play theory that has impacted early childhood education and the implementation of play in the early childhood curriculum. A complete discussion of the vast body of research on the benefits of play is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Examples of research into the benefits and application of play in the early childhood classroom were discussed to

illustrate the significance and status of the current knowledge of play. This chapter

includes a discussion of the historical background of play, theoretical perspectives of

play, an introduction to beginning early childhood education teachers, the current

context of play in the early childhood curriculum and barriers to play.

Historical Background

For many centuries, theorists, researchers and educators have documented the

importance of play in children's development. Play has been referenced as far back as

the historical teachings of Aristotle and Plato.

Plato created a foundation for play in education through the introduction of

games, puzzles and playgrounds. In Plato's writing of the *Republic,* he expressed his

advocacy for play:

> For the free man there should be no element of slavery in learning.
> Enforced exercise does no harm to the body, but enforced learning will not
> stay in the mind. So, avoid compulsion, and let your children's lessons
> take the form of play. (as quoted in Wolfe, 2000, p. 9)

Aristotle developed useful guidelines for educating young children from his own

observations of children. Like Plato, he believed in a balanced education that articulated

the needs of young children.

The beginnings of play as part of the early childhood curriculum can be traced

back to the seventeenth and eighteenth century influences of Comenius, Rousseau and

Pestalozzi (Monighan & Nourot, 1990). All three men believed that, contrary to religious

doctrines of the time that preached that children were inherently evil, children were

in fact inherently good. Children learning through play is a recurrent theme of

Rousseau's writing. This is exemplified in the following excerpt from Rosseau's (1955)

Emile:

> Work or play are all one to him, his games are his work; he knows no
> difference. He brings to everything the cheerfulness of interest, the charm
> of freedom, and he shows the bent of his own mind and the extent of his
> knowledge. (p. 126)

Influenced by Comenius and Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel developed the first

German kindergarten in 1837. He is often credited as the father of the kindergarten

concept. Play was an integral part of Froebel's kindergarten concept. His kindergarten

program was, "In its view of children and its educational purpose ...different from any

school that had been designed before" (Spodek, Saracho, & Davis, 1991, p. 19).

Froebel believed that play was an essential activity from which children learn (Froebel,

1907). He artfully expressed the meaning of play for young children:

> Play is the highest phase of child development. It is the spontaneous
> expression of thought and feeling – an expression which his inner life
> requires. This is the meaning of the word 'play'. It is the purest creation
> of the child's mind as it is also a pattern and copy of the natural life hidden
> in man and all things. So it promotes enjoyment, satisfaction, serenity and
> constitutes the source of all that can benefit the child. A child who plays
> well of his own accord, quietly persisting until he is physically tired out,
> will develop as an efficient and determined person, ever ready to make
> sacrifices for the good of himself and others. This age has no lovelier
> sight than that of a child absorbed in play.... ...play is never trivial; it is
> serious and deeply significant. (as quoted in Lilley, 1967, pp. 83-84)

Froebel's kindergarten was the first program in the history of early childhood

education to emphasize the activity of children (Spodek & Saracho, 1988). He created

an activity-based curriculum with play objects or "gifts" and activities or "occupations"

(Froebel, 1899). Froebel believed that through play, children could symbolize their inner

nature (Froebel, 1899, 1907).

Froebel's ideas of play were revolutionary for his time and played a pivotal role

in the history of play. According to Gutek (1997), Froebel should be credited with being

"one of the pioneers in legitimizing the concept of play in Western educational history" (p. 249).

Froebel's ideas on play were eventually challenged and replaced by the works of G. Stanley Hall, John Dewey, E.L. Thorndike and others who led the child study movement into the twentieth century (Weber, 1984). A freer form of play curriculum was conceptualized in the early twentieth century with John Dewey's philosophy of play as being a way of developing knowledge as an intrinsically motivating activity. Dewey's beliefs about play evolved around his presumption that learning experiences should provide opportunities for problem solving and for active engagement. He was critical of conservative teaching practices because he believed that teacher-directed activities had limited educational value (Eisner, 1990). He organized instruction to fit the individual interests of the children. He believed in developing learning activities that encouraged children to be productive, have real life experiences and adhere to their interest (Weber, 1984).

Dewey (1916) believed academic subjects could be taught through exploration. He emphasized hands-on activities over worksheets or drills. Children learn through doing, experiencing and active engagement.

Play was central to Dewey's process of learning through doing. Through active engagement in play activities, children learn about the grown-up world (Dewey & Dewey, 1915). Dewey saw play as a way for children to develop an understanding of their world and to participate in a social environment. Dewey's writings serve as a framework for current thoughts about play as an educational tool.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, with the influences of John Dewey

and others from the progressive education era, a number of play-based early childhood programs emerged: Carolyn Pratt's City and Country School and Bank Street Nursery School. Increased interest and concern about play resulting from Dewey's work led several researchers to question why children play. This questioning, in turn, led to constructive thought and the development of many theories of play. Piaget and Vygotsky led the theoretical movement into the modern era. Their cognitive development theories provided the framework from which many current early childhood education models have evolved.

Play Theories

With the research inquiry of play taking place from many different perspectives, play research has generated many different theories of play throughout the past centuries. The study of play has attempted to understand why children play, how children play and the impact play has on development (Block & King, 1987). The play theorists have never been able to explain play in its entirety and many of the theories conflict with each other. Nonetheless, these theories may still affect how we think about play (Hughes, 1999). To fully understand play and the relevance of other's views in today's society, "...we must know how others have thought about play" (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2001, p. 35). This section provides a brief summary of the classical and modern theories of play.

Classical Theories

Many of the classical theories were proposed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The early play theories focused on why play exists and the function of play.

Surplus Energy Theory. One of the most influential play theories, the surplus energy theory can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. The literature supports several contributors to this theory, including, Herbert Spencer (Hughes, 1999; Mellou, 1994). The surplus energy theory proposed that living beings are equipped with energy needed to maintain survival. These play theorists believed the release of this surplus energy was the purpose of play. An example of this theory is a setting wherein children are constrained, their energy appears to build up until they are ready to explode, and once the constraints are removed all types of activity seems to develop or explode.

Renewal of Energy Theory. Opposite of the surplus energy theory, the renewal of energy theory, or what has also been referred to as the relaxation theory by Block & King (1987), was proposed by G. T. W. Patrick in 1916. He believed that play was a way of recuperating and relieving tension for the purpose of regaining energy.

Instinct – Practice Theory. Karl Groos (1898) proposed the instinct-practice theory, also referred to as practice for adulthood theory (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000). This theory suggests play allows children the opportunity to practice skills that are needed later in life. Groos' theories influenced early childhood education by emphasizing the need for play in schools.

Recapitulation Theory. The recapitulation theory was G. Stanley Hall's perception of the meaning of play. He believed that human beings follow a sequence of development and that children reenact the developmental stages of human development through play. "Play is the retracing of the developmental progress of our ancestors..." (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000, p. 3).

These classical theories are very limited in their explanations of play. These theories represent many different perspectives and often contradict each other. However, "...they give us historical perspective to contemporary adult attitudes about play. ...and ...several of these theories are still very much with us today" (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999, p. 8). Through the continuous research and investigation of play, many more theories on play developed.

Modern Theories

Modern theories were developed in the early to mid 1900's. These theorists moved away from focusing on why children play. They accepted that children play and attempted to determine the role of play in child development. They also investigated the role of play as a learning/educational tool (Mellou, 1994).

Psychoanalytical Theory. Notable proponents of the psychoanalytical theory included Freud and Erikson. Psychoanalytic theorists viewed play's value as primarily emotional in that it provides a "...mechanism in childhood for resolving the pressures a child feels when drives are being curbed by society" (Frost, et al., 2001, p. 39). Simply put, play provides an outlet for stress and anxiety.

<u>Cognitive Development Theory</u>. "Play is an exercise of action schemes and therefore part of the cognitive component of conception" (Piaget, 1966, p. 111). The writings of Piaget (Piaget, 1962, 1966; Piaget and Inhelder, 1969) and Vygotsky (1967, 1978) form the basis of much of the research on the relationship between play and child development. Their theories continue to influence the current underpinnings of early childhood education.

According to Piaget, play involves two distinct cognitive processes: assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the action of the child on surrounding objects. Accommodation is the converse action of the environment on the child (Piaget, 1962, 1966). Piaget believed that play is in essence the dominance of assimilation over accommodation. Accommodation and assimilation generally occur simultaneously, but, depending on the context of the situation, one will generally occur to a greater extent than the other (Hughes, 1999). This includes the process through which real events or objects are reconfigured to the participant's cognitive level (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983).

Piaget believed that play is not identical to learning, but can facilitate learning. For example, a child who builds a house out of sticks might simultaneously learn about "logical classification, part-whole relationships, measurement, balance, and spatial relationships" (Hughes, 1999, p. 20). By exposing children to new experiences and possibilities, play facilitates learning.

Vygotsky (1978) believed play has a direct role in cognitive development. He believed that all three domains of development; social, emotional and cognitive, interrelate. He considered play important to all three domains of development.

Vygotsky stressed the importance of symbolism in play. He conceptualized how the child functions within a zone of proximal development in which imagination and understanding can be explored. As the child advances, the distance between real and imaginary increases as play becomes internalized as symbolism. Vygotsky regarded play as an integral component of development in the preschool years.

Vygotsky explained that children utilize play as a tool to create imaginary events that emanate from real life experiences. Play provides children an escape from reality. He believed that play promoted a higher level of thought processing and language and thought development. This occurs through the child's ability to maintain control over the play situation, which, in turn, allows for greater creative thinking.

Play theories have evolved over the last 100 years to a broader conceptual base. The recent theories have shifted to a focus on the study of the effect play has on children's long-term growth and development of their social, emotional, psychological and cognitive processes.

Arousal Modulation Theory. The underlying premise of the arousal modulation theory is that there is some optimal level of arousal that a human being attempts to maintain (Mellou, 1994). Berlyne (1969) and Ellis (1973) are often credited with development of this theory. The goal under this theory is to develop an environment that provides the perfect level of arousal to keep a person optimally aroused. Care must be taken to avoid over and under stimulation. This theory may explain why children attempt to change their environments through play in an attempt to attain optimal arousal.

Postmodern Theories

As the study of play continues, new studies relating to play and its complexities contribute to the advancement of understanding this phenomenon. The literature and theoretical contributions to this field of study come from many disciplines. With this continued focus on play, new theories have and will continue to develop.

Several theories continue to evolve and have not been fully tested. Fromberg (1999) has begun to apply chaos theory to group play by attempting to understand the various random contributors to the oscillating contrasts of play. The script theory "takes the position that children develop sociodramatic play content out of the event knowledge that they acquire in daily life within their distinct cultural contexts" (Fromberg, 1999, p. 32). Inspiration from the field of human behavioral genetics has led to explanations of children's play through a neuropsychological model. This theory links symbolic play to integration between the two hemispheres of the brain (Weininger and Fitzgerald, 1988). New ecological-cultural frameworks attempt to explain play as an expression of our cultural backgrounds (Bateson, 1976).

Current play research ranges from ideological studies to practical studies of classroom application of play. Teacher researchers, such as Jones & Reynolds (1992, 1995) and Paley (1981, 1992), have contributed descriptive classroom observations and findings to play research. Their classroom research has paved the way for other teachers to learn about play by listening and observing their own students. Paley's stories and personal reflections have added knowledge, created questions and emphasized the importance of children's play.

As play research continues, it will contribute support to prior concerns regarding play, provide support for existing theories and generate new and exciting theories. The varying and complex issues surrounding play should provide a fertile field for future research.

Benefits of Play

In the last fifty years, a tremendous amount of research on play has explored links between play and aspects of cognitive development. The research has explored links between play and symbolic development (Fein, 1981; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978); play and language development (Bruner, 1983; Garvey, 1984, 1990); play and early literacy development (Christie, 1990; Isenberg and Jacob, 1983; Pelligrini, 1985a, 1985b, 1991); play and problem solving (Bruner, 1972); and play and creativity (Lieberman, 1977; Dansky, 1980a). Other researchers have focused on play and its connection to social development (Garvey, 1974; Pelligrini, 1995; Rubin, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978); emotional development (Bruner, 1972; Erikson, 1963; Freud, 1958; Garvey, 1990; Smilansky, 1968; Spodek & Saracho, 1988); and physical development (Gallahue, 1993).

These studies and others have established that play is beneficial to many aspects of child development. Research has validated the role of play in promoting many elements of cognitive development, including: problem solving, language development, creativity, discovery, reasoning and thought. Research has also revealed the importance of play to social development, physical development and emotional development. Accordingly, a working knowledge of the benefits children can derive from play

experiences is essential to evaluating and understanding the experiences and meanings of play expressed by the participants of this study.

<u>Cognitive Development</u>

The research of Piaget, among others, supports the importance of play in cognitive development. Piaget identified four stages of intellectual development: sensory-motor activity, pre-conceptual thought, interactive thought and operational representative activities (Piaget, 1962). He contended that all children pass through these stages when developing their thinking skills. The age at which children accomplish these stages of development can vary.

Piaget believed that children's thinking is enhanced through interactions with other people and the environment. These interactions with people and environments are perfectly suited for the settings provided by various forms of play. By providing environments that promote play, a child's natural motivation to learn can be enhanced, supported and nurtured. It is appropriate play environments that foster the advancement of children through Piaget's four stages of intellectual development.

Piaget viewed play as the assimilation of objects and experiences without regard to accommodation. Children utilize play as a tool to explore without the fear of failing to accommodate. The power of play was summarized by Rubin and Pepler: "Finally, children gain much pleasure from play. They gain a positive sense of self worth... It may also be the most worthwhile (and adaptive) outcome of the play experience" (Rubin & Pepler, 1982, p. 298).

Language and Literacy Development

"There was a time when play and early literacy were not seen as likely companions, even as each was intensely examined by educators and researchers" (Roskos & Christie, 2000, p. XV). There has now been substantial research documenting the connections between play and literacy development. Many studies have shown that by providing a playful literacy environment, children have an increased amount of participation in reading and writing activities (Neuman & Roskos, 1991).

Language and cognitive development are enhanced through play. Play provides the opportunity for children to expand and refine their language skills (Smilansky, 1968). Research on the relation between play and language development has shown a particularly close connection between dramatic play and language development (Fromberg, 2002). It is Bruner's (1983) position that complicated grammatical and pragmatic forms of language appear first in play. Allowing children to role play the events of a story has been linked to improved comprehension (Pelligrini & Galda, 1982).

The relationship between play and language continues into the early childhood years. Studies conducted by Wolfgang (1974) and Pelligrini (1980) provided evidence that sociodramatic play enhances language-arts skills and reading and writing competency.

Research on the relationship between literacy development and play often overlaps with that of language development and play. This is likely due to the often interrelated context within which these skills are taught and learned. Like the research related to language development, a body of research has established a strong relationship

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between play and literacy development (e.g. Christie, 1991; Morrow, 1997; Pelligrini & Galda, 1982; Isenberg & Jacob, 1983).

Problem Solving and Creativity

Several studies have found that play enhances children's problem-solving abilities (e.g. Simon & Smith, 1983; Sylva, Bruner, & Genova, 1976). Researchers, including Bruner (1972), have theorized that by affording children exposure to many different options, play assists with problem solving skills.

Through play, children are always creating and solving problems. Lieberman (1977) sees playfulness as a trait in relation to play, imagination and creativity. Playfulness is a part of each individuals "cognitive style" (Lieberman, 1977, p. 108). Lieberman's research has drawn him to conclude there is a relationship between playfulness and humor, joy and spontaneity. These relationships are enhanced through play.

A study conducted by Sylva (1977) provided an interesting example of the relationship between play and increased problem solving skills. The children in the Sylva study had to solve a problem that involved clamping sticks together to retrieve a small object that was beyond their reach. Children who were allowed to play and experiment with the sticks and clamp prior to being asked to solve the problem did just as well as a control group that had been shown how to solve the problem. Another very interesting finding of this study was that the play group appeared to be more motivated to solve the problem (Sylva, 1977).

Dansky (1980b) concluded that there is an increase in divergent thinking in children who engage in make-believe or fantasy play. Other studies have found a correlation between divergent thinking and playfulness (Sutton-Smith, 1968; Dansky & Silverman, 1973).

Social Development

Play provides a great setting for children to learn, perfect, and use social skills. Play provides the opportunity for children to learn to take turns, play, share and compromise. Leadership and conflict resolution skills are also developed through play. Through play, children can engage in experiences that may enhance their social development (Garvey, 1974; Pelligrini, 1995; Rubin, 1982).

Play is an obviously important aspect of socialization. While playing together, children learn that others may have views and feelings that may be similar to or different from their own. Piaget refers to this process as "decentering" from themselves (Piaget, 1965).

Some studies have found that play allows children to have social experiences at different levels (Parten, 1933). Others have found that these levels of social play represent more of an individual's style of play (Monighan, et al., 1987).

Children who engage in fantasy play are more socially skilled (Connolly & Doyle, 1984). Further, dramatic play provides opportunities for social and cognitive development (Connolly & Doyle, 1984).

Emotional Development

The importance of play to emotional development is captured in the following statement: "We believe that those children who have less opportunity, encouragement, and less constitutional predisposition toward regular make-believe play miss an important phase of becoming fully human, developing complex self-schemas and learning how to express and to experience emotions" (Singer and Singer, 1990, p. 151). Piaget and other psychoanalytic theorists provided the early studies on the relationship between play and emotional development. Piaget (1962) theorized that pretend play promotes emotional development by helping children express feelings. Other studies have established the importance of play to the child's sense of reality, being, trust, hope and stress management (e.g. Elkind, 1981; Erikson, 1972; and Sutton-Smith, 1980; Vandenberg, 1998).

Physical Development

Play is often associated with physical exercise. Increased levels of obesity in today's society and particularly in children make the exercise benefits of play obvious (Jambor & Guddemi, 1992).

Physical skills often depend on both large and fine motor development. The early years are when children acquire basic motor skills. Play encourages motor development and skill growth (Gallahue, 1993). Play enables children to experience how their bodies move and function. The repetition and practice provided by play experiences contributes to physical development (Gallahue, 1993).

Gallahue (1993) defined four levels of progression in the acquisition of motor skills, including: reflexive movement phase, rudimentary movement phase, fundamental movement phase and specialized movement phase. The rate of developing a mastery of these skills varies from child to child. Gallahue (1993) cautioned that appropriate curriculum and activities should be developed to help children develop these fundamental skills in the early childhood years.

Beginning Early Childhood Education Teachers

Early childhood teacher education dates back to the late nineteenth century and the introduction of kindergartens to the United States. With early childhood education becoming more of a priority in our society, an interest has developed in the early childhood teacher preparation programs that prepare individuals to work with young children. Early childhood teacher preparation programs prepare teachers for a range of certifications from child development associate credentials (CDA) to certified early childhood education teachers. Teacher certification requirements and beginning teacher support or mentor programs vary from state to state (Bowman, 1990).

Beginning teachers are generally considered teachers in the first three years of their teaching careers. The first few years of teaching are probably some of the most stressful times in a teacher's career. Beginning early childhood teachers face the same stresses and struggles as all new teachers. Studies have shown that the concerns and stresses of teachers tend to be quite universal (Valli, 1992; Veenman, 1984). Concerns about management, discipline, classroom control and evaluation are common among beginning teachers (Featherstone, 1992, Charnock & Kiley, 1995).

Research has attempted to define stages that teachers proceed through in their professional journey (Berliner, 1988, Katz, 1977). Generally, these stages range from a survival stage to a mature or expert teaching level. While passing through these stages, teachers experience a multitude of challenges and concerns. Concerns about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the curriculum and concerns about whether students are learning what needs to be learned are common (Peterson, 1990). Teachers may pass through these stages at different paces. It may take some teachers more time than others to reach teacher maturity (Bullough & Baughman, 1993).

According to Bullough (1989), beginning teachers' first years establish behavioral patterns, habits and understandings. Therefore, the experiences teachers' have during their first years of teaching may have a significant impact on children, teacher educators and other professionals. Bullough and Baughman (1997) explained the importance of studying teacher development: "Better schools for children will result only when schools are better places for teachers to learn about teaching and are more supportive of their efforts to improve their practice and enrich their lives" (p. xv).

Play in the Early Childhood Curriculum

The previous sections have focused on the historical and theoretical underpinnings of play in addition to the research supported benefits of play. As discussed, a sound knowledge base of these concepts is essential to application of play in the early childhood curriculum. These theories begin to form the foundation for understanding the importance of play to young children. However, knowledge of these concepts is meaningless in the absence of a strong grasp on how play can be implemented

in the early childhood curriculum and an understanding of the role of the teacher in play in the classroom setting. Accordingly, this section provides a summary of numerous basic concepts that are vital to understanding how to implement play in the early childhood curriculum, including: Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Educational Play, The Play Based Classroom Environment, The Teacher's Role in Play and Barriers to Play.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

The foundation for understanding how to apply and implement play in the curriculum begins with a sound knowledge base of developmentally appropriate practices. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is a professional organization that developed guidelines to assist teachers in developing curriculum that meet children's needs (Bredekamp, 1989; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The NAEYC's definitions of developmentally appropriate practices for early childhood education form the framework for professional practices in the early childhood classroom.

Developmentally appropriate play is based on three kinds of knowledge:

1. What is known about child development and learning-
knowledge of age related human characteristics that
permits general predictions within an age range about what
activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be
safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and also challenging
to children;

2. What is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group to be able to adapt for and be responsive to inevitable individual variation; and

3. Knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 9)

The 1987 guidelines provided the first generally agreed upon set of professional standards for appropriate and inappropriate practices in programs for children from birth through age eight.

Developmentally appropriate practices, as described in the NAEYC guidelines, support child-initiated, hands-on play activities, with teacher directed instruction motivated in response to individual children's needs. Teacher directed instruction can occur either in short interactions between teachers and individual children or in small interactive group activities. McMullen (1997) explained that developmentally appropriate curriculum "...focuses on the overall development of children, including social, emotional, aesthetic, moral, language, cognitive, and physical (including health, gross motor, and fine motor) development" (p. 57). McMullen (1997) further explained that a developmentally appropriate classroom is "...rich in literacy opportunities, has a whole language approach to literacy, allows for free exploration, encourages problem solving and critical thinking, values the play of children, integrates instruction across the major content areas and is process rather than product oriented" (p. 58). Teacher

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practices associated with implementation of developmentally appropriate practices have been shown to increase overall student achievement (Goffin, 1989).

The NAEYC's developmentally appropriate practice guidelines were influenced by the cognitive development theories of Piaget and Vygotsky. Research relating to developmentally appropriate practices has established numerous benefits of such programs, including: improves problem solving skills (Spidell-Rusher, McGreiven, & Lambiotte, 1992); increases positive social behavior at home and school and decreases stress behaviors (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Elkind, 1989); promotes cognitive development and increases scores in reading, language and math (Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986).

Educational Classroom Play

Spodeck and Saracho (1987) distinguished between educational and non-educational play. Educational play is designed to further children's' learning, to help children explore, gain information and to process that information into meaning. It is the purpose attributed to the activity that differentiates between educational and non-educational play: "Play becomes educational when the teacher, or another adult in a similar role modifies the spontaneous play of children so that it has an educational value" (Saracho, 1991, p. 92).

Spodeck (1985) classified the types of educational play, including: dramatic play, physical play, manipulative play and games. Dramatic play occurs when children undertake adult roles or play out spontaneously created scenarios. Physical play involves actual physical activity in the form of running, jumping, digging, skipping, etc.

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Manipulative play involves opportunities for children to learn from their sensory motor experiences. The final type of play is games. Studies have shown that providing children opportunities to invent games and gain an understanding of following the rules of games enhances their social, moral and cognitive development (Castle & Wilson, 1993; Kamii & Devries, 1980). Each of the types of play may overlap with the other.

There are many activities and behaviors that can be called play. These activities range from child-centered activities to more teacher directed activities. Bergen (1998) described a continuum of play (see Figure 1). The continuum ranges from free play/discovery learning to work/drill and repetitive practice. There are many activities that fit between the two extremes. According to Keiff & Casbergue (2000), it is important for early childhood teachers to plan and facilitate activities along the wide range of the play continuum.

Studies have found that teachers struggle with the work versus play dichotomy (Bennett, et al. 1997). By using a play continuum, activities can be viewed in a flexible range rather than in diametrically opposed extremes.

The Play Based Classroom Environment

The NAEYC guidelines for developmentally appropriate practices advocate that early childhood programs acknowledge the value of play to children. "Play is an important vehicle for children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p.14). Accordingly, because the guidelines emphasize recognition of the value of play to children, a developmentally appropriate classroom should utilize and facilitate play. The following

Type of Play	Free Play	Guided Play	Directed Play	Work Dis-Guised as Play	Work

Type of
Learning
Most Likely
to Occur

Discovery Learning	Guided Discovery Learning	Reception Learning	Rote Learning	Drill-Repetitive Learning
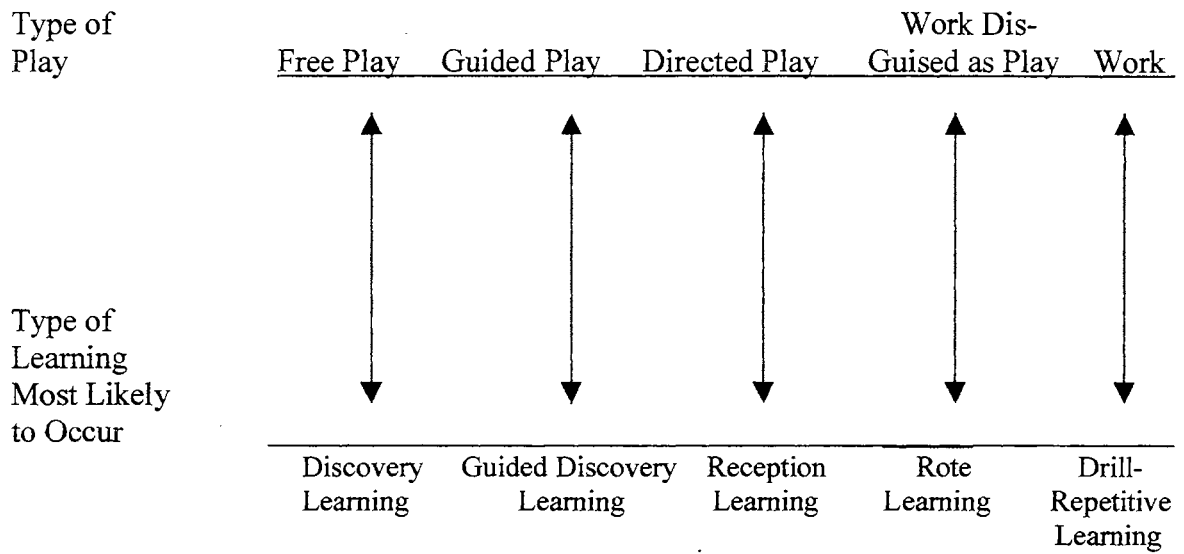
Figure 1. Continuum of Play

Note: From, Using a schema for play and learning (p. 111). In D. Bergen (Ed.),
Play as a medium for learning and development (pp. 109-122), by D. Bergen, 1998,
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statement emphasizes the importance of establishing an appropriate classroom environment:

> An environment is a living, changing system. More than the physical space, it includes the way time is structured and the roles we are expected to play. It conditions how we feel, think, and behave; and it dramatically affects the quality of our lives. The environment either works for us or against us as we condition our lives. (Jim Greenman, as quoted in Cromwell, 2000, p. 233)

Room Arrangement/Space. Room arrangement literally refers to the physical environment of an area and the way it is organized. The organization of the room should facilitate learning and movement. Room space can directly affect the behavior and attitudes of those who occupy it (Kritchevsky et al., 1977; Mclean, 1995). A well organized classroom environment facilitates control and choice over the arrangement of the physical setting.

Research on children's play environments suggests that 30 to 50 square feet of usable space per child represents an ideal indoor environment. Space with less than 25 square feet per child can lead to increases in aggression and unfocused behavior (Smith & Connolly, 1980). Isenberg & Jalango (1997) suggest six principles that should be acknowledged when arranging a classroom environment:

1. Consider how the environment communicates messages about appropriate behavior.

2. Space must be easy to supervise.

3. Materials must be accessible and easy to use.

4. Be alert to behaviors that conflict with your goals.

5. Distinguish between the child's and the adult's environment.

6. Be alert to traffic problems. (pp. 218-219)

Learning Centers. Many early childhood classrooms are arranged into play or learning centers. Centers can facilitate many educational objectives, including: multicultural awareness, teaching to different intelligence levels, integration of the curriculum and nurturing of spontaneity and originality (Casey & Lippman, 1991; Keiff & Casbergue, 2000). Common types of centers include: block areas, art centers, writing centers, music centers, reading centers and dramatic play areas. Learning centers should be designed to facilitate the number of children in the classroom, the children's ages and developmental levels and the space and materials available. Likewise, learning centers should change over the course of the year to address the ever changing needs and interests of the children as they gain new skills and abilities.

Time. Play based classrooms should provide adequate time for play. At least an hour of continuous free play time is recommended for younger children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). This task is complicated by the growing pressures to devote more time to structured academic activities (Christie & Wardle, 1992).

Play time can convey a message to children of the importance the teacher places on playful tasks. Accordingly, the time blocks allowed for activities must be carefully considered. Long blocks of uninterrupted play time have been linked with more engaged learning (Perlmutter, 1990). Whereas, Wein (1996) found that strict, fragmented scheduling practices reduced the opportunities for quality play.

Scheduling must consider the attention spans of the children involved and how their attention spans may be longer or shorter depending on the activity. Children will likely lose interest in activities that exceed their attention span. Likewise, limited time

periods may inhibit completion of a task, cause stress and take away from the developmental value of the activity (Perlmutter, 1990; Wein, 1996).

Materials. Quality play materials can influence children's play (Rubin, Fein & Vandenberg, 1983). There are numerous types of Play materials. These materials can be broken into several groups, including: replica toys, construction toys, art materials, natural or real materials, literacy materials, and games (Johnson, et al., 1999).

Replica toys are small replicas of objects that also exist in a child's real world. This category includes dramatic-play props, transportation toys and animated toys. Educational toys are specifically designed to promote learning and development. This category can include sorting games, stringing toys, puzzles and stacking toys. Construction toys are not as easily defined, but include any toy that can be used in an open ended building activity. These include blocks and building sets such as Legos and Lincoln Logs. Art materials can include a myriad of materials that are used for hands-on creating, including: paints, crayons and clay. Games cover a spectrum of activities ranging from child-constructed games to educational games. Real or natural materials include sand, water and mud (Johnson, et al., 1999).

The type of play a teacher wishes to encourage should dictate the types of materials used. For example, dress-up clothes can encourage dramatic play. Researchers have found that the type of materials used can affect different aspects of children's play. The type of play material used can affect whether children play in groups or individually (Rubin, 1977). For example, props and toy vehicles encourage group play, while art materials and educational toys promote individual play. Similarly, certain materials can promote different aspects of development (Rubin, 1977). One example of this

proposition is child-constructed games. Such games can be used to promote understanding and acceptance of rules and to develop an ability to cooperate and compete (Castle & Wilson, 1993).

With a vast array of play materials available, teachers are faced with the difficult task of choosing materials that provide the maximum utility for the educational task to be achieved. The age of the children, group versus individual play and the cognitive development level of the children are all factors that must be considered. This task is often complicated by limited financial resources.

The Teacher's Role

Understanding Children's Perceptions of Play. It seems obvious that effective teacher implementation of play in the classroom would require an understanding of how children perceive play and various play activities. However, there does not appear to be a large body of research on play from the child's perspective. Many researchers have simply observed children's play and coded it into various categories.

King (1979, 1982) approached the research of play from a unique perspective. Instead of observing children's play, she asked children to classify their daily classroom activities as work or play. She interviewed children in four kindergarten classrooms. She observed the children's activities and created a log of their activities. She then interviewed the children to determine whether they perceived the activities she had observed and logged as play or work. The teacher's role in the activity and the teacher's attitude toward the activity appeared to have played a greater role than the pleasure derived from the activity in differentiating between work and play (King, 1979, 1982).

Activities that allowed choice on the part of the children were often labeled as play. Teacher directed activities were generally labeled as work. The children perceived that their teachers valued the activities the children had labeled as work more than those they had labeled as play. The children did not perceive play as an important educational activity (King, 1979, 1982).

King's (1979, 1982) findings have significant practical applications. Teachers should take time to understand how their students perceive the various activities utilized in the classroom. They should be careful to emphasize the importance of play. Play should not be relegated to a second-class activity or a reward. In this regard, King (1979) stated: "using play as a reward... or relegating play to recess... further separates play from the central concerns of the school" (p. 86).

Understanding Parent's Perceptions of Play. As discussed in the barriers to play section, society in general does not perceive play as having any particular academic value. Because of societal pressures to succeed, parents often feel that the earlier their child is exposed to academic materials, the greater the chance of success (Elkind, 1981, 1990). Studies have suggested that parents generally placed a greater emphasis on academic or intellectual skills than did teachers (Van Cleaf, 1979). Graue (1993) found that parents had conflicting ideas about the value of play in kindergarten. Further, parents often expect to see tangible evidence of the final product of teaching. Rigid, objective academic work is more likely to satisfy the parent's desire for results (Klugman, 1995).

Teachers must be prepared for scrutiny from parents. Knowledge of why and how play can and does promote learning and development is needed so that parent's can be educated on the benefits of the play curriculum.

Participation in Play Activities. Research into what teachers do while children are engaged in play indicates that teachers only spend between 2% and 6% of their time involved in children's play (Sylva et al., 1980; Wood et al., 1980). The percentage of time spent in support of play increases to between 15% to 27% for preschool teachers (File & Kontos, 1993). These statistics are discouraging in light of the fact that the NAEYC guidelines on developmentally appropriate practices emphasize the need for teachers to engage in supportive and responsive interactions with children during play (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). However, all may not be lost, a more recent study by Grinder and Johnson (1994) revealed that preschool teachers assisted in play 39% of the time.

These statistics likely speak to teacher's general lack of understanding of their role in play. Teacher educators at the college level should make significant efforts to expose early childhood education students to real classroom experiences where they can observe appropriate teacher intervention in play activities (Davey, 1999; Fromberg, 1995; Klugman, 1995). It is through such observations that real knowledge and understanding of how to participate in children's play can be achieved.

The early childhood teacher has an important role in encouraging, developing and promoting children's learning and development. Children's play is richer and becomes more elaborate and complex when adults participate in their play (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). However, attaining the balance between being complacent

towards play and being intrusive into the play domain is a complicated task. Either extreme can undermine the potential of play on development and learning. Perfecting this balance is more of an art than a science.

Nourot and VanHorn (1991) suggest a continuum of teacher involvement that ranges from environmental and scheduling type tasks, or indirect involvement, to direct involvement in a role as peacekeeper, participant or coach. Others have identified varying strategies (see Table I) for adult intervention in children's play (Bennett, et al., 1997; Isenberg & Jalango, 1997; Johnson, et al., 1999; Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 1993; Wolfgang & Wolfgang, 1999).

If teachers take on a highly directive role, dictating the time, place and materials used, they risk hindering children's opportunities for independent decision making (Berk & Winsler, 1995). A balanced approach of intervention wherein the teacher takes on the role of interpreter and information provider can enhance and encourage children's play opportunities. The teacher's input in this setting can provide motivation for frustrated or discouraged children to continue their play activity (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

A study of British preschools revealed that when a teacher was involved, children's play activities lasted considerably longer and were more elaborate (Sylva, Roy, & Painter, 1980). Other studies have shown that teacher's involvement in literacy play activities resulted in increased reading and writing behavior (Christie & Enz, 1992; Morrow & Rand, 1991).

Studies conducted by Bennett, Wood & Rogers (1997) inquired into the correlation between theories of play expressed by teachers and their classroom practices

TABLE I

PLAY INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Jones & Reynolds (1966)	Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward (1993)
Observer	Play & Scaffolding
Stage Manager	Apprentice
Mediator	Peacemaker
Player	Guardian of Gate
Scribe	Parallel Player
Assessor and Communicator	Spectator
Planner	Participant
	Matchmaker

Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey (1999)	Isenberg & Jalango (1997)
Observer	Observer
Stage Manager	Collaborator
Co-Player	Planner
Play Leader	Responders
Provider	Models
	Mediators

Bennett, Wood, & Rogers (1977)	Wolfgang & Wolfgang (1999)
Observer	Looking
Provider	Naming
Participant	Questioning
Model	Commanding
Review & Feedback	Acting

They discovered that "In general, play was far more structured in practice than teacher's theoretical accounts indicated" (p. 75).

It is appropriate and often necessary for teachers to participate as players in children's play. Teachers taking on the role of the participant player can help build relationships, trust and confidence in their students. They can also gain unique insight into the creativity and thinking of their students. However, like the highly directive teacher, the participant teacher who crosses the line of simply being a role playing participant and takes on the role of participant/leader, one who takes over and organizes the child's play, also risks eliminating the role of play in establishing children's independence and providing opportunities to learn from mistakes. Studies have suggested that teachers directly involved in play should use easing out techniques to allow the children to manage their own play (Christie, 1990; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990).

It is important for teachers to model play and the importance of play (Fromberg, 1992). Teachers must be careful not to give students the impression that play activities are less important or less educational than other classroom activities. Teachers must provide an appropriate and supportive environment with adequate materials, time and space. "It is essential for teachers to understand the uses of particular types of play that are age appropriate for young children" (Spodek & Saracho, 1988, p. 18). Teachers in early childhood classrooms should have highly specialized early childhood education and development training with a strong understanding of early childhood development and its application to teaching (Bredekamp, 1987).

Teachers must have an understanding of classroom management strategies for addressing individual student needs. They must respond to the needs of individual

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children and encourage exploration and social interaction (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992). The importance of the teacher's relationship with students is reflected in the following statement:

> The one essential point in the whole educational system is the point of contact between teacher and child. It is to make this contact as fruitful as possible that everything else – authority, administration, inspection, curriculum – exist. If the system fails to work at this point of contact, it fails everywhere. (John Blackie, as quoted in Weininger, 1979, p. 62)

Assessment/Observation. Assessment of student progress and performance is one of the primary tasks assigned and expected of all teachers. This is particularly true in the current environment of accountability. Accordingly, teachers who utilize a play based curriculum must be equipped with the ability to assess and account for their student's progress and performance.

Observations are the primary tool for assessment of children in a play based curriculum. Observations provide the vehicle through which teachers can get involved in children's play.

Observations provide valuable information regarding each individual child. It is through observing that teachers can determine what skills, tasks and developmental thresholds each student has mastered, how they have gone about achieving their mastery and whether they are ready to move on to new and more challenging activities. Observation should occur daily in order to provide comparisons of current abilities with those of the past (Weininger, 1979). This method of continuing observation over time ensures that the observed behavior is representative of the student's typical behaviors. Likewise, allowing children time to become comfortable with their classmates and

activities before conducting observations will allow children to demonstrate their true cognitive social levels of play (Doyle, Connolly, & Rivest, 1980).

There are numerous types of observation instruments. Rubin, Maioni, & Hornung (1976) developed a matrix that considers both cognitive and social behaviors at the same time. The matrix is made up of twelve play categories plus several non-play behaviors (Rubin, Watson, & Jambor, 1978). An understanding of the definitions of the behaviors identified in the matrix is essential for effective use. This matrix has been used for years by researchers. The matrix has been applauded for its utility in assessing preschool children engaged in classroom play, but has been questioned with regard to its usefulness in assessing outdoor play and play in the primary grades (Pelligrini, 1998).

Other useful observation instruments include the peer play scale and rating scales (e.g. Howes, 1980; Pelligrini, 1996). All of these observation tools can be complemented with anecdotal logs or notes that track individual activity and/or videotaping of classroom activities. Regardless of the method or combination of methods utilized, effective observation cannot be achieved without a sound understanding of the appropriate uses and methodology of the observation technique.

An Element of Playfulness. Effective teachers in a play based early childhood curriculum must bring to their profession something more than good observation skills and a solid understanding of the role of play in the lives of their students, they must also bring with them a sense of playfulness. According to Caldwell (1985), adult play is generally more structured, convergent and rule oriented than children's play. In describing what she calls the "play paradox", Caldwell stated:

We're talking about having adults, who don't know how to play, teach children, who know quite well how to play. In other words, if we want to improve the play of children, we're using the wrong teacher. We're using people whose play is not at all playful. (1985, p. 169)

Teachers who are playful are probably more likely to play with children. Similarly, playful teachers are more likely to be able to observe children's play from the children's perspective and to be role models for enjoyable play experiences.

Rubin (Rubin, Fein, and Vandenberg, 1983) and his colleagues described playfulness as a psychological concept wherein playful persons are guided by natural motivation, are oriented toward process, focus on pretend, seek freedom from externally imposed rules, attribute their own meanings to objects or behaviors, are not bound by what they see and are actively involved. Ellis (1973) defined playfulness, or a playful attitude in learning as an "indifference to extrinsic payoffs [that] allows a new response for the person or a new transformation of information. Novel engagements with elements in the environment are self-reinforcing and sustain the behavior leading to new knowledge" (p. 121).

Playfulness leads to a type of play that enhances children's intrinsic motivation to learn (Lieberman, 1977). "Thus, playfulness provides children with the opportunity to freely discuss and explore personality dimensions and personas, discover alternative strategies for handling daily concerns, and use their senses to sample the world in a healthy, structured manner" (Boyer, 1997, p.90). Through the integration of playfulness in classroom play activities, teachers can provide children a sense of happiness and greater opportunity for exploration, both of which can lead to more meaningful experiences.

Barriers To Play In The Early Childhood Classroom

Any discussion of how to implement play in the early childhood classroom would be incomplete without a discussion of the many barriers teachers may face in their efforts to utilize and implement play in the early childhood classroom.

The role of play in schools in the United States has undergone change. Play had little importance during colonial times. Colonial schools focused on religion and philosophy. Although the education movements of the early twentieth century led to widespread acceptance of play in the curriculum, the topic has always been and continues to be the subject of controversy.

It is the controversies surrounding play that are at the root of the barriers to teachers implementing play in the classroom. The barriers to play do not appear to discriminate between elementary schools and the kindergarten or preschool levels. However, opposition to play may increase in the primary grades as a result of accountability standards. Barriers to play have been linked to time and space constraints, teacher-child ratios, curriculum pressures to teach basic skills, teacher beliefs about the role of play, environmental barriers, parent's beliefs about the role of play in education, co-workers teaching philosophies, discipline problems, inadequate teacher preparation/education and lack of resources/materials (Bennett, et al., 1997; Jones, Burts, Buchanan and Jambunathan, 2000).

The role of elementary schools has traditionally been viewed as that of providers of academic skills and work ethic. Klugman (1990) attempted to gather information about elementary school principal's views about play through the use of a questionnaire. The responses revealed that nearly 90% of the principals believed play should be an

integral part of the preschool curriculum, but that only 9% viewed play as having an important role in third grade programs. These statistics are reflective of the popular view that elementary schools are reserved for meaningful learning (Bowman, 1990).

Nowhere has the devaluing of play been more apparent than in recent movements to abolish recess for the sake of spending more time on academics (Johnson, 1998; Pelligrini & Bjorklund, 1996). This movement and the rationale for it have come under sharp criticism by early childhood educators and scholars. Studies have shown that children were more on task when they had recess (Jarrett, Maxwell, Dickerson, Hoge, Davies and Yetley, 1998). Recess has also been found to be important for development of social competencies and overall cognitive functioning (Pelligrini & Bjorkland, 1996; Pelligrini & Glickman, 1989). "Every study shows that children are more attentive after recess" (Johnson, 1998, p. A18).

The justification for continuing recess periods has been linked to the excess energy theory. Recess is viewed as a chance for children to release excess energy after long hours in the classroom (Jarrett, et al. 1998). Pelligrini (1991) summarized this concept:

> Children need recess because they are temporarily bored with their
> immediate classroom environment. When they go outdoors for recess
> they seek novelty by interacting with different peers in different situations.
> But, when the novelty of recess begins to wane, they again need to change.
> At this point, the classroom becomes a novelty and children actually pay
> closer attention. (p. 40)

It is the same emphasis on "academics" and test scores, the work versus play rationale, that usually results in parents acting as impediments to the use of play in the classroom (Jambor & Guddemi, 1992). Parents often do not consider play and learning as coexisting practices. There is a distinction in our society between play and work

(Elkind, 1988; Fromberg, 1987, 1990). This belief is fueled by today's competitive society wherein parents believe their child must be the best. Our society often equates being the "best" with high academic performance. In turn, parents view play as an impediment to their desire for their children to succeed or learn (Jones, et al., 2000).

Many early childhood teachers believe play should dominate their curriculum, but feel great pressure to justify every activity to parents, administrators and other teachers. Some authors have suggested that this parent barrier to play can be overcome through appropriate parent education of the benefits of play (Morrison & Rusher, 1999). Morrison & Rusher (1999) also suggest that properly educated parents can become allies and valuable resources for assisting with resource/material shortages.

With the current "test mania" and accountability craze in our educational and political environment, early childhood teachers will likely face even more pressure to eliminate or minimize play in their classrooms. Accordingly, teachers must be armed with a strong understanding of the theories and concepts that support the utilization of play in the early childhood curriculum.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the relevant literature on play and its relationship to early childhood development, education and the application and implementation of play in the early childhood curriculum. Research has validated the association between play and children's cognitive, social, physical and emotional development. The research has also linked play and improvement in numerous developmental processes that are directly connected with academic endeavors, including:

language development, literacy development, problem solving and creativity. Accordingly, there is a clear need for early childhood educators to have a sound knowledge base of the historical and theoretical underpinnings of play.

The research also revealed a large body of information dealing with the appropriate use and implementation of play in the early childhood classroom. Mastering an understanding of both the historical and theoretical foundations of play and the practical aspects of implementing play in the classroom present a daunting task. The importance of effective educational programs in the training of early childhood education professionals cannot be understated.

Added to this convoluted mix are societal dispositions that drive a belief that play and educational activities cannot coexist. Recent movements toward test-mania, teacher and student accountability and an obsession with succeeding that is oftentimes linked to academic success have further added to the devaluing of play, particularly in the classroom. Many pre-packaged curriculum programs designed specifically for early childhood education do not include any elements of play. But, the movement against play has not stopped there. Now, children across the country are having their right to play violated through the abolition of recess.

The complexity of these issues is obvious. It is understandable why teachers not only struggle with the effective implementation of play in their classrooms, but the continuous pressure to justify the role of play in young children's education.

The lessons from the reviewed literature echo the very issues that were addressed in the interviews and protocol writings that made up the findings of this study. An understanding of the issues addressed in the literature provides greater meaning and

understanding to the observations, opinions and meanings expressed by the teacher participants in this study. Likewise, the literature provides the knowledge base necessary to attach meaning to the participant teachers' interviews and protocol writings.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

*Today we are trying to live ever closer to the lives about which we write.
Many examples are available. Others are forthcoming that try to show
not that we can live those lives, but that we have lived close enough to
them to begin to understand how their worlds have been constructed.*

Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 582

Introduction to the Methodology

The methodology of this study was of a qualitative nature within a constructivist

inquiry paradigm. The aim of the study was to understand a situation as constructed by

the participants. Qualitative methods were utilized to collect data that was rich in detail.

Qualitative research provided an opportunity for the words and ideas of the participants

to be heard. Beginning early childhood teachers were asked to share their views and

stories about the concept of play in the midst of the complexities of teaching. Qualitative

inquiry, including phenomenology, can develop an understanding of how groups or

individuals make sense of their world (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

van Manen (1990) refers to methodology as the "…view of knowledge" (p. 27).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) explained how methodology focuses on "how we gain

knowledge about the world" (p. 185). Phenomenology was the research methodology

used for this study. This methodology was chosen to attempt to gain an understanding of

the meaning of play to beginning early childhood teachers as expressed in their own

terms. A phenomenological study attempts to understand people's perceptions.

According to van Manen (1996):

> Phenomenology merely shows us what various ranges of human
> experiences are possible, what worlds people inhabit, how these
> experiences may be described, and how language (if we give it its full
> value) has powers to disclose the worlds in which we dwell as fathers,
> mothers, teachers, students, and so forth. (p. 49)

The central element of a phenomenological study is to construct a possible

interpretation of a phenomenon through observation, reflection and the act of writing

(van Manen, 1990). Play is a phenomenon in and of itself. Many people, including

educators, have their own interpretation of play. Phenomenology is a form of research

that helps address the question of "What is the structure and essence of experience of this

phenomenon for these people?" (Patton,1990, p. 69).

I accepted that I had my own idea of what I considered play and the place of

play in early childhood classrooms prior to conducting this study. Individuals develop

their personal meanings of play as a result of many different factors, including: culture,

personal play experiences, school play experiences, professional training or education

and the experiences we have had with children. With the acceptance of my own

perceptions and experiences with play, I strived not to compare the participants meaning

of play with my own and remained true to my goal of developing a sense of

understanding of each participants' own meaning of play.

By attempting to understand what play means, as viewed through the eyes of early

childhood teachers, I was able to explore the meaning of play and practices in early

childhood classrooms. To understand this phenomenon, it was imperative to listen to

teachers, to become part of their worlds and to understand the ways they explain their personal practices. Spodek and Saracho (1988) described the goal of social science as to gain understanding or "verstehen". A phenomenological approach seeks to gain understanding or "verstehen" the view of the world held by those in the situation.

The question that guided this research was:

What is the meaning of play to beginning early childhood teachers?

The research methodology of this study was designed to accomplish the following:

1. To illuminate the experiences of beginning early childhood teachers as expressed through their own words and perceptions.

2. To understand what beginning teachers experience as they attempt to implement play into their curriculum.

3. To provide opportunities for beginning early childhood teachers to share insight from their own play experiences.

4. To explore possible gaps between teacher's perceptions of play and pedagogy.

5. To examine beginning early childhood teacher's recollections of experiences they had as students in early childhood education programs and how those experiences affected their ideas of play.

Selection of Participants

Selection of the research participants was accomplished through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is based on the premise that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore, must select a sample from a population from which the most can be learned (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The criteria for

the participants of this study were:

1) Beginning teachers in their second year of teaching,

2) Teachers that were early childhood certified, and

3) Teachers teaching in grades pre-kindergarten through third grade classrooms.

The participants in this study were four early childhood teachers. All the participants were beginning early childhood teachers in their second year of teaching. The researcher chose second year teachers because they were less likely to be bound to the influences of a supervising teacher who may impact and influence their classroom practices. The researcher purposefully selected teachers who had completed early childhood teacher education programs. All the teachers were early childhood certified and two of them held dual certification in early childhood and elementary education. All the teachers were early childhood teachers in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, transitional first or first grade classrooms.

By using a list collected from the state education department's certification office, The researcher purposefully selected teachers from four different school districts. The researcher also selected teachers from three different teacher education programs. Consideration was given to teachers of differing gender, age and ethnicity. Although attempts were made, the researcher was not able to locate a male beginning early childhood teacher.

Several factors influenced my choice of research sites. The most important factor was the eagerness to participate on the part of the participants and their respective principals. I also considered the geographic locations of each school. All the schools selected were in a large metropolitan area in a midwestern state. The school's student

populations ranged from low to middle-high socioeconomic status.

Procedures

In a phenomenological study, the procedures are as "much in the hands of the participants as in the hands of the researcher" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 153). Procedures in phenomenology follow a systematic process. The data collection process for this study consisted of extensive interviews and protocol writings (see Appendixes A, B, C & D).

Consent was obtained from each participant and their respective school district and principals (see Appendixes E, F & G). The participants were assured their participation in the study was voluntary with the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were informed that their identity and responses would be kept confidential. The names of the participants and anyone identified by the participants have been replaced with fictitious names. Approval from my degree granting university's Institutional Review Board was obtained prior to the study (see Appendix H).

Data Collection

Interviews

Interviews are used in phenomenological studies to uncover knowledge related to the phenomena being studied (Seidman, 1998). Interviews are a way of inquiring. Interviews are a method of attempting to "find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). Interviews are a time when the interviewer and

participants work together. Tesch (1994) described the interview process as important to "arrive at the heart of the matter" (p. 147). The interviewing process has been described as something more than questions and answers, but rather an experience of immersion (Tesch, 1994; Seidman, 1998).

The interviews were conducted in a three-interview series. The first interviews were conducted to develop an understanding of the participants' life experiences. The first interviews also provided information regarding education and teaching experiences. The first interviews provided an opportunity to develop a rapport with each participant or what Seidman (1998) refers to as an "interviewing relationship" (p. 83).

The second interviews allowed the participants to provide details regarding their ideas of play. These interviews were conducted to allow the participants to provide details of what they consider to be play, how they use play in their classrooms and their views of the place of play in the early childhood curriculum. Interview questions were also used in these interviews that originated from the participants' protocol writings.

The third interviews were conducted for purposes of clarification and refinement. Transcriptions of the interviews provided accuracy to the data collection process. The transcriptions were also used in the third interviews to secure accuracy and to provide participants the opportunity to reflect on the meanings they had expressed.

van Manen (1990) described two specific purposes of interviewing:

1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing richer and deeper understandings of a human phenomenon, and

2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation

with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience. (p. 66)

I used the interviews to try to capture the complexities of the participants' teaching experiences and to develop an understanding of how these early childhood teachers perceived the meaning of play. Because I did not want the interviews to be intrusive to the participants' busy schedules, I arranged interviews at the participants' convenience. The interviews took place in the participants' classrooms or a neutrally agreed upon site.

I had the opportunity to collect field notes and statements that illuminated the phenomenon and provided additional questions. I shared the transcripts from the interviews with the teachers for interpretation and refinement. This reflection process allowed for the extended interaction that is needed to develop an understanding of the participants' perspectives.

I used a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews to elicit rich descriptions and interpretations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). I carefully considered the questions I used so that I could gain a deeper understanding of what play means to each participant. Through the interviews, I wanted the participants to share their experiences and explore their meanings of play.

A list of predetermined questions were used to lead the interviews, however, I also allowed additional questions to flow from conversation. I followed the participants' responses and tried to connect the questions in a meaningful context. Sample questions for the first and second interviews included:

1. What do you remember about playing when you were a child?

2. What type of play experiences did you have in your schooling?

3. What does it mean to play?

4. What are your beliefs about the role of play in a child's development?

5. Can you give examples of how you incorporate play into the curriculum?

6. What is your role in your students' play?

7. What constraints do you have in implementing play in your classroom?

Protocol Writing

van Manen (1990) described protocol writings as original texts from which the researcher can work. Each participant was asked to write responses to prepared questions regarding their teaching, understandings and experiences. The participants were asked to write short descriptions of:

1) Examples of play in their classroom,

2) Memories of play.

3) Personal meanings of play.

This type of writing was utilized to put the teachers in a reflective mode. I had hoped the participants' writings would illustrate how they view play and how play is reflected in their pedagogy. This type of data can provide meaningful examples associated with a particular phenomenon. Unfortunately, the participants' writings and reflections did not provide the depth and extent of data I had anticipated.

The protocol questions were left with the participants after interview I. A self-addressed envelope was included for return of their responses. The plan was to use information from their protocol writings as potential questions for the second interview. Two of the participants promptly returned their writings while the other writings were

only returned after several reminders and not until after the second interviews. All

participants were informed of the writing requirement upon agreeing to be involved in the

study, however, in the complexities of their teaching and personal lives, it was hard for

them to find time to write meaningful reflections.

Data Analysis

The main method of data analysis consisted of theme analysis. Theme analysis

is the process of accessing the messages that are embodied in the collected data. van

Manen (1990) describes themes as:

1. The means to get at the notion.

2. Theme gives shape to the shapeless.

3. Theme describes the content of the notion.

4. Theme is always a reduction of a notion. (p. 88)

I identified themes by using the selective highlighting approach (van Manen,

1990). Through multiple readings of the data, I identified statements that illuminated the

phenomenon and grouped these statements to determine what categories fit together until

pieces of the data converged into separate essential themes.

I used my research data to attempt to understand the meaning of play to beginning

early childhood teachers. I developed an understanding of their meanings through

significant words and reflections. The themes that emerged through the research data

provided descriptions of the phenomenon for me to understand and interpret. I expected

that some themes would become more pronounced than others. Theme analysis and

gathering of the data were continual processes. Without continual analysis of the data,

the research would have failed to take direction because it was constantly changing and relied upon the participants' responses.

Quality Issues

A variety of methods were used to maintain rigor in the research study. A series of interview transcripts, personal field notes and protocol writings comprised the collected data. Multiple strategies of data collection, or the technique of triangulation, were used to obtain the participants' meanings of play.

The interview process was conducted over a five-month period. The interviews resulted in rich descriptions of the participants' understandings and experiences. Their verbal descriptions exposed their meanings of play. Several interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding and for verification purposes.

The participants were asked to verify my analysis through review of their interviews and narratives. I further verified my understandings by using prolonged engagement. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement is "the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes..." (p. 301).

My goal for this research study was to understand the meaning of play to beginning early childhood teachers, to gain an understanding of the ways they implemented play in their classrooms, to gain an understanding of the constraints they faced in their attempts to implement play in their classrooms and to gain an understanding of what experiences had influenced their understanding and application of play. This research was not designed to find answers. The purpose of this research was to understand a small group of beginning early childhood teachers' meanings of play.

The findings of this study cannot be generally applied to all beginning early childhood teachers. The participants were a small select group. It would be difficult to generalize the findings to other teachers. However, readers can deepen their understanding of play by connecting their own experiences to the findings disclosed in this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Recovering the voice of the teacher...What can these teachers tell one another and the world about teaching and about children? has largely been ignored in favor of more distanced questions, such as 'How shall we explain what these teachers ought to know and what it must be like for them?' At some point the goal must become an accurate portrayal of action as teachers themselves experience it, an account infused with immediacy, conflict, and contradiction as teachers actually live it.

W. Ayers, 1992, p. 266

Introduction

This study focused on understanding the meaning of play to beginning early childhood teachers through their own words, perceptions, opinions, and impressions. The meanings derived from this study came from interviews and protocol writings provided by four beginning early childhood teachers. It has long been known that new teachers are disillusioned in the beginning of their practice as they encounter the realities of a classroom. Becoming a teacher is a forever becoming journey. Each day and each student offers teachers the opportunity to learn. New teachers provide a unique view of how this journey begins to develop. The study of what beginning teachers observe, learn and experience can offer valuable insight and information for educational studies and efforts to further improve teacher education.

This study encouraged four beginning early childhood teachers to reflect on the concept of play as they looked back at their first two years of teaching. My goal was to disclose a descriptive representation of what play means to each of the participants by identifying their experiences and reconstructing the manner in which each of them have implemented play in their own classrooms. The purpose of this study was not to determine whether or not their activities and understandings were developmentally appropriate and accurate, but to understand their beliefs, ideas and experiences. I also strived to understand what factors influenced their meaning of play. This text reflects each teacher's story and statements and illustrate accounts of their personal experiences.

I wanted to explore what may have influenced the participant teachers' beliefs about play. Their personal and educational backgrounds were fertile grounds for exploration.

After listening, questioning and assimilating the thoughts and descriptions from the participants, related sentiments of phenomenological meanings emerged. While common themes appeared from text of the interview transcriptions and the protocol writings, the essence of their experiences were unique to each of them.

These teachers were involved in a series of three interviews and were also asked to provide a protocol writing. According to van Manen (1990), "...if we wish to investigate the nature of a certain experience or phenomenon, the most straightforward way to go about our research is to ask individuals to write their experiences down" (p. 63).

I engaged my participants with questions in interviews and through protocol writings to see if childhood play experiences or their own school play experiences had

influenced their meaning of play. Jacobs and Eskridge (1999) suggest that memories of early schooling affect what teachers do in the classroom. However, it was not clearly revealed whether they felt these experiences influenced their meanings and beliefs about play. Although it is commonly accepted that our personal life experiences influence our thoughts, beliefs, actions and understandings of the world, these beginning teachers were more concerned with discussing the here and now.

They all agreed their teacher education programs were most influential to what they believe to be the meaning of play. Diane also expressed how her students had influenced her beliefs about play. In this regard, she stated that she learned so much watching her students:

> ...the children when I see that they are learning, when their language is developing more because of interacting more with each other, their life skills are developing, they're working out problems, you know acting things out, they're learning spatial awareness through blocks, I think that they are the ones that really influence how I perceive play. (see Appendix B, Interview 2)

The data collection sources were used to capture meaningful portrayals of each teacher's experiences. The data were derived from a series of conversational interviews that became the primary source for analysis. According to van Manen (1990), conversations provide an avenue to collect personal stories, recollections of events and an opportunity to form a relationship with the interviewees about the meaning of an experience. After the textual sources had been collected, I began a deeper interpretation of the data in order to identify meanings, concepts and themes.

Theme Analysis

Through multiple readings of the data I attempted to make sense of what the participants think about play and what they have experienced as they have attempted to implement play as part of their curriculum. In isolating recurrent themes, I engaged in selective highlighting and recorded dominant concepts in the margins of the transcriptions. As I continued condensing the data of each respondent, I also began comparing the data as a whole, searching for consistencies.

I then started to write possible themes on a large grid to make a visual map with applicable quotes from each respondent. I felt it was important to use their exact words. This process involved joining the participants statements together, creating temporary themes, creating new themes and continuously revising the data until I was satisfied I had exhausted all potential themes. I continued review and analysis of the data to arrive at the elements which are the essence of the phenomena.

van Manen (1990), described theme analysis as "...the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (p. 78). Themes were discovered from the respondent's own words. Themes are not planned or anticipated, but naturally develop from the data collection and review process. van Manen (1990), shared the qualities of themes:

1. Theme is the needfulness or desire to make sense.

2. Theme is the sense we are able to make of something.

3. Theme is the openness to something.

4. Theme is the process of insightful invention, discovery, disclosure (p.88).

The themes are the very structures of what the participants experienced or the way they

make sense of the concept of play. Themes enhance communication through the development of similar understandings.

The most difficult part of the thematizing process was determining the difference between the essential themes and those that were more incidental themes. "In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (van Manen, 1990, p.107). The identification of the essential themes was accomplished by contemplating the experiences that were at the very heart of the data.

The summaries of the themes are brief descriptions of my perceptions of the written and spoken words of the four early childhood teachers I interviewed. My summaries are influenced by my personal views on play, my life experiences and my own experiences as an early childhood classroom teacher and college instructor. The themes of what play means to the teachers and what they have experienced developed early in my data collection process. I would leave the interviews with one of their quotes replaying in my head. The conversations guided my thinking and led to clarification of meaning and understanding.

The following are the themes that I discovered from the interview and protocol writing data. The essential themes that developed through the interviews and protocol writing data fit into two overarching themes: The Meaning of Play and Pedagogical Issues of Play. However, all the themes have an element of interrelatedness. The Meaning of Play category delineates the participants' beliefs, understandings, attitudes and what play means to each of them. The themes of this category include: Play is

Beneficial, Play is for the Young and Play Means Choice.

The second overarching theme of Pedagogical Issues of Play was comprised of many themes: Play Means Pressure, Work/Play Conflict, Play: An Instructional Struggle, Constraints of Play, Socioeconomic Status Limits Play, Play Versus Test Scores and Playful Spirit. These themes reflect the participant's experiences, interpretations and difficulties.

Summaries were created for each theme. Each theme is supported by passages from the participants' interviews and writings which best exemplify a particular theme.

Theme Summaries

The Meaning of Play

1. Play is Beneficial: These early childhood teachers viewed play as important and with many benefits in child development. Their teacher education programs and children influenced their thoughts regarding play.

2. Play is for the Young: Play was implemented by these teachers in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, however, they were reluctant to use play in the primary grades.

3. Play Means Choice: The participants utilized various methods of implementing play. However, they all discussed free play, a concept that described when children played in self-selected activities or self-directed activities, both of which included the element of choice on the part of the child.

Pedagogical Issues of Play

1. Play Means Pressure: The implementation of play, whether in or out of the classroom, exerted some kind of pressure on these teachers. The pressures may have originated from administrators, parents, other teachers or even themselves.

2. Work/Play Conflict: The teachers faced the same conflict between work and play that exists in our society. Common ideology finds it difficult to believe that both play and learning can occur at the same time.

3. Play: An Instructional Struggle: These teachers struggled with the challenges of implementing play in the face of curriculum and instruction demands. They needed reassurance in their teaching.

4. Constraints of Play: The participants faced many barriers that made the implementation of play more difficult. The barriers to play included: curriculum, time, space, noise, behavior and materials.

5. Socioeconomic Status Limits Play: The two teachers in the schools with lower socioeconomic student populations faced unique limitations and experiences relating to play. The children in the schools with lower socioeconomic student populations were exposed to less play and were not allowed recess.

6. Play Versus Test Scores: Three of the participants consistently expressed feeling a struggle between utilizing play and teaching to the test. There is tremendous pressure to increase test scores at the expense of play.

7. Playful Spirit: I also discovered a theme that described an element that was absent from the participants' descriptions of how they implement play, the essence of playfulness. The professional literature says that teachers can and should participate

in play and have an active role in their students' learning. The participant teachers had a limited role in the play activities they utilized in their classrooms.

<center>Participants</center>

To further develop an understanding of the themes of this study, it was essential to attempt to understand the teachers whose personal experiences and interpretations formed the basis for my data collection. The data collection consisted of a series of three interviews with each teacher and a protocol writing provided by each teacher. This group of teachers was diverse in ethnicity and age. The teachers taught at different schools in different school districts and in schools of varying socioeconomic student populations. Their descriptions of their experiences, impressions, opinions and observations formed the premise of the meanings of this phenomena.

<u>Cara</u>

Cara was in her early fifties and was the oldest participant. She was very friendly with a pleasant, easy going manner. Cara did not come to teaching until her own children were grown. She had wanted to be a teacher since she was seventeen years old. However, the circumstances of her life did not allow her to go to college earlier. After her husband died, she started substitute teaching. During a long-term substitute position, she became very attached to a group of children. She loved it so much she decided she was going to college so she could become a certified teacher. She was a graduate from a local university and had obtained certification in both early childhood education and elementary education.

<center>70</center>

Cara viewed her education as an important part of her life. She mentioned that she wished she had gone to college before she had children because she would have raised them differently.

Cara's first two years of teaching were in two different schools located in two different school districts in a midwestern metropolitan area. She had to go where she got the job. At both schools, she was hired after school had already started. Her first year, she taught in a pre-kindergarten and her second year she was in a kindergarten. During the interviews, she had already been informed that a tenured teacher was being moved to her position. So, once again, Cara would be looking for a job. She has really had to deal with the frustration and uncertainty of what it is like to be non-tenured, an experience that many beginning teachers face.

Diane

Diane was in her early to mid-twenties. She was the youngest participant in this study. She is young, attractive and energetic. She was friendly and soft-spoken.

Diane became a teacher because her third grade teacher really made an impression on her. She had no experience with children before teaching. She was a graduate of a local university where she obtained a degree in early childhood education. Her experiences in her college courses and the last two years in the classroom were her only experiences with children. Diane teaches in a middle-class elementary school in a large suburban area in a midwestern state. During her first year teaching, she taught half-day kindergarten and half day pre-kindergarten. She taught morning and afternoon kindergarten in her second year.

Diane was somewhat intimidated by the tape recorder I used to record the interviews. She was the type that did not really start to talk until the second the recorder was turned off. Diane seemed to make an easy adjustment to teaching. Once she became comfortable with the tape recorder, she had an easy, confident air during our conversations.

At the time of our second interview, Diane had made the decision to change her teaching assignment from kindergarten to second grade Her confidence in her teaching abilities had now turned to anxiousness. She commented to me that she had been in grades where it was okay to play, but now she was going to have to teach.

Evelyn

Evelyn was in her early thirties. She is the mother of two children under the age of three. Evelyn came to teach in the public schools after having experience in Head Start and early care. She graduated from a university in the northeastern part of the country with certification in elementary and early childhood education. Although she had teaching experience in the Head Start program, she was new to the teaching profession in the public school system and as a degreed and certified early childhood education teacher. Evelyn taught in an inner-city school with a lower socioeconomic student population located in a large city in a midwestern state.

Evelyn was very serious when she talked of her experiences, ideas and concepts of play. Her first year teaching in a public school was in a transitional first grade. She said she did not know if she would ever do that again. She had never even heard of transitional first grade before teaching in this classroom. Her second year of teaching

was in a pre-kindergarten program. She felt much more comfortable with this class because of her experience in Head Start.

In the weeks during which our interviews took place, Evelyn was struggling with whether she should even return to teaching after the semester concluded. She was having a hard time juggling her young family and the many demands of teaching. In her two years of teaching, Evelyn experienced many pressures from the administration relating to curriculum and with student behavioral issues. There were many issues at her school that made her uncomfortable. She had ideological issues with the administration's approach to teaching and focus on learning with the exclusion of recess and social interaction. She is the type of person that did not want to "rock the boat". Instead, she kept her opinions bottled-up while her true feelings ripped at her heart.

Jill

Jill always had a smile on her face. She was a warm, friendly person. Jill was eager to talk and share her story. She had a kind playful spirit about her. When I asked her the last time she had actually engaged in play herself, she giggled and said: " I have a four year old, are you kidding" (see Appendix D, Interview 2).

Jill is in her mid-thirties and the mother of two early childhood-aged children. Her children attend the same school where she teaches. She believed this gave her a unique point of view. She often mentioned her worries about her own children not getting play experiences in school.

Jill returned to college after the birth of her first child. She said she came from a family of teachers and always wanted to teach. As a child she would play teacher with

her Barbie dolls. She attended a small private college in a small town located in a midwestern state. She teaches in a small rural, predominately middle to lower socioeconomic level community located in a midwestern state.

Jill's classroom was located in a portable building beside the main school. She regularly lamented the constraints of her small classroom. Her room was arranged in learning centers with play materials all over the tables. A large play school bus in the corner caught my eye. I could envision children playing inside and around the bus and pretending the places where it might take them.

Jill immediately apologized for the mess in her room and suggested we go into the adjoining room for our first interview. The adjoining room was very neat and organized with the alphabet and a few other posters on the wall. We sat at perfectly organized student desks as we talked. This room was quite a contrast to Jill's classroom.

As she talked, it became apparent that Jill's first year of teaching was, like most first year teachers' experiences, very stressful. Jill's first year teaching consisted of traveling between different half day kindergarten programs located at two different schools. During the series of interviews I conducted with Jill, she was finishing up her second year of teaching a pre-kindergarten program. Jill described most of her experiences with great emotion.

Her first year of teaching was unhappy because, at the request of her administrator, she had to follow exactly what another teacher was doing. Once she gained her independence, she found herself much happier in an environment where she could do what she wanted. For example, she utilized play more often.

Jill constantly reads and continually strives to learn more about teaching. Many times she would ask me about current topics or programs she had read about. She had a unique willingness to learn and strived to improve her practice. She often referred to herself as a continuous learner.

<div align="center">Themes</div>

The Meaning of Play

Play is Beneficial. All of the teachers expressed a belief that play is beneficial. This is not surprising because play is a natural human function. However, each teacher described the benefits of play differently. They all conceded that play is a difficult concept to describe, but were in agreement that it has a meaningful place in children's lives. They saw that play has multiple benefits. Not only did they describe play as fun and enjoyable, but they described how play enhances cognitive, social, language, physical, imaginative and creative aspects of development.

Cara viewed social development as one of the benefits of play. She stated this several times throughout her interviews. She wrote: "The meaning of play is having fun, but to learn to interact, to develop and to socialize while having fun" (see Appendix A, Protocol Writing). She went on to describe how play can benefit all ages. She added: "That's what is wrong with our world today. They never learned that while playing they learn how to share, get along, take turns, listen and to talk with each other" (see Appendix A, Protocol Writing). Cara also described how play provides opportunities for role play, problem solving and imagination. She exclaimed, "it's phenomenal" (see Appendix A, Interview 1).

"Imitating life" (see Appendix B, Interview 1) was a phrase Diane used to describe play. She referred to how play allows her students to take on different roles when they engage in dramatic play. When she wrote about one of her childhood play memories, she described playing school. Diane was one of the only participants to emphasize that children can learn through play. She used examples of what children may learn as they build with blocks or work a puzzle.

Evelyn commented: "[play] it's the most important thing in my classroom with pre-k" (see Appendix C, Interview 1). Evelyn described play in her classroom as when her students get the opportunity to interact with one another. Play, to her, means "positive interaction with peers" (see Appendix C, Interview 1). She identified social development as one of the benefits of play. She did write and comment that children learn through play, however, she did not provide an example.

Jill felt that play has the potential to develop imagination, social interactions and dramatic play. She described play as "the nature of the world and the memories we have" (see Appendix D, Interwiew 1).

Play is for the Young. In the midst of this study, two of the teachers were facing changes in their teaching assignments for the next year. Diane had made the decision to move from kindergarten to second grade and Cara's pre-kindergarten position had been filled by a tenured teacher. Cara's new job was going to be teaching third grade.

These teaching assignment changes and some of the comments made during the interviews led my interview questions in a new and unanticipated direction. Hatch (1998), described how this situation is appropriate when using qualitative methods:

Because its goal is to reveal the lived experience of real people in real contexts and because those experiences and contexts are dynamic in nature, research questions sometimes change, research designs frequently are adjusted, and data collection strategies often are altered as studies evolve. (p. 49)

I asked a few questions to obtain information on how they were going to use play in their primary classrooms and then followed these questions up after they had experienced a few months in their new teaching assignments at the primary grade levels.

Evelyn had a story to tell regarding the differences in teaching transitional first and then pre-kindergarten. She described how she utilized play more extensively in her pre-kindergarten class than in her transitional first grade class. This led me to ask Jill questions about how she would use play in her classroom if she ever moved to the primary grades.

Play is more appropriate for the young was a theme that was consistently expressed by all the participants. What these teachers viewed as beneficial to younger students became less important when they were teaching older children in the primary grades.

Cara has both early childhood and elementary education certification. Her first year she taught in a pre-kindergarten where it was organized for a lot of free play. She referred to her role in this setting as just "babysitting" (see Appendix A, Interview 2). She felt that teaching and using her degree would happen when she taught in the primary grades.

Now that Cara has moved into third grade she is not using play in the classroom. However, she described how she is trying to make learning fun. For example, she uses manipulatives when she can. The use of materials, especially real and relevant materials that students can manipulate is a principle shared by early childhood educators. I asked

her if her class gets the opportunity to play outside or have a recess and she said that her administration really did not want her to because of low test scores. This response may have only been part of the truth as her own responses revealed her own reluctance to allow play. This was exemplified when she said: "they can't handle it [recess], they do not listen" (see Appendix A, Interview 3). She was very anxious about teaching third grade and expressed hope that she could return to pre-kindergarten next year.

Diane, the teacher that seemed so confident in her feelings regarding play, changed as she prepared to teach second grade. Her change was consistent with her statement mentioned earlier: "play, play, play manipulatives, hands on, all those things. But when you get in the real world, and especially second grade, they have to learn now" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). After she had taught a couple of months in second grade, I asked her if she was using play in her classroom, she responded by saying: "Honestly, I am not, there is just not enough time" (see Appendix B, Interview 3).

Evelyn would only use the word play when she taught pre-kindergarten. The only type of play she used when she was teaching transitional first was educational type games. She mentioned playing match games, bingo and race to the board type games. This is what she meant by play in her transitional first grade classroom. She clearly believed educational type play is valuable for all ages and all grade levels.

I asked Jill how she would use play in the classroom if she moved to a primary grade level. She said that because of the academic focus at the primary grade level, she would be more teacher directed and probably only use centers in the discovery areas. She said: "it is unfortunate, but it is harder to play because of academic restrictions" (see Appendix D, Interview 3).

Play Means Choice. The degree to which teachers allow for their students to make choices in their classrooms varies. Some teachers allow for their students to make free choices, to move from center to center and choose many activities and materials. All the teachers in this study mentioned free choice in relation to play. These teachers used the word "choice" to mean an opportunity for choice among many options. Most often, the choice they referenced was the option of learning centers or play materials. Choices allow children to select experiences that pertain to their own interests and abilities.

Cara facilitated free play on Fridays. Her students participated in learning centers four days a week where they had an activity or lesson to complete. On Fridays, they had the opportunity to freely choose centers and materials. Cara described this free play time: "We would do special things, like we would do the typewriter, and we'd do painting and play-doh" (see Appendix A, Interview 2).

Diane allowed for choice during learning center time. Children choose from a variety of areas and materials. Diane viewed this time as "no limitations" (see Appendix B, Interview 1) on their thinking. Kieff and Casbergue (2000) explain how development occurs when children are given the opportunity to have choice:

> When children choose to play, they choose to play with something or someone or some concept that is interesting to them and that they have some level of comfort with or knowledge about. As play progresses, children will encounter new problems, elements or ideas that will surprise or confuse them. They then focus their attention on resolving or mastering these new problems, elements or ideas. They experiment, hypothesize, and receive ideas from adults or more experienced peers; test new ideas; and revise their initial ideas. As they keep revising, their understanding of their original concepts expands and becomes more sophisticated. They have added a new dimension to their original understanding. As play continues, there will be additional surprises, problems or elements to resolve. (p. 10)

Evelyn utilized free play when she taught pre-kindergarten. Her students could choose how and where they wanted to play after they had finished what Evelyn described as a "focus" (see Appendix B, Interview 1). The focus for each area was centered around a thematic unit. After her students finished their focus, they were free to choose and explore with the materials.

Jill used choice in play for the first thirty minutes of each day. Her students were free to move from center to center and choose many activities and materials. She mentioned how this is a time when the children "enjoy themselves" (see Appendix D, Interview 1). She described this episode: "...play to me is just when they are in there and they are making up their own games and they're choosing what activities they do and they 're choosing who they play with and they're just enjoying themselves" (see Appendix D, Interview 1).

Pedagogical Issues of Play

Play Means Pressure. According to Webster's Dictionary (1948), pressure can mean "the constraint of circumstance." A trend that echoed throughout the conversations regarding play was the existence of a sense of pressure. The participant teachers felt pressure from various forces as they implemented play in the classroom. Pressure was experienced by the teachers in similar and in unique ways. There was an overriding concern that parents perceived the children were "just playing." There was pressure from administrators to spend time "on task." There was similar pressure from other teachers or what was sometimes simply described as "others." Finally, there was a degree of pressure from within themselves as they questioned their own practices. This was likely

a result of the outward pressures they described becoming internalized.

After moving to teaching third grade, Cara felt pressure from her administration to avoid wasting time on play. She said her administration made it clear that they have a "no fluff, only total instruction" (see Appendix A, Interview 3) policy. Cara perceived this statement to mean play was not an approved method of instruction. When I asked her about playing outside or recess, she replied, "there was no time" (see Appendix A, Interview 3). She felt pressured to "get it all in" (see Appendix A, Interview 3). She said that it took half the morning to complete her Saxon math lesson.

Cara did not feel as much pressure when she implemented play in her pre-kindergarten class during her first year of teaching. However, she felt there was some pressure for her classroom to look like it had some structure to it. She described one scene in her room as her administrator visited: "One time, well on Fridays was free play and one time the principal came in that day and later told me he wanted more structure. I explained that on Fridays they had free choice centers and he understood" (see Appendix A, Interview 2).

Diane expressed feeling the same type of pressure or what she described as pressure from "others" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). She meant others to include parents, administrators and other teachers. Even though she did not feel she had to defend the use of play as part of the curriculum in the school where she currently teaches, she did feel the pressure to get her students ready for first grade. In this regard, she said: "I try to give them a balance [direct instruction] so they don't go to first grade just wanting to play and just be free" (see Appendix B, Interview 1).

Diane anticipated pressure from parents about her use of play in the classroom. She mentioned the very high expectations of her parents. Diane mentioned that parental pressure made it difficult for her to implement play because they expected children to bring home papers and be assigned homework. To combat this pressure, she addressed this issue at the beginning of the school year during parent orientation. She explained to the parents that the children will not be bringing home a lot of papers. She provided parents with detailed examples of how children learn through play. She gave an example: "I describe that to parents, you know, when they are playing with a puzzle they are learning spatial awareness" (see Appendix A, Interview 1).

Evelyn experienced great pressure to not utilize play in or out of the classroom. Her principal did not want the students to play because of the school's low test scores. This literally meant that none of the children were allowed recess or other down-time during the school day. Despite the fact that Evelyn's pre-kindergarten students would not be tested, the administration felt it would have been too hard for the other children to watch her class go out to recess when they could not. This was especially frustrating to her because there was a brand new playground at the school. She exclaimed, "it was tearing me up inside" (see Appendix C, Interview 2). However, she simply did not feel empowered to such a degree that she could seek to implement change.

Evelyn's frustration was similar during her first year when she taught transitional-first grade. Her students were not allowed to have recess or any other opportunities to socialize, an activity Evelyn believes is an important aspect of play. Evelyn stated: " To me, the more you put them behind a desk, they need a break, they need an outlet. During lunch they were not allowed to talk. For eight months they had to put their heads down

until their teachers picked them up... To me this just caused more frustration, they had no outlet" (see Appendix C, Interview 2). She went on to explain, "Yes, to have play or have that outlet or making waves and not following what your administration wants you to do. I was torn with that all year. I would come home and tell my husband about it and of course he would tell me to say something to her. And I would think how can I approach her and it not come out in a negative way. There was so much negativism at the school" (see Appendix C, Interview 2).

Evelyn felt great pressure to not even mention the word play. I asked if she felt pressure when her administrator came into her room and saw the children engaged in play. She rationalized: "No, because I called it learning centers, I did not call it play. I did not want her to think we were just playing. I used the words to help me" (see Appendix C, Interview 2).

Evelyn thought by escaping confrontation with her administration by avoiding the word "play" and by disguising it, at least by her language, she would not be labeled a "trouble maker". Accordingly, she decided not to approach her administration about this topic. She described this experience as one that was "tearing her up inside" (see Appendix C, Interview 2). She was torn between what she called being a "trouble maker" or doing what she believed was in the best interest of the children. She dealt with this pressure through prayer.

Jill felt pressure from parents to exclude play from the curriculum. She felt uneasy about how she would explain to the parents that the children learn through play. In this regard, she explained: "if a parent walked in right now would they understand why I'm letting them have free choice time with blocks?" (see Appendix D, Interview 1).

Jill felt the same type of pressure from her parents and administration her first year when she was teaching in a kindergarten program. The parents, as well as her administrator, expected her to teach exactly the way the other kindergarten teacher was teaching. This required her to have the children do many worksheets every day. She described this teaching experience as mostly direct instruction. Play was not part of her curriculum. She described herself as being very unhappy that year.

Jill also questioned herself as she implemented play in her classroom. She said: "...sometimes I'm like, okay what are they really getting out of that? Are they really learning anything?" (see Appendix D, Interview 2). She believed that this uneasiness emanated from parental pressure and her concerns regarding what the parents might think about her teaching. Jill continued to question herself about the role of play and her own way of teaching. This dilemma of whether or not to utilize play in the curriculum comes from within herself. Many teachers, especially new teachers face this internal conflict.

Diane expressed the same type of pressure. She seemed very confident about implementing play, however, when I turned off the tape recorder she stated that she often questioned, "are they really learning anything". I asked her what she did to calm this uneasiness and doubt about whether the children are learning. She described how she would use questioning techniques to reassure herself that the students are truly learning through play.

The pressures expressed by these teachers came from the never-ending work versus play dichotomy that pervades our adult society. Studies have documented how children learn through play. Nonetheless, many people, including parents and

administrators, do not understand the basic concept of how children learn through play. This is a dilemma these beginning teachers faced.

Work/Play Conflict. The work versus play issue has long been a debate in education. As discussed in the review of literature, the dichotomy between work and play is as evident in our society as it is in our educational systems. Many educators do not consider play to be a meaningful part of learning. Many early childhood teachers feel "caught in a conflict embedded in our society: is teacher dominion or developmental appropriateness the best route to learning and development for young children?" (Wein, 1995, p. 1). Because this dichotomy between learning methods is readily apparent in everyday society and our educational system, the theme of work versus play could not be overlooked as a theme in this study.

The teachers in this study experienced the dichotomy between work and play. This dichotomy caused them to experience anxiety, frustration and confusion in their professional lives as well as their personal lives. When I questioned them about play in their personal lives, they were timid to reply. Most of the participants hesitated and then gave responses such as: "Oh I don't know" or "I mean let me think here" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). It took the participants a while to reflect on their own play and, even then, they never went into great detail. When they finally got around to answering, they described activities such as going out to dinner, working out and scrap booking. I believe their struggle with describing play in their own lives was reflective of a sense of guilt associated with playing as an adult. This guilt is a product of the work versus play dichotomy in our society that leads to a devaluing of play.

Jill was the one exception to this hesitation to respond. When asked about play in her personal life and the last time she had played, she responded without hesitation: "are you kidding, I have a 4 year old" (see Appendix D, Interview 2). Jill's response may indicate that having a playful relationship with young children can help adults understand the meaning of play.

The work versus play dichotomy was prevalent in the participants' classroom experiences. Learning centers were utilized by all the participants. Learning centers are commonly found in early childhood classrooms. Learning centers are a way of organizing classrooms into specific learning areas. Learning centers can be used to encourage collaboration and explorations that fit into the classroom curriculum. Kieff and Casbergue (2000) describe this system: " Learning centers, sometimes called stations, interest centers, zones, or activity areas, are multipurpose areas within a classroom where equipment and materials are organized to promote active, child-centered learning." Spodek (1985), described the usual activities in centers as not being prescribed by the teacher and activities that take shape as a child or group direct their own learning. Learning centers are used and facilitated differently according to the style of the individual teacher.

Cara, Evelyn, and Jill viewed learning center time as different than free play. They used their learning center environments for teacher directed lessons. For example, Evelyn described her centers in her transitional first grade classroom: "Each area each day I had a different task that we were on" (see Appendix B, Interview 1) Their learning center time was work oriented rather than play oriented. Nonetheless, the participants still viewed the time at the learning center environments as play because the

children had the opportunity to interact with someone else or had an opportunity to explore with materials. Their views in this regard are inconsistent with the impressions their students are likely to have about play versus teacher directed lessons. Studies have shown that children distinctly know and separate the difference between teacher directed lessons and free play (King, 1979; 1982).

Cara's centers were primarily organized to facilitate teaching skills and on free days her students got to play with free choice. She used a rotation plan to assist in having her students complete every learning center. She preferred the more structured centers because "…it gave them the experience of sitting down and being still. This is a classroom, you know we can't just be up running around and jumping up and down. It is not a play center" (see Appendix A, Interview 2). When she used materials in her curriculum she wanted them to do what she called "get the play out" (see Appendix A, Interview 2). She explained this concept by describing an experience when she introduced play-doh to her students: "Okay, here's you some play-doh. I'm going to give you two to three minutes and go ahead and do whatever you want to do with. And, then [I'd] say, Okay, times up, you know. We need to make our A's for this week" (see Appendix A, Interview 2).

Diane, however, believed that learning center time and free time could co-exist. She accomplished this by setting up centers that facilitated free play. Diane had a separate time for them to do teacher directed lessons. She seemed to value play as a vehicle to learn. Nonetheless, she somewhat contradicted herself during one of the interviews when she stated: "…play, play, play manipulatives, hands on, all those things. But when you get in the real world, and especially second grade, they have to learn now"

(see Appendix B, Interview 2).

Evelyn did not want to use the word play when she was speaking to students above the pre-kindergarten age: "It was not a good thing to say play. If I said we are going to play a game they would get real excited" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). She wanted her students to understand that their work is serious business. Even with her pre-kindergarten age students, she stopped using the word play when it was time for writing. She stated: "the main time I stopped saying play was writing class. Because, I wanted them to know the importance of writing and how important it is" (see Appendix B, Interview 1).

In Evelyn's pre-kindergarten class the students could play after they had finished their focus. The focus was a teacher-selected activity. After they had finished the focus activity, they could ask her if they could explore with the other materials in the centers.

Part of Evelyn's work versus play conflict was due to the pressures stemming from her administration. However, she mentioned it was important for the students to take learning seriously. Her statements in this regard seem to imply that some of her work versus play conflict may come from within herself. This may have been the result of her own inconsistent thoughts regarding play and its role in learning. She did not want to use the word play when it was time to learn something serious. Evelyn mentioned several times that children can learn through playing games. The games she mentioned were educational type games such as number and letter bingo.

Further, even though Evelyn views learning as a more serious activity than play, the first thing she wrote in her protocol writing was that to her play means learning. This

contradicted what she expressed in the interviews. She described play as the most important thing in her pre-kindergarten class. She made sure to distinguish her pre-kindergarten and transitional first grade class.

When Jill's students arrived they were afforded the first thirty minutes of the day to free play. She described her free play as choice among the materials. After free play time, she had what she called academic or teacher directed centers. "On the academic centers or teacher directed centers, they[students] like to do file folder games where they match numerals to objects or upper to lower case or you know. I'll use a little piece of sticky tack and I'll say, okay when you get done, bring it to me, and I'll give them a sticker or stamp or something that shows me that they did that center even though they may not have something to take home" (see Appendix D, Interview 2). Jill stated: "play with a purpose is hard for them" (see Appendix D, Interview 3).

Play: An Instructional Struggle. Beginning teachers usually struggle with curriculum and instruction decisions. These beginning teachers believed play was important but struggled with how to implement play in their everyday classroom experiences. If they had the opportunity to see a classroom where play was successfully facilitated, whether during their field experiences or student teaching assignments, they relied on those experiences to help guide how they would use play in their own classrooms.

The participants sought out fellow teachers, colleagues, or district wide grade level groups for advice. Cara called it "reassurance" (see Appendix A, Interview 2). All of these teachers were, at some point in time, the only pre-kindergarten teachers at their schools. They really felt alone and needed someone to help or someone to talk to about

their struggles and to validate their concerns.

Cara started her first year of teaching after the school year had already begun. Due to an enrollment issue, a teacher had to change schools which left the pre-kindergarten open. She felt the children were already used to the routine the prior teacher had used, thus, she just followed what the other teacher had been doing. She had a group time with her students and then they had free play every day. She was a little uncomfortable with this situation. Not only was Cara's class the only pre-kindergarten in her school, but she was one of the only pre-kindergartens in her district. She tried to attend the district wide kindergarten teachers meeting but she still felt "alone" (see Appendix A, Interview 2).

Cara's second year teaching was in a pre-kindergarten in a different school district. She organized and structured her room differently. Her centers became teacher-directed centers except on Friday, which was free choice day. She once again found herself in the role as the only pre-kindergarten teacher in her school and wished she had someone else to provide guidance and advice or to simply collaborate.

Diane seemed comfortable with implementing play in her kindergarten classroom, however, after she made the decision to move to second grade, she became very anxious. She described her struggle with this experience: "I have my desks in groups, I have shelves full of games and everything, but I don't know. I just talked to the pre-kindergarten teacher that I'm good friends with and we've just been talking about, you know, do I still have centers? What do I do? I mean, I feel like, I don't know" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). Diane continuously described her feelings of frustration. She did not know how to arrange her room or where she should even begin.

Because I wanted to explore how Diane was using play in her second grade class, I checked back with her a few months later. When asked if she was using play, she said: "To be honest with you, No" (see Appendix B, Interview 3). Diane felt there was just not enough time for play.

Evelyn felt comfortable with implementing play in her pre-kindergarten class because of her experience in Head Start and child care. She described her pre-kindergarten class as "beautiful, beautiful" (see Appendix C, Interview 2). However, she did not want to use play or even the word play in her transitional first grade class. Nevertheless, she used centers to facilitate her students' learning. She used the centers to reinforce skills and to provide her students the opportunity to interact with other students. She struggled with curriculum, guidance and room arrangements. She said: "...I wasn't sure what T-1 [transitional first] was all about. I never heard about T-1 [transitional first] until I taught here" (see Appendix C, Interview 1). She emphasized how hard it was for her to plan for children on so many different levels.

"How do you implement play without it being chaotic?" (see Appendix D, Interview 2) was a question that Jill said would be her personal theme for the year. This is the question she is continually trying to answer. During her first year of teaching she was required to teach exactly in the same manner and using the same materials as the other kindergarten teacher. She described that time as very unhappy. She was disheartened because she was not allowed to use her originality. She said you get out of school with "big ideas" (see Appendix D, Interview 2) that are immediately stricken down. "It would have been nice for me to have been able to have a little more independence to choose my own activities and do my own ideas and lessons that I wanted

to do" (see Appendix D, Interview 2).

Jill mentioned the desire and importance for freedom and an opportunity to use her creativity and plan her own curriculum. Jill taught pre-kindergarten her second year of teaching. Because it was the first year for this program, she got to use all of her own ideas and activities. Unfortunately, she did not have any opportunities in her teacher education program to see play facilitated in a classroom setting. She believed that play is important but struggled with how to implement and facilitate play in her own classroom. She summarized her frustration when she said:

> ... you know how I was telling you I struggled with how to do centers, you know. Am I letting them have too much free time? Do I not make a have to [required] center? Do I just let them chose all the time? How do I do this? Do I tell them where to go? Do I let them chose? I've tried to do it [centers] three different ways and I still haven't come up with one that I have found that really works well. ...because I do not have anyone to talk to. It's like okay, may I ask a question?. I'm going to call Dr. Halston [pseudonym], or whoever, and say, okay I have a question. And, I did call her last year and told her, I said 'you have got to teach us how to do centers. You have got to get that in your class'. (see Appendix D, Interview 2)

I asked Jill if learning centers were ever discussed in her college courses. She admitted that using centers to facilitate children's learning was brought up in many of her courses, however, she never had the opportunity to see them implemented in a classroom setting.

All these teachers struggled with how to implement play. Their experiences were compounded by the many obstacles they were confronted with that acted as restraints on their use of play.

Constraints of Play. The pressure these teachers faced were a dominant theme of this study. As previously mentioned, they all faced some form of pressure and constraints relating to their use of play in their classrooms. Like most teachers in early childhood education, these teachers felt constrained by the curriculum expectations. They felt they had to "get them ready" (see Appendix B, Interview 1) for the next grade level or prepare them for "the test" (see Appendix B, Interview 3). Other constraints included: behavioral issues, time, space, materials and noise. The constraints they described were not all the same. Some of the teachers experienced all the constraints, while others only encountered a few of the constraints.

The participants described the barriers to implementing play as they pertained to their personal experiences. Three of the teachers mentioned their students' behavior as a barrier to implementing play in their classrooms. Diane was the only teacher that did not mention behavior as problematic in association to play.

Cara struggled with the constraint of noise control when she taught pre-kindergarten in an open classroom. Her classroom was located next to a third grade classroom. Because of this location, she felt like she had to keep her class to a quiet tone. She also described how some administrators correlate loudness with a teacher's inability to maintain control.

When Cara moved up to third grade she was unable to take her class outside to play. She commented: "I cannot go out with the group that I have now. They do not listen. Besides, it takes me all morning to get through our Saxon math lesson" (see Appendix A, Interview 3). She added: "I know one thing my education did not prepare me for and that is the behavior" (see Appendix A, Interview 3). Cara confronted barriers

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to implementing play from noise, behavior, curriculum expectations, and her district's requirements.

Diane did not feel she had experienced any constraints as she implemented play in her pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classes. However, when she moved to second grade the curriculum expectations made it difficult for her to implement play at all. Wein (1995) suggests that rigid scheduling commonly found in early childhood programs reduces the potential for quality play opportunities. Diane told me that she was not using play in her classroom because there just was not enough time. She explained: "I hate it, but I have to do their reading scores every 6 weeks. There is so much to do. The longer you are out [college] the more you conform to the other way" (see Appendix B, Interview 3). Diane explained the other way as "not early childhood" (see Appendix B, Interview 3). Her statement is consistent with Smith's (1997) findings that beginning teachers conform to expectations and routines to appease administrators, even when it conflicts with their own philosophy.

Evelyn described many behavior problems associated with play that frustrated her. She described her frustration with her transitional first grade class: "They were not mature enough to handle play or playing a game or whatever they are going to play. They would get real giddy and silly. It became more frustrating than fun. I guess you're supposed to get excited when you're going to play a game. But if it was a learning game, it did not seem like they were learning because they were being too silly" (see Appendix C, Interview 2). She also commented: "Whenever we played a game, the kids lost, they got mad at each other. They did not want to be friends with each other, or they would say nasty things to each other, that type thing. It was negative things

like that" (see Appendix C, Interview 2).

Evelyn believed play beyond pre-kindergarten age children should be educational type play. However, she struggled with behavioral issues to the point that it even made playing games difficult for her to implement.

Evelyn also felt the constraints of the curriculum. She described how her student's were on various developmental levels. The expectations of teaching to meet all the district "benchmarks" (see Appendix B, Interview 1) were a constant struggle.

Jill experienced many barriers to implementing play in the classroom. She mentioned space, materials, noise and time as constraints to implementing play in the classroom.

Jill's class was located in a portable building. Space was a barrier to play in her classroom. Her room was very small with virtually no storage space. This space limitation made it difficult for her to have a variety of centers for her students.

Her room has an adjoining door that was shared with the kindergarten class. Jill felt that she needed to keep her student's noise level to a minimum so the other class would not be disturbed. Time was a constraint on Jill as well. She had to limit her students' free play time so there would be time for calendar, group time and her teacher directed centers. She tried to get her students outside each day, but if they ran short on time she eliminated outside play altogether.

The types of materials available in the classroom can affect the play of children. Materials did not present much of a barrier for Jill's utilization of play in her first year of teaching because she was using more "paper and pencil" (see Appendix D, Interview 2) tasks. However, she expressed concerns about how the playground

equipment was inappropriate and unsafe for her class. Because the pre-kindergarten she

taught at her second year was in its' beginning year, she did not have a lot of materials at

her disposal to facilitate the play oriented curriculum she wished to utilize. Thus, she

collected items from what other teachers did not want and made many activities herself.

Evelyn experienced the same supply shortage dilemma with materials. Many of

her materials were borrowed or came from her own house. She also made many of the

games she used in her class. When she finally got the opportunity to purchase materials,

she experienced frustration. Her frustration is evident in her response to my question

about what materials were in her pre-kindergarten room: "Everything in that room I

brought myself. I found it here (home) or found old things. I did not get any money.

Anything that was bought like manipulatives or anything I bought myself. However, I

did ask the secretary if I could get a kitchen set because there was not anything for a

house area. Other than that, the librarian gave some materials, but by the time I got the

materials from her, it was the end of the school year" (see Appendix B, Interview 2).

Socioeconomic Status Limits Play. Cara and Evelyn both taught in schools with

lower socioeconomic student populations. These two teachers were confronted with

administrators that did not believe their students should be playing at all and did not

allow any recess time. To many, recess is just considered a break from learning, not part

of the learning process. To many people, recess and play are regarded as nonproductive

activities that impede learning and at the very least take away from serious learning time.

However, others view recess as a valuable part of the school experience, a time that

fosters socialization and provides a necessary break from the rigors of study (Pelligrini &

Bjorkland, 1996).

Evelyn was frustrated with the no recess policy at her school because she believed that all children "need a break" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). Evelyn was frustrated with not being able to go outside for recess, particularly in light of the fact that her school had a new playground. Toward the very end of the school year they were finally allowed to have recess. Evelyn commented on this issue: "...I prayed about it and then we had recess" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). The end of the year just happened to be the time when testing in her school was finished. Although their school's test scores were not provided to me, both teachers referred to their school's "low" test scores. I later verified through state department of education records that both these schools do have low test scores.

Cara faced the same situation as Evelyn. She had been told that test scores were too low, therefore, her curriculum should be "No fluff, only total instruction" (see Appendix A, Interview 3). Cara's problems were further magnified by the fact she was struggling with behavior issues so much that she did not feel she could handle her students at recess. Jill and Diane felt some pressure from curricular demands, but not to the point of totally abolishing recess.

According to Kenneth Wessom (2001), test scores are an indication of income level. Wessom expressed: "test scores more accurately mirror reflections of economic advantages and disadvantages seen throughout our American society" (p.16). Gratz (2000), provided an example of the problem of high standards in relation to the high stakes that tests have in producing a much higher dropout rate for poor and minority students. In this regard, Gratz stated:

> ...many schools and teachers are resorting to such strategies as piling on homework, abolishing recess for young children, cheating on tests,

transferring pressure to students, flunking more students, teaching to the test, and seeking ways to rid themselves of low performers. (p. 6)

In this study, there seemed to be a disparity in children's exposure to play and the benefits of play that was linked to socioeconomic status. The children in schools with lower socioeconomic student populations were being denied exposure to play and the benefits of play to a greater extent than their peers in schools with middle to higher socioeconomic student populations.

Play Versus Test Scores. The negative impact of today's test score driven accountability model on the utilization of play in the curriculum was evident throughout the interviews. Jill was the only participant that did not express experiences with this dilemma. Cara, Diane and Evelyn discussed their struggles with facilitating the use of play and succumbing to the demands of teaching directed at achieving higher test scores.

Each participant discussed their struggles with utilizing play and doing what was perceived as teaching for better test scores within the context of different themes. This test score dilemma was discussed by these participants in the context of the Play Means Pressure, Constraints of Play and Socioeconomic Status Limits Play themes. These discussions helped explain their experiences with play in relation to the emphasis on test scores in these different contexts. These discussions fit nicely within these three themes. However, the prominence and frequency with which test scores and their impact on play were discussed gave life to Play Versus Test Scores as an independent theme.

Cara experienced this struggle between play and test scores in the context of pressure from her administration to not waste time on play and in the context of

teaching in a school with a lower socioeconomic student population. Her administration expected a "no fluff, only total instruction" (see Appendix A, Interview 3) focus on teaching to attempt to raise test scores. Her administration made it clear that the test scores were too low and were to be the primary concern. Because of these demands, "there was no time" (see Appendix A, Interview 3) for play or recess.

Diane did not express experiencing a struggle between utilizing play and teaching to the test in her kindergarten and pre-kindergarten classes. However, after moving to second grade, she discontinued using play altogether because of time constraints resulting from spending time on demanding curriculum expectations. She now felt she had to spend time to "get them ready" (see Appendix B, Interview 1) for the next grade level or prepare them for "the test" (see Appendix B, Interview 3). She stated: "I hate it, but I have to do their reading scores every 6 weeks" (see Appendix B, Interview 3). These constraints on play caused by teaching to prepare for tests made her believe that she was beginning to "conform to the other way" or "not early childhood" (see Appendix B, Interview 3). Diane experienced this dilemma within the context of tests and teaching for tests as being a constraint on her use of play.

Evelyn experienced the struggle between utilizing play in her classroom and teaching to improve test scores in the same contexts as Cara. Evelyn taught in schools with low test scores and lower socioeconomic student populations. Her administrations did not want her students to play in or out of the classroom because of the low test scores. Despite the fact that her pre-kindergarten students would not be tested, the administration felt it would have been too hard for the other children to watch her class go out to recess when they could not. The situation was the same her first year when she taught

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transitional-first grade. Evelyn described this situation as one that was "tearing her up inside" (see Appendix C, Interview 2). This focus on test scores to the extent of excluding play was contrary to her beliefs about what was in the best interest of the children. Nonetheless, she did not have the confidence to complain or attempt to change because she did not want to be a trouble maker.

There was a tremendous amount of pressure on these participants to increase test scores at the expense of decreasing or even eliminating play.

Playful Spirit. There are many dimensions to the domains of playfulness. Rubin, Fein, and Vandenberg (1983) described criteria related to the condition of playfulness. One criterion was the degree of active involvement. Glynn and Webster (1993) have applied this measure to the study of adults. Studies have found that teachers can have a significant role in contributing to children's play. The role that teachers take in children's play has been a topic of recent study. When teachers take an active role in children's play, positive results can occur. The teacher's role in children's play has been referred to as play leadership (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2001) or play training.

A unique theme in this study was the absence of playfulness or active involvement by the teachers. There were inconsistencies in these teachers' descriptions of how they were involved in their students' play. Biber (1951) described the teacher's role in play:

> If free is to yield these values in terms of children's growth needs, it requires a skilled guiding hand, especially where children are collected in groups as they are in nursery schools. There is a way of setting the stage and creating an atmosphere for spontaneous play. Most important in this atmosphere is the teacher's sensitive understanding of her own role. Sometimes, the teacher needs to be ready to guide the play, especially

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among the fives, sixes, and sevens, into channels that are beyond the needs of the nursery years. (pp. 3-4)

Cara instructed a small group as her students rotated through their center time. She organized her room with materials and areas that facilitated play and at times she would be involved in her student's play: "I will sit down and do a puzzle with them or blocks. Sometimes, I demonstrated with materials such as pattern blocks. Sometimes, I ask questions" (see Appendix A, Interview 2). Cara described very minimal involvement in her student's play.

Diane had a playful spirit about her. She involved herself in her students play, but was also careful not to intervene. She allowed the children to lead the play. She described how she would even take on the role of a mother or child to involve herself in her student's play. She mentioned several times how she uses questioning strategies to facilitate play. Smilansky (1990) concluded that children who have experienced interventions designed to promote their participation and/or competence in sociodramatic play have shown significant gains in aspects of cognitive and creative performance.

Diane continued: "[I] get in the conversations, you know, and just laugh with them, you know. Have a good time" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). She also described how playfulness was just part of her personality. She discussed how watching the children playing and learning has influenced her the most. Diane seemed to have a genuine spirit of play that was missing from the other participants in this study. However, Diane is now faced with the struggle of how to use her spirit and other elements of play in the primary grades.

Evelyn described her involvement in her student's play in two different ways. She explained how she was a "floater" (see Appendix B, Interview 1) when her student's

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were involved in play. There was some contradiction in one of her statements regarding her role in her student's play when she stated: "I would watch and float around from each area but most of the time I tried to have a small group with me that we worked on something" (see Appendix B, Interview 1).

Jill used some of her children's play time to do administrative tasks. She was involved in their play when she needed to intervene to change behavior. She referred to her involvement in several different ways. She first believed her role as supervising progress and then she could interact with her students. She commented in this regard: "I do a variety of monitoring and then interaction with the kids" (see Appendix D, Interview 2).

Conclusion

As discussed in the review of literature, many have struggled with defining the meaning of play. Researchers have described elements, characteristics or criteria of play. Garvey (1977, 1990) described four criteria that must be present in order for an activity to truly be play:

1. Enjoyable.

2. Intrinsically motivated with no utilitarian product.

3. Freely chosen.

4. Involving active engagement.

The participants in this study had difficulty describing play. They described several situations or activities they believed were play that included characteristics that were inconsistent with the criteria described by Garvey (1977, 1990). The best example

At times, these teachers felt frustrated and pressured to get their students ready for the next grade level or to meet curriculum expectations so their students would one day be prepared for standardized tests. The teachers experienced constant pressure to focus on the attainment of skills rather than the educational and developmental benefits of play. This dichotomy forced them into a work versus play dilemma. Because they believe play is of vital importance, they are constantly having to defend against the devaluing of play. They struggle with how they will defend the use of play. Choosing how and whether to advocate for play in a given situation is a decision making challenge. They question their own beliefs and practices and feel a need for useful support systems. These constant struggles appear to wear away at their belief in the use of play in the curriculum and, ultimately, particularly in the early primary grade levels, results in the decreased use of play or the total elimination of it altogether.

What is the Meaning of Play to Beginning Early Childhood Teachers?

As stated in Chapter II, it was not the goal of this study to attempt to formulate a definition of play in the context of early childhood education. Instead, it was the intent of this researcher to attempt to understand the meaning of play and the participants' experiences in attempting to implement play in early childhood classrooms. This was accomplished through a phenomenological view of the participants. Gaining insight, such as that provided by the methodology of this study, can often result in more useful information than simply attempting to create abstract definitions.

To these beginning teachers, play is fun, beneficial and allows choice. The benefits of play were expressed as social development, imitation, problem solving and

learning. However, play also had negative meanings to the participants such as: pressure, barriers and internal conflict. Play was viewed as important, but the implementation of play often caused the participants to confront many pedagogical struggles.

People interpret and understand play in many different ways. The view of play in the classroom varies greatly from teacher to teacher. This study revealed that this is true among early childhood professionals as well.

CHAPTER V

REFLECTIONS, DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Teachers, like all human beings, are busy creating meaning for themselves.

Jones & Reynolds, 1995, p. 37

The purpose of this study was to understand the meaning of play to beginning early childhood teachers and to understand what they have experienced as they have attempted to implement play into their early childhood curricula. The phenomenological research methodology allowed me to gain an understanding of what play meant to the participant teachers as expressed through their own thoughts and words, to gain insight from their own play experiences and to explore reflections from their experiences in their early childhood teacher education programs.

Selective highlighting of the interview and protocol writing data revealed numerous themes. The essential themes fit under two overarching categories: The Meaning of Play and Pedagogical Issues of Play. The Meaning of Play category delineated the participants' beliefs, understandings, attitudes and individual meanings of play. The themes under this category included: Play is Beneficial, Play is for the Young and Play Means Choice. The Pedagogical Issues of Play category reflected the participants' experiences, interpretations and difficulties. The themes under this category included: Play Means Pressure, Work/Play Conflict, Play: An Instructional

Struggle, Constraints of Play, Socioeconomic Status Limits Play, Play Versus Test
Scores and Playful Spirit.

This chapter discusses the benefits of a phenomenological study, provides a
reflection on the study and includes a discussion of my findings. Applications to teacher
education and suggestions for further research are also discussed.

<center>Advantages of Phenomenology</center>

The phenomenological approach allowed me to collect in-depth and personal
explanations from the participant teachers. The purpose of this study was not to compare
and/or define play, but to attempt to understand this group of four teachers' thoughts,
beliefs and experiences. Their reflections on their first two years of teaching provided
insight into the challenges these teachers faced as they attempted to tackle the many
issues associated with implementing play in the early childhood curriculum.

The phenomenological approach allowed me to explore and describe the teachers'
thoughts and experiences. This exploration process provided detailed descriptions of the
participants' understandings and meanings.

I was directly involved with the research. My involvement allowed me to develop
an understanding of the meanings the participants conveyed. The process of the study
also allowed me the opportunity to personally examine data generated from the
conversations with the teacher participants and from their protocol writings. I was
particularly intrigued by how the meaning of play changed as two of the teachers changed
grade level teaching assignments. This was evident in statements such as: "But when
you get in the real world" and "especially in second grade, I mean they have to learn

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now" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). This is demonstrative of how, even within one person, meaning may be fluid and subject to continuous reconstruction.

In order to understand the meaning of play to beginning early childhood teachers, I wanted to examine play in the context of their personal and pedagogical life experiences. My intent was to capture the phenomena of what they perceived as play and what they experienced with play as a child, adult, early childhood education student and classroom teacher. This method of research allowed me to understand play from the point of view of beginning early childhood teachers. It is important to understand the views and experiences of teachers who have direct impact on whether and how play will be implemented in the classroom. Classroom teachers are gatekeepers over children's exposure to play in school.

Early in the interview process, I perceived that several of the participants were providing answers they thought I wanted to hear. I had to repeatedly reiterate the purpose of the study and the methodology of the study to encourage a more conversational type of interview relationship. After explaining phenomenology, the purpose of this methodology and after prolonged engagement, the participants appeared more at ease and understood that I did not intend to evaluate them.

I believe my position as a college instructor may have had an unintended influence on the data collection process. One of the participants was a graduate from the university where I currently teach. I never had this teacher as a student, but I believe that coming from the university where she graduated may have influenced some of the answers she gave early in the interview process. For example, during the first interview, she made the following comment when answering one of my questions: "I hope this is

the way you want me to go with this" (see Appendix B, Interview 1). However, by the second interview, she appeared to feel more comfortable with the process and expressed herself in greater detail. The effect of the researcher on the participants should be taken into consideration in future research studies similar to this one. Efforts should be made to avoid situations that may inadvertently influence the data collection process.

The transcriptions of the conversational interviews provided the most valuable data for evaluating the meanings expressed by the participants. The protocol writings did not reflect as much thought as I had expected. In hindsight, I believe this may have resulted from a lack of time on the part of the participants to devote to meaningful reflective writing or inexperience in doing such reflections. There never seems to be enough time to complete the multitude of duties that accompany teaching, particularly as beginning teachers. The many requirements and challenges of teaching can be overwhelming and may have contributed to the lack of reflection noted in the samples of the protocol writings.

<center>Reflections</center>

My study findings highlighted the participant's experiences, difficulties and perceptions. The dominant barriers the participants faced as they attempted to implement play in their classrooms were standardized tests, teacher directed curricula imposed on them by their administrators and others and their own attitudes and concerns about play.

All four of the participants mentioned the pressure of "the tests". These mandates limited the participants' ability to address the individual educational needs of their

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children. The participants implied that these tests and curriculum requirements resulted in a hindrance of their creativity and originality. In this regard, one participant stated: "you get out of school with big ideas and it would be nice to be able to use them" (see Appendix D, Interview 2).

The participants expressed the pressure and frustration they felt because of these mandates placed upon them. One participant stated that the curriculum mandates in her school made her "Unhappy" (see Appendix D, Interview 1). Another participant noted that the biggest constraint to implementing play was the "unreal expectations" (see Appendix A, Interview 2). Fromberg (1995) discussed this dilemma:

> Just as young children become more powerful learners in an intellectual environment, so might early childhood teachers profit from a broad panoply of intellectual stimulation other than a textbook-driven, linear curriculum. Such linear forms rob both children and teachers of opportunities for thinking and learning about content-rich events or phenomena and engaging in experiential learning. Linear curricula may contribute to the creation of conditions, for both children and teachers, which nurture the kind of apathetic conformity that is congruent with burnout. (p. 57)

Although most teachers have a strong sense that play should be part of the early childhood curriculum, they are facing great pressure and many constraints that put them in a perpetual dilemma between utilizing play or succumbing to the teacher-directed curriculum. There is tremendous pressure to increase test scores at the expense of decreasing or even eliminating play. This pressure comes from administrators, parents, teachers and from within teachers themselves as they struggle with the work/play conflict that is predominant in our society. These multi-faceted pressures often result from a general lack of understanding of the power of play, the benefits of play and the way knowledge is constructed through play.

Teachers confront many realities as they begin to understand the complexity of implementing play in the curriculum. All the participants agreed their teacher education programs influenced their beliefs regarding the importance of play. Three of the participants mentioned that play was addressed in a couple of their college teaching courses. However, none of the teachers had a course that was specifically designed to teach about play and how to implement play in the curriculum and classroom.

Diane felt her teacher education program placed too much emphasis on play and failed to prepare her to teach second grade. On this point, she stated:

> It [teacher education] was so based on play, play, play, manipulative, hands on, all those things. But when you get in the real world, and especially in second grade, I mean they have to learn now. They're reading, they're doing handwriting from what I've heard, you know they're doing all those things. They have to, I don't know, I just feel like early childhood only focused on pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. (see Appendix B, Interview 2)

All the participants believed play was important for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children. Their perceptions of the importance of play encouraged them to implement play in their pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms. Nonetheless, these teachers faced many challenges to implementing play, including: how to organize their classrooms to facilitate play, how to manage behavior when their students are at play and how to justify their practices to administrators, other teachers and parents.

This study revealed that it was very difficult for the participants to reflect on their own childhood and school play experiences. Reflection was hard for these teachers who are just trying to survive the "here and now" of teaching. The stresses of their current teaching duties appeared to overshadow any useful reflection into their past experiences. This prevented any meaningful exploration of how their own experiences may have

influenced their level of playfulness in the classroom.

Discussion

As I carefully listened to the participants, it became apparent there is confusion about the meaning, perception, usefulness and implementation of play. These early childhood teachers are confused about what play is. They say they value play, but mostly for the younger children, not primary age children. This implies a lack of understanding that play contributes to learning. This may be due to the overriding effect of the teacher directed programs these teachers experienced in their own educational history. A few teacher educational courses which emphasize the value of play are not likely sufficient to challenge the deep rooted beliefs and attitudes towards play.

The devaluation of play and the research that supports it and its educational benefits result in the societal devaluing of play and the marginalization of early childhood education in general. The primary principles of early childhood education such as developmentally appropriate practices are not allowed to carry over into primary education because of their perceived interference with real learning and high stakes testing (Ohanian, 1999). A play-oriented curriculum detracts from the emphasis on the test.

This study revealed that recess had been eliminated in the two teachers' schools that included a lower socioeconomic population. Recess had been abolished as a result of an increased focus on academic achievement/test scores. Research has shown that the abolition of recess for the sake of additional time for academic endeavors is spreading across the United States (Pelligrini & Bjorkland, 1996). In one of the other teachers'

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programs, recess was the first activity to be left out of the day if all the other curricular expectations had not been met. Recess was not valued as part of the learning process. Recess was simply used as an opportunity to allow children to relieve stored-up energy.

This test driven accountability model has the effect of discriminating against certain groups including low socioeconomic level groups with the ultimate result of promoting the status quo in power relations among high, middle and low socioeconomic level groups (Kohn, 2000). If more and more low socioeconomic schools eliminate play and recess, this may result in stifling creativity, problem solving and the many other benefits of play to the lower class. The lack of play in lower socioeconomic schools may be a covert example of class discrimination. Results of this study may only hint at such a relationship. Further research is necessary to confirm this trend.

The diminished value placed on play by the participants may represent the overall lack of value of play in the American culture. The United States was one of the last industrialized nations to adopt the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), having adopted it in 1995 under President Clinton (Guddemi, Jambor, & Moore, 1999). This devaluing of play in American culture may stem from the historical Puritan views that play is a distraction from work (Hughes, 1995). Schools reflect society, so teachers are merely reflecting the popular view that if you are playing and not working then learning is not taking place.

Our own experiences, culture, schooling and education impact the way we view play. These teachers were inconsistent in their own descriptions of play and the role of play in early childhood development and education. They would describe play as a tool

for learning, but in their next breath make statements such as "get the play out" (see Appendix A, Interview 2), "are they really learning anything" (see Appendix B, Interview 2) and "but when you get in the real world, and especially in second grade, I mean they have to learn now" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). All the participants agreed play is important and viewed play as a tool for learning. However, they all began to devalue play when discussing its role in the primary grades.

Many agree that an important characteristic of play is that it is freely chosen (King, 1982; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999; Klugman & Fasoli, 1995). Bergen (1998) described a continuum of play that ranged from free play to work (See Figure 1, Chapter II). Such a continuum can assist in analyzing the types of play utilized by the participants and the degree of the participants' involvement in children's play.

In the present study, just as in the Bennett, Wood, & Rogers (1997) study, the participants described activities as play that in actuality were teacher directed activities cloaked in the context of play. Such play activities fit toward the work end of Bergen's (1998) continuum and are reflective of lower levels of teacher participation in play. For example, they would describe a center activity that involved nothing more than a group setting wherein teacher directed activities had to be completed.

The participants seemed to be missing the connection between the cognitive benefits of play and how play can be utilized as a learning tool. They claimed they believed that children learn through play, but only allowed it on Fridays, during arrival time in the morning and when they taught pre-kindergarten or kindergarten age children.

We all have an innate desire to play. Sutton-Smith (1971) described how play is more than just a childhood phenomena. Play is present throughout our lives and simply

takes on different contexts. Many teachers spend much time in their classrooms trying to

stop play instead of using the power of play to help children learn. The participants

described many pressures and restraints that made the implementation of play difficult for

them. Many of these pressures and barriers were described as these teachers lived them.

Application to Teacher Education

The findings of this study were derived from the data collected from four

beginning early childhood teachers. Their own words and their descriptions of what they

have experienced formed the foundation of the recommendations for teacher education.

The findings of this study may assist in identifying important issues in early childhood

education. The findings provide insights that are worthy of further consideration

in investigating how to better prepare teachers to implement play in the classroom.

This study and the review of literature on play revealed a need to address several

issues relating to play and teacher education, including:

1. Instruction on the benefits of play.

2. Instruction on how to facilitate and utilize play in the classroom, particularly

   the primary grade classrooms.

3. Instruction on the role of the teacher in play.

4. Instruction on the need for advocacy, support and teacher autonomy.

Teachers need more courses designed to address the complexities of implementing play

in the classroom. According to Bowman (1990) "Colleges list few courses entitled play,

and in most the word play does not even appear in course descriptions" (p. 97). She

described how much of the training and information on play is "superficial coverage of

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theory" (p. 104).

The role and value of play in the development and education of young children is well documented. This study revealed the difficulties beginning early childhood teachers encounter as they attempted to implement play and their misunderstanding of play's application in the classroom. These revelations emphasize the need for play to be a central focus of teacher education programs. Play can be integrated into all courses. Play courses should address curriculum instruction and classroom management skills that will assist teachers in making meaningful connections between play and curriculum.

Instruction on the Benefits of Play

As discussed in the review of literature, numerous benefits of play have been well documented. Teacher education programs need to engage pre-service teachers in reading actual research on play to gain an understanding of the benefits of play and of how the benefits are well supported through documented studies.

The participants used the word play to describe activities that ranged from freely chosen activities to teacher directed activities. However, they did not appear to have a strong understanding of the educational and developmental benefits of different types of play and the teacher's role in the different types of play. Actual observation and documentation of children's play is needed in early childhood education programs to provide exposure to the wide range of development and learning that takes place during play episodes. A deeper knowledge base of the theoretical underpinnings and pedagogical applications of play combined with a solid understanding of the benefits of play and its role in human development may have a positive influence on encouraging the

extension of the use of play, particularly in the primary grades.

Instruction on How to Facilitate and Utilize
Play in the Curriculum

The participants understood that materials can influence play. If they did not have materials, they found a way to make play activities by using items from their own homes, they borrowed materials from other teachers or requested materials from their administrators. It appears the participants believe their teacher education programs sufficiently addressed the importance of hands-on and manipulative materials in children's play.

Room arrangement and space organization was a concern to all the teachers. Programs that address the use, organization and arrangement of learning centers and free play would be helpful. Further, instruction on how to appropriately manage individual and group participation in play settings would help these teachers make the play experiences they utilize more efficient and beneficial. In this regard, one of the participants stated that her theme of the year would be "how do you incorporate play without it being chaotic" (see Appendix D, Interview 2).

Cara, Evelyn and Jill mentioned problems with behavior management. Cara explained that "I know one thing my education did not prepare me for and that is the behavior" (see Appendix A, Interview 3). She felt that she could not even take her students outside because "they can't handle it" (see Appendix A, Interview 3). Jill commented that behavior management is the single most puzzling aspect of play implementation.

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A deeper education and understanding of behavior management techniques is desperately needed. Education programs need to provide specific strategies for guiding student behavior. Teacher education students should also be taught that conflict is not always negative. Conflicts can provide the opportunity for children to learn problem solving, negotiation and conflict resolution skills.

Some of the teachers in this study had minimal involvement in play activities. Instead of participating in their children's play activities, these teachers did administrative tasks while the children engaged in play or simply utilized small group instruction instead of being involved in child centered play. Teachers need to have a sound understanding of how their involvement in play activities cannot only affect their student's learning, but can also have a positive impact on behavior.

Cara, Diane and Evelyn mentioned observations and child development labs or field experiences as meaningful education experiences that influenced their way of facilitating, organizing and utilizing play. Jill made the comment that it would have really helped her to have had meaningful opportunities to "see it [play] in action" (see Appendix D, Interview 2). One of the participants commented on how her teacher education program was more pre-kindergarten and kindergarten based and that she did not feel prepared to teach the primary grades. She added: "Its not fair to spend twenty thousand dollars [on education] and not know what to do" (see Appendix B, Interview 2). Education students need exposure to environments where play is appropriately implemented. Exposure should include pre-primary and primary grade levels. Such learning opportunities can be facilitated through field experiences, student teaching or video excerpts/virtual classrooms.

Instruction on the Role of the Teacher in Play

The participants seemed unclear about their role in children's play. Teachers can enhance play through playful interactions, questioning techniques and active involvement. Teachers can assume the role of the planner as well as the facilitator of play. Teachers should be introduced to the many different play intervention strategies so that they can appropriately enhance children's play. Teachers also need to be skilled in observation and assessment techniques specific to children's play.

Instruction on the Need for Advocacy, Support
and Teacher Autonomy

Advocacy.

Advocacy is a proactive stance taken by individuals in response to particular issues that concern them. In early childhood education, the purpose of advocacy is to promote ideas and seek resolutions that will affect children and families in positive ways. (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000, p. 13)

The participants of this study were not prepared to advocate for play. This was particularly true when they moved above the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten grade levels. They felt uncertain about how to explain the benefits, strategies, theories and studies supporting the use of play to parents, administrators and other teachers. One of the participants stated: "The longer you're away [teacher education] the more you give into the pressure" (see Appendix B, Interview 3). She was referring to the pressure to use teacher directed methods. The participants all seemed eager to utilize play in their classrooms, but the longer they were out of school the less support they had to implement play.

Support. There is a need for teachers to have continuing support beyond their entry years. All the participants looked for guidance at some point in time during their first two years of teaching. All of them indicated a need and a desire for help. For example, one of the participants stated: "I was the only pre-kindergarten teacher. There were no other pre-k teachers. There were no other teachers who really talked to me, ya know. ...and I longed to talk to someone. ...just for the reassurance" (see Appendix A, Interview 2). Without continued support, these teachers are more likely to conform to more teacher-directed instruction methods.

Teacher education programs need to establish continuing support programs. An introduction to professional play organizations could help beginning teachers and provide means for additional support programs that will serve teachers throughout their teaching careers. Similarly, an emphasis on teacher collaboration and networking with other teachers may enable teachers to feel more confident about their conviction for the role of play in the classroom. Such strength may make them less likely to give in to the pressures that lead to the devaluing of play.

Autonomy. The participants were faced with decisions and policies that negatively affect children and the way they teach. This negativity can also impact their personal well being. Many of the policies they confronted were contrary to their own beliefs. For example, Evelyn believed recess was important, but did not confront her principal on this issue because she did not want to "rock the boat" (see Appendix C, Interview 2). Teachers need to be autonomous decision makers.

Autonomy is described as "the ability to make decisions for oneself, about right and wrong in the moral realm and about truth and untruth in the intellectual realm, by

taking all relevant factors into account, independently of reward and punishment"
(Kamii, 1994, p. 4). "Autonomous teachers make decisions after carefully considering
relevant variables. Autonomy is self-regulation - the ability to decide for oneself without
having to be told by others" (Branscombe, Castle, Dorsey, Surbeck, & Taylor, 2000,
p. 265). When teachers understand why play is important and how to appropriately
implement play, they are more likely to resist constraints and to find ways to promote
play. Likewise, they are more likely to be able to articulate the reasons why play is
important to principals, other teachers, parents and anyone else who may question their
use of play in the classroom.

<div align="center">Implications for Further Study</div>

This study encouraged consideration of other possible research topics and
emphasized the need for further study into the many complexities of play. There is a
need for additional studies of teachers' attitudes towards play. An understanding of the
meaning of play to administrators could also provide meaningful information.

A topic ripe for further research is: Who are the people that are creating the
policies that directly impact early childhood education? Decisions are being made
that are causing children and teachers to be placed in stressful situations. An example of
such a policy decision is the elimination of recess. Are these policies being created by
principals, administrators, school board members, or anyone with any understanding of
the principles underlying child development and learning in the early childhood years?
Research should inform policy. The research reviewed in chapter two concluded there
are many benefits of play. Research in child development and education should guide the

policy making process for administrators and teachers.

This study exposed a critical issue worthy of further inquiry: Is the elimination of play and recess more predominant in schools with lower socioeconomic populations? This is an important issue because children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds deserve to receive the same benefits from play and recess as children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. A statement from one of the participants who taught in a school with a lower socioeconomic population captured the magnitude of this problem:

> Well, the principal, she did not think they should play, ... Test scores were so low they did not need to play. There was no time to play, but there was a brand new playground at there.

> ...During lunch they could not talk, for eight months they had to put their heads down until their teachers picked them up. ...This started in transitional first grade. ...To me this just caused more frustration, they had no outlet. (see Appendix C, Interview 2)

I hope this study will provide inspiration for continued study of this issue. Research needs to focus attention on what recess and play means to children, what is it like for children who do not have play or recess, the benefits of play and recess and whether there is any support for the often cited argument that elimination of recess and/or play results in increased academic learning.

Continued research on the benefits of play is also needed. To have any impact on societal perceptions of the value of play, there is a need for more research supportive of developmentally appropriate practices. Integrative research involving multiple disciplines may provide more convincing data that may in turn influence popular perceptions that tend to devalue play.

The question of whether and how to establish a common definition of play needs to be investigated further. At the very least, the common characteristics of play need to be identified. There is a need to look closely at what it means to play, what actually happens during play episodes and what is considered play. An examination of personal beliefs and reflections can aide in developing an understanding of these complex concepts.

Concluding Thoughts

I hope this study will contribute to and provide insight into the meaning of play to beginning early childhood teachers. I also hope that it will add to the understanding of the complexity of the challenges teachers face with regard to play and its use in the early childhood classroom.

This study concentrated on beginning teachers because they provide perspectives that can influence teacher education programs and provide information on how they understand play and use play in their own classrooms. This study discussed the literature that associates the benefits of play, the many meanings of play and practical issues relating to utilization of play in the classroom.

My interviews with the participants have deepened my understanding of the dilemmas teachers face with the issue of play. The pressure and confusion surrounding play is real. The participants described their need for support and guidance. Without support and guidance, teaching can be a very lonely journey. They described their frustration as the curriculum mandates do not allow time for play or creativity in their teaching. These mandates create a risk of losing children because the mandates

oftentimes do not allow teachers to reach students at their individual levels.

Likewise, these mandates deter the desire to learn. Good teachers may leave the profession as a result of misguided pressures and unreal expectations. As play continues to be undervalued, professionals that care for and serve children need to join forces to educate society about the many benefits of play.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

CARA'S INTERVIEWS AND

WRITING PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW 1
July 11, 2001

Q: What is your educational background?

A: Early Childhood from a university in a Southwestern state.

Q: This is good to know. What types of experiences have you had with children?

A: I would sub in the afternoon and a lot of times I would be in like fourth or fifth
       grade. Yeah, it was a fifth grade class, and there was like a space there that some
       of the kids were gone to speech, some of the kids were gone to band and there
       was like, oh, maybe six or seven kids that were left in the class. And I said, "Why
       don't we just go up to my pre-K class and we'll see what it's like?" And they
       went in there and they took the blocks and built the most beautiful building. I
       mean, you know, just to see them, and they didn't have any qualms about getting
       in the sand. They didn't have any qualms, you know, about, I mean it was fun to
       them, but yet you could see how much more development. And that's what you
       need to see through there. You know, you need to see, and it was just really
       exciting.

Q: I was in New England one time. I saw a fifth grade that had done a block
       structure and they had done the plumbing with PVC pipe underneath that would
       connect a whole town if they needed plumbing.

A: Oh, my gosh.

Q: So I thought that was really fascinating.

A: Okay, tell me about your educational background.

Q: Okay. As far as what I have achieved in education or . . .

A: You've gone into early childhood. Was that a second career or was that your
       first time?

Q: Well, I wanted always to be a teacher. Since I was 17, I wanted to be a teacher.
       But through a lot of circumstances, I didn't get to go to college and stuff like that.
       My husband had passed away and he left me the social security. He was quite a
       bit older than I was. So I was able to support my kids without just having to kill
       myself doing it, and so I had been subbing. I wanted to see if I wanted to teach,

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[1] All names of individuals, schools, universities and any other educational institution identified during the
interviews have been changed for purposes of protecting identities.

so I had been subbing. And I was a teacher assistant for about six months and I hated it. I mean I didn't hate it but, you know, it just, you just don't get the glory, I guess. You don't get the affection of the kids. You're just there to do what the teacher tells you to do. And so the next year I told this friend of mine, I said I'm not going to sub teach anymore and she said, "Oh listen, Diane, you have to come back and teach in my class." She said, "Because you keep reign over them and yet they learn," you know. And I said, "Well, we'll see if they change the substitute law where you go from 36 days, 32 days to 70 whatever. So they did. So she calls me a week before school starts and tells me that she had the baby and I get to start the class, 7th grade science class. I was sitting there going, just so long as you put it all down on paper. And she did. And for four weeks I was in that class and it was my class and they were my kids. She had to come in and she was the new teacher. But I loved it. And so I go back and I call all my people, you know, that I had been subbing for the last year and I said, "Okay, now I'm available." And I didn't get a call. For a week I sat at home and didn't get a call. And I go, I don't like this. And so that next Monday I went in and enrolled at Rose College into nine hours in the eight-week class.

Q: Wow, fast.

A: Yeah. I mean I was ready to get at it. And so from that point on it was summer, winter, fall, everything. And so I started out with elementary. That's what I wanted to do, just elementary. Well, really, I didn't know that much about early childhood because I was so focused on elementary. And, ah, we had a principal come and talk to us at our parent teacher class we had and she says, "Well," and she was K through third, her school was, and she goes, "I really don't even, if I have two applications, one with early childhood and one without, I will look at the early childhood first." And I thought, well I wonder how many more hours it would take to get early childhood. And it took like 14 more hours. And, so I started it before I graduated but then I went back and finished it after I had graduated. And that's what got me into my class last year and that's what got me into this year was my early childhood education. I think, plus the elementary. But I found out that I could take my early childhood and my elementary filled in a lot of early childhood classes so I didn't have to, you know, start from scratch on that.

Q: So, what did you do last year? What was the grade you taught? Pre-K?

A: Pre-K.

Q: And it was half-day?

A: Right. It was a pilot program in a school the year before and then last year they came in and put it into a lot of the schools. But the particular school that I was at, they only did it for half a day. That's all it was funded for.

Q: Okay. And did you start the year this year?

A: No. See I didn't start the year last year. They had interviewed me for the job and then there was a kindergarten teacher that had to be moved to a class so she went into the pre-K. Well, then she was there for about three days and they told her that the kindergarten had enough kids and all where she was. So she went back to that school and left the pre-K. So they called me and I went in and I took it from there. So I was about a week late coming into there. And then on this one, they had hired a first year teacher out and her husband moved to San Antonio. He was in the Air Force, Navy or something. So anyway, he moved down to San Antonio and she went with him. And so they needed somebody and I was the only one with early childhood that had called him back he said. So I got this position and I really liked it. I had 17 in my class and 16 were Hispanic, in the morning. Very respectful. Very good in class.

Q: You had a morning and then you had a different group in the afternoon?

A: Right. It wasn't an all day.

Q: Four days a week or five days a week?

A: Five days a week. We had centers four days a week. Monday through Thursday we had centers and we had like a certain group of kids were in the green group, and a certain in the yellow, red and the blue. And then we had the chart and we would rotate the construction paper with the group around so that each one of them got one of the centers. But they learned how to sit down, learned how to focus on the one thing that was at the table. And yet they were only there for about 20 to 30 minutes at the top. And we did reading, we did writing, math and then art. I mean we tried to do something that functioned in with those categories.

Q: Okay.

A: Then on Friday it was free choice. They could . . . we just had our calendar and stuff like that and then we would get up and we would do special things, like we would do the typewriter and we'd do painting and playdoh. We'd get those other things out.

Q: So how long was your play time?

A: Oh, we had about 45 minutes of play time. We would have calendar in the morning and then we would do our centers and then we would do playtime after that.

Q: And then they would go home because you only had them . . . Okay, um, before teaching the last two years what experiences did you have with children? You said subbing . . .

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A: I did a lot of subbing. I did assistant. Of course I was in Sunday school. I had second grade in Sunday school and Bible School, stuff like that. And, ah other than that . . .

Q: And you schooled your own children? Is that right?

A: I have two children.

Q: Two children, well that's a lot of experience with children. I have a two year old. What do you remember about playing as a child? What were some of your play experiences as a child?

A: Well, of course we were out in the country. We didn't have pre-school. We didn't have, you know, our socializing was church, you know. And then I had two brothers. They would go off and play by themselves. They didn't want a girl with them. So I was really, of course dolls were. . . and you know Mother didn't really push things at me. You know they keep saying role play, role play. But, you know, she didn't ever push things at me. It was just the way, I was always mothering. I had a twin brother and I mothered him. Until I was married and I was out of the home, I mothered, I guess. But you know that was just a role thing. And so I guess probably the house was the main thing because the boys went outside and took care of the chores and I was inside the house all the time. So the cooking and the play cooking and I had a little sewing machine, you know, different things like that.

Q: So you remember playing indoors?

A: Yeah, more so. Yeah, I was mostly indoors. The guys stayed mostly outdoors. But I remember going outside and playing mud pies and stuff like that.

Q: Did you have any type of play experiences in your school experience?

A: No. We didn't go to Kindergarten. At the time whenever Kindergarten started for us it was very optional and it cost. Well, Mother and Dad didn't have the money to send us. Plus there were two of us, my twin brother and I at the same time. So, we didn't go to Kindergarten. So it was just straight into school. So, no, we didn't have any. I mean we went outside on recess and stuff, but as far as in the classroom, no.

Q: Okay. What do you think it means to play?

A: There are a lot of things that it means. Playing can be problem solving. Playing can be imagination. Playing can be role playing. It can be acting out what they did at home, what they see at home, what they see in school. But I think really I like the problem solving and like the imagination the best. And they learn coordination. Through the coloring they learn how to put the colors over here.

And you don't think about that but the solid colors, most pre-K's whenever they first start its all one color. And I don't care if they have red up there, they're going to put black over the top of it or orange over the top of it. They don't section their colors out. And so they learn to section their colors out and that's coordinating. The fine motor skills are phenomenal that it starts developing and ah, I don't know there's just so much learning. If you put an educational toy down, I mean, they played cards like Crazy 8. We played cards and I mean, they knew how to play that. Well, to just sit there and say the numbers, to recognize numbers. They may not recognize the numbers, but they do on those cards. You know, I mean, that's learning their math. That's learning their math skills. So, I mean, it's phenomenal.

Q: If you were going to describe some features of play, if you were trying to say, "Well that's not play, but this would be considered play," like you said when you were at school, you didn't have play, what are some things that distinguish play from non-play?

A: I think play to me is where they enjoy doing it. It can be anything. But if they enjoy doing it, it is some type of a play and it makes it fun for them. And it can be like we did reading. Well, you don't think about reading being fun. At one of our centers, I always usually led the centers for reading. We were studying the A for astronaut and so that's what we were doing. We had little books, little short words, and there was a tape that was playing. So we had big books and we would follow the big book and then they all had their little books and we would turn it over on the back and look at the words that were in there and I'd just say, you know, we need to find those in the book. So it was like seek and find, you know, seek and find through there. They would find the word. And before that, we had astronaut helmets. I took paper sacks and I cut out holes here for their shoulders so it set down over their shoulders and here they just had this vision, right here, in front of them. And I said now this is how astronauts, you know, the big helmets and everything, they can't see, they have to move their whole bodies. And they got the biggest kick out of it. And I fixed a rocket, you know, that they could get into a little bit later. Well, that's fun for them. That's play for them. They don't even think about that being lessons, learning. And so I think anything that can be fun can be play. Or vice-a-versa. And learning can be fun as long as teachers make it that way.

Q: Yeah. Definitely. Um, what are your beliefs about the role of play in a child's development?

A: I think it's really important. So many times at home I think the boys don't have a chance to be the ones who sweep the floors. They don't get to be the ones to cook because Dad may be saying, "No, no, no, that's not what my boy's going to do." And whereas in our play centers, they can be that if they want to be. If they like to cook, they get to go cook, whether it's imaginary or not. If the girls want to be a racecar driver, they can be a racecar driver, or if they want to be an astronaut. I

mean, I'm not saying that these things are unlimited to them, but you don't usually think of them as being . . . Just like every boy and girl in my reading group was an astronaut. And in the tape it was so funny because in the tape there would be one part and they would go 10-9-8, you know, and I would say, "Okay, you all, get ready, we're getting ready to go!" And you could see them push back in their seats getting ready to go up in the air.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And, ah, but you don't think about the girls wanting to do that and so they get to use their imagination in play.

Q: And it takes off the gender role, opens that up.

A: That's right. And if the boys want to play with dolls, you know, some of the girls would even maybe say, "Oh, so and so is playing with a doll!" And I go, "So, he's going to be a good daddy," you know. "What's wrong with that?" And you just really try to cut that down to where they realize that anything is possible for them.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So what else is the role of play in their development?

A: Well, there's problem solving because if there is a problem in the kitchen, you say, "Hey, you all take care of it." What are you going to do to get that food all out or where are you going to put the food or, you know, let them figure that out so it's problem solving.

Q: And the socialization.

A: Right. The interacting is so important because some of them are not ready for that interaction yet. They've come from where maybe they are the only single child and so they have to learn how to interact. Maybe Mama does everything for them. I found that with the Hispanics, the parents do everything for the kids, everything. They carry their backpacks in, they take their folders out of the backpacks, they go hang up their backpacks. Kids don't do it at all. Now I'm not saying all, but the majority of them. And my assistant told me that she did a lot of lunchroom duty and she said she would go in there in the morning to breakfast and the parents were feeding them.

Q: Wow.

A: And so for play role, it's really good for these kids to realize that they're going to be big one day.

Q: And feed themselves.

A: And feed themselves and feed their babies. And that's another form of development for them, you know, that they don't always get.

Q: Can you describe your room to me, the typical environment that you set up?

A: Okay. Well, we have our center. Like on the chalk board thing, we had the calendar, we had the day, the days, the month. We had a calendar for the date and then we would do the weather with it. We had a helper that would help me do these. We had colors set up on one side. We had shape stuff on another side. They would do those every morning. We had the ABC's at the top and we had numbers and we would do those. We did the numbers in Spanish and in English. We had four tables that they would sit at. Over here, as you walk in, here's the center for our dates and calendar and stuff and then there's a little blue rug that they would come and sit on. And then they would have name recognition. You know those hanging, I want to say hanging boards, they had the little plastic . . .

Q: Yeah, the blue?

A: Yeah, yeah. I would put their names in there and they would have to go get them every morning and put them on my bench. I had a bench up here. And so they would have to do name recognition. And that was a big thing because this one little girl got put back from Kindergarten because she still didn't know her name. And she still, almost to the end of the year, still didn't pick her name out, where the other kids did. But, okay, and then back behind was a sink for us to be able to rinse our brushes and stuff out with and that was also art. We had a painting easel over there they could paint with. And then we had shelves along one side that we put, you know, the blocks on and we put little tubs of like linking links, connecting links, you know, cars, all this kind of stuff was over here on these shelves. And then we had another shelf that had like the art stuff in it. The sponges and the papers and the paints and like that was all on this one shelf by the easel. And that was the division and then the middle part was where the blocks would be placed and that was another division. And then on the side of that we had a little stove and a little sink that divided that. So that was a one-two-three division and over here then we had housekeeping.

Q: Now how long had the four-year-old program been there?

A: From what I understand, the schools has been for about 14 years.

Q: Oh, okay.

A: Yeah, I didn't realize it was that long. And this school has evidently had one for almost that long.

Q: Okay.

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A: I know it's been 12 to 15 years.

Q: So you had plenty of materials.

A: Right. Well, I say yes. The lady who was the teacher last year, she went to another school. It was like a church that the Kindergartners came into the classroom and then they went back into the . . . I'm not sure how it works. But anyway, so from what I understand, she took a lot of the stuff that she had probably accumulated over the years and I don't know whether she paid for them. A teacher told me that if the school paid for it at the first of the year that that teacher was able to take them with them if she wanted to. So, from what I understand, the room was a lot barer than what it used to be. But we had plenty to play with and we had puzzles that they always had and then there was a bookshelf that had books on it and stuff. What really surprised me, I did a long term sub at the first of this year and it was a first grade class. They didn't have pre-K, they had Kindergarten. But the teacher, I said something about the kids looking at books in their spare time. "No, they're not old enough. They'll tear up the books."

Q: The Kindergarten teacher?

A: No, this was first grade.

Q: Oh . . .

A: First grade. And I'm sitting there going, wait a minute, I have pre-K kids who look at them, that take care of them. What are you doing telling me first grade kids can't look at books. I was just . . .

Q: How can they develop a love for books?

A: That's right. If they're so, you know, if you're going to be so picky about them. But anyway, so . . . And then we had a typewriter set over here that really initiated them more into computer and what a computer did. We weren't allowed computers out in our annex because there was no security out there.

Q: Oh.

A: So we didn't have computers. Now, the last week of school, I took my computer over there. It was an older one. But they could see what the monitor was. They could see them hitting the keys and it would show up on the monitor.

Q: Oh, yeah.

A: They couldn't print out or anything like that. It was just literally that they could do the keys, do the cursor keys, you know, whatever they wanted to do like that and just give them a little bit because next year they will have computers.

Q: Are they getting one of those boxes that you sit on top of and a lock?

A: Well, they could but, of course, I just kept mine up there for a week, so nobody really knew it was up there that length of time, so it worked out pretty good. So they had different things that they could do.

Q: Okay. Good.

CARA

Interview 2
July 24, 2001

Q: Okay, looking over it, there was one question I wanted you to elaborate on.

A: Okay.

Q: And it was the one about how you structured your room for play and you were talking about how you had Fridays were free-play. So tell me how you came up with that organization.

A: Whenever I came into the classroom, you know I told you I came in October 30th and that's how they had it set up. So I just went with their plan since the kids were used to it. I just keep following it.

Q: Okay.

A: Now, the first year, when I was at a school, I did it differently.

Q: Okay. Tell me how you did it.

A: That's where I just had centers and the kids had the choice. They would just go to whatever center they wanted to play at. And we just had the, like I didn't have the organized tables for them to go to. They had to sit at the table. Like the writing table, I just had blank paper, pencils, papers, rulers, markers, whatever they wanted to write with and then we had arts and crafts where my assistant was at most of the time and she would help them do whatever they wanted to do, whatever we had set up for that day. And we had the blocks and we had the water table. You know, we had just centers like that for them to go to. And so we had our group time and then they went to their centers. I mean group time outside, you know, and we had a snack time with that.

Q: Did you feel comfortable organizing it that way?

A: To tell you the truth, I really liked the structure better. But, I think that might be my age. Uh, because I'm used to a structured classroom. But it seemed like it was much more organized. The children in this last year at a school, the children learned that whenever they went to that center, they stayed at that center for 20 minutes or 30 minutes or however long it took me to get through the reading center and they stayed at that table. They learned how to sit down which is what you have to do. The children have to be prepared to whenever they go in that first grade particularly, they have to be still, they have to da-da-da, you know, and all

that stuff, which I know is the development for them that they would develop in Kindergarten, buy they also have to be introduced to it in pre-K. And, so that's what I mean. I like the organized simply because it gave them the experience of sitting down and being still. This is a classroom, you know, we can't just be up running around and jumping up and down. It's not a play center, I mean, what am I trying to say. It's not like at the babysitters, it's not like outside, you know, there is structure here. So we have to sit down and we have to be quiet for that 20 to 30 minutes and then we get up and go play, you know. So I liked the structure because of that. It gave them a little bit more of the structured classroom. Whereas, last year, we didn't have that.

Q: So why did you organize it like that in a school?

A: I don't know. To tell you the truth. That just seemed to be. Oh, I think it was because whenever I was in the Child Development course, when we had to go into the classroom area, I think that was kind of the way they had it set up and that's the reason why I set it up that way. They just had their free choice and they would go wherever they wanted to go. So I think may have . . . .

Q: Made an impact on you and so that's why you planned . . .

A: Right. I think that's why I probably . . . because I hadn't seen it anywhere else and that's also the way they had it at, ah, I observed what you have to do your 30 hour observation or whatever and I was at, ah, three-year-old center at Eastern County Vo-tech and that's how they also had it set up.

Q: Okay. So, those field experiences really make a strong impact then on you.

A: Oh, definitely.

Q: Because that's the way you were kind of going, that's what you saw, you were planning it like that.

A: Right.

Q: Okay, that's interesting. Okay, uh, you kind of answered this last time about you gave examples about how you incorporated play into the curriculum. I think I read what you sent me and you said stuff like playdoh. When they were going to a center would that be out on the table or was that a free choice for them to get off the shelf. How is that part of the curriculum?

A: We use it different ways because kids just love playdoh or they love the sand or something like that. And, ah, so we would put, if it was in one of our centers like where they had to go to sit down before they got to play at their play centers. See we had kind of play activities and then we had centers. The centers were where they would go and sit down and do their activity at that table. And like at the

writing table we would use playdoh like to make your letters. You form letters with it or you make your numbers with it, you know, or something like that. And we also had like little bags of sand, the colored sand, that we put in there and they would write their ABC's on it and then they could just shake it up and mess it up and do it over again. So we would do it like that. I'd let them go ahead and play a little bit first because that was what we thought too. You know, you let them play first and then get the play out and do it. But now they loved the dry eraser board and the chalk boards. I have little chalk slates and that we would even do in big group time. We didn't have enough for everybody so I put them like in, they would just share. You know, they would pass it around to the next person. But we would go around and check their ABC's and stuff like that.

Q: Okay. Explain to me, you just made a comment a while ago, you said, "Get the play out." Explain that statement a little bit more.

A: Well, whenever you given them something new or something different, they're going to sit there and play with it and not listen to you. I mean, listen to the instructions of what to do. So, consequently you just say, "Okay, here's you some playdoh. I'm going to give you two or three minutes and go ahead and do whatever you want to do with it." You know, just do whatever you want to do with it. And then like you can go to another table and do instructions at that table. And then say, "Okay, time's up," you know. " Let's quit that and now let's form our letters," you know. "We need to make our A's for this week." You need to make A's with it or something like that. And then give them something, some instruction with it.

Q: Okay. Okay.

A: Because they have to get that type of energy out.

Q: Right. Okay. I understand now. Okay, and what rules did you have about play in the classroom?

A: Well, there are rules. Of course, they weren't printed. They were kind of understood rules, you know. Ah, the sharing, you know, we shared. Ah, cleaned up after ourselves when we got finished. And, of course you had rules that some didn't listen to at all. Like, you know, don't take somebody's . . if they're playing with it, you have to leave it alone until they're through with and then you can play with it.

Q: Right.

A: Those are kind of understood rules, but there are some of the children that don't understand those kind of rules, unspoken rules, that's what I'm saying.

Q: What about rules with like their play? Could they take stuff from one area to another area or what was the rule about that?

A: Well, we tried to incorporate that and most of the time, the kids just stayed in that one area and played and then they would go to another area. But every once and a while, they would like their plane and go over to the blocks. You know, they'd make an airport or they would take their baby doll over and sit and watch them do a puzzle. You know, I mean, so consequently you have to kind of allow . . . that's part of their role, that's part of their play acting too, that baby is there and they're taking that baby with them. So, we try to, you know, say, "You need to go back to that center and play in that center. When you're through with it you pick it up and go to another center." Whenever you have 18 of them running around you kind of make allowances every once and awhile, but there were certain things that they would just leave there. Like the crayons and the paper and stuff like that. They would just sit down and do that. Usually the puzzles stayed in one area. You didn't have much trouble with them kind of wandering. It was more the cars, more of the . . . and if they were playing cars with the blocks, making a highway out of it, well, the highway kind of got extended out into the other areas, you know, and stuff like that.

Q: And so is that okay? Or was that a rule?

A: As far as I was concerned, that was okay. Because to them that is still they're playing. There wasn't a set bound. You know, you cannot cross this line with this stuff. Because, I mean, part of their playing is exploring.

Q: Right. Okay. Uh, what place do you think that play has in schools—indoors and outdoors? Not just in your classroom, but kind of . . do you think that all children need time to play during the day?

A: Yes, I do. I think even 6th graders. I think even your 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th. I think they need some type of play. It may be play on the computer. It may be play in role playing, drama. You know, like if you have a character in history, you have a story in history. If it's acting it out, that's a type of play. It gets them out. It exposes what they are and that's what your play is. It doesn't have to be down on the floor playing with blocks and cars. I know whenever I was at Norman I just taught half a day so I would sub a lot of times there in the same school and there was a particular 5th grade class that I would go into and I'd take the 5th graders into my pre-K classroom. I didn't take all of them. There were some that would go to music and some that would go here and some that would go there and I took the remaining ones. We'd go up there and we'd play in the pre-K classroom and they loved it. I had pictures of things that they built with blocks and I was fascinated with it back then and whenever I got it, I just got them developed not too long ago. But it was just phenomenal, the buildings that they built with the blocks and the fun that they had playing in the sand. Well, that's just as much part of their development and as it is with little kids. It's just . . .

Q: So you think that type of equipment should be in all classrooms?

A: I think it ought to be available to them. Not necessarily in the classroom. You know, I mean, you can't have blocks and playdoh just for a center in your classroom. Oh, I don't know, I say that you can't. If you have the room, I think it would be fantastic. Because whether it's Legos . . I mean, can you imagine them with just a whole big set of Legos. And, of course, the thing with Legos, they build it and then they don't want it torn up, that one particular thing, because they want to do it next time period. They want to build more on it or they want to change it a little bit and that's theirs so that kind of gets complicated, but, yeah. And I don't think it would even be bad for older kids. But the older kids have been trained to think that that is little kids stuff.

Q: But how can that be because just like you said . . .

A: They open up easy.

Q: Yeah, they do.

A: They do and I think that's just part of their development. And I think, like I said, whether you can do it like with their building stages. You can build props. Because you are going to have some people that volunteer. Hey, yeah, you know, I'll build that prop. Of course, they wouldn't want to call it prop, but they could build a stage or whatever.

Q: Right.

A: Or you could even have people that would sew in older classes, you know. Yeah, just hand . . . you know, some of them sew, some don't. I even think it's neat, I've often kind of thought it would be neat to do embroidery, have an embroidery class, you know. Just say 30 minutes or so like that, you know. Even the boys, not maybe that type of embroidery, but something like they would be interested in. Because that just helps their fine motor skills. I'm not talking about ... well, as far as like number painting or something like that, I think that's kind of neat for little kids. Because I did it with my kids and I still have some of their pictures that they did when they were five. And then whenever they got ten, we did another number painting and, you know, I just had it to compare back to and stuff like that. There's all kinds of play, you know, it's really according to . . . Some people say that's play and some people say that's not play. It depends on your definition.

Q: I know last time you said if they enjoy it. That's what you would consider play, as long as they are enjoying it. I remember something that you said. You said they get to play about 20 or 30 minutes, is that about right, in each center?

A: Okay. Are you talking about this last year?

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Q: Yes.

A: They got to play about 30 to 40 minutes as far as play in their activity time. Now, if they came down to their sit down times, that's were they would stay about 20 minutes.

Q: Okay. And then the year before when you were in a school, how long was play time?

A: About 45 minutes also. It just seemed like . . . I don't know why. Well, we tried to go outside more. I think there was a little bit bigger area and for one thing my assistant went out with me. Last year my assistant didn't go out with me. She always managed to find some reason to go over to the building about the time I took them out and to me, in your four-year-old classroom, you have to have your assistant out there. I don't care, you know, how big the area is or whatever, that's what she's there for.

Q: Did you go outside every day?

A: No, not last year. Now the year before we did. We tried to go out everyday.

Q: And this year, why didn't you go out every day?

A: We just seemed to always be busy. Well, of course, with that extra 20 to 30 minutes of sitting down and doing something and then letting them have their 30 to 45 minutes to play, it just took time. And then also it took a little bit longer on the circle time. We did a little bit more this year in the circle time than what I did the time before. So, I was together. You know, I had my head a little bit more together.

Q: Talk to me about that: together. Because that first year I know, that first year is rough. I mean. So how did you get things together? Let me change that. What were some of the biggest struggles that you had? Especially when it came to implementing some of that play that you were trying to implement, that you had seen at other places, what were some of the struggles?

A: During my first year?

Q: Uh, hum.

A: Well, I think not really knowing what to do. The uncertainty and not knowing whether you're doing it right or whether you're doing everything you're supposed to be doing. And, too, it was a new program in the school. In that particular school they hadn't had pre-K in there before. And I think your entry year is so scary anyway. You're under so much stress. Am I doing everything I'm supposed to be doing? Whenever the principal says she's going to come visit

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your classroom, you know, what all is she expecting? And it is just . . . and then of course you have your parents to expect certain things.

Q: What were some of your, maybe not struggles, but your experiences this year?

A: I don't know that I really felt like I had any. I mean, I'm not saying that I'm that confident in it, you know, I mean, I'm sure because I'm certainly learning. I'm learning all the time about things but as far as the pressure was off of me about the entry year and like I said, I like the structure. I think that kind of helped me more to have things together in my own head. The structure. And I had a different perspective on it. Like I said, whenever I was at the other school, I kind of felt like I was just their babysitter because I really wasn't into the program. You know, I had gone in for elementary and all of a sudden here I'm . . . I'd done, you know, early childhood, yes, but I was expecting to be in an elementary class and then here the only class I could get was pre-K and it just kind of holds over, you know. Well, okay, here I am baby sitting. And I looked at them kind of like they were babies, you know. Well, then last year, like I said, at the end of the year I had seen where they had grown so much and the possibilities of the growing. So last year it was like, okay, now this is what I expect. I expect them to be this, this and this by the end of the year. In order to do that, you know, you had to see what you expected at the end of year. Does that make sense?

Q: Yeah, it does. Now, if you had not gone into that classroom in October and it was already organized the way it was, how would you have organized it? Would you have gone back to the way that you had done at a school or would you have gone back to . . . I mean did you know that you wanted to make a change and you didn't know how?

A: Yeah. I think I knew that something needed to be a little bit different. And I'm not saying that I wouldn't do like I did at a school again because I think that that is kind of, you need to do that free play and stuff, you know, without the real structure. But I like the structure too so I might incorporate less structure. More play, less structure, but, you know, still have some structure here. Does that make sense?

Q: Well, you try to just find out, it seems like a balancing act and you're still a beginning teacher. That's why I'm studying beginning teachers because it is interesting to me, but also it's kind of, you know, even I taught for six years and I never felt like I was totally there. I don't know if you can ever be there in teaching but you always are continuing to try things out.

A: Right. Sure. And that's kind of the reason why I really, the possibility of working at a school and under someone who was so knowledgeable excited me. You know, I mean, because I had never gotten to work with anyone other than just myself. It was always just me. I was the only pre-K teacher. There were no other pre-K teachers. There were no other teachers who really talked to me, you

know. The kindergarten people were over there, the first grade was there and here I'm the only one here.

Q: And you are out in like . . .

A: An Annex, yeah. So I really didn't have any communication with teachers and it was that way at a school also because all the kindergarten teachers were at the other end of the building because they had just placed us into a room that we could have. Now they had like a support type group, you know. They would have their kindergarten meetings every once and a while over at a school. But it was such a new program that they really didn't know what they were doing. You know, they were just kind of there bouncing ideas off and, ah, at schools, they've been there for about 14 or 15 years.

Q: So are you joined into the Kindergarten meetings or did pre-K meet on their own?

A: The school had their pre-K meetings on their own. And a schools definitely had some of their own, their pre-K meetings of their own. And there was, I mean, all the pre-K people came. So we are talking about a large group of people. But, I mean, I wanted someone like every day to be able to talk to, you know. And I think that's kind of where a lot of people don't like the centers, like the pre-K centers, the 1st through 3rd grade centers, you know, da-da-da-da-da. But I can also see where it's good because the teachers have teams they can bounce those ideas off. They can say, "What do you think about this idea? Have you tried this?" You know, and have some support there whereas, you're just one teacher. And that's what got me too in these smaller schools. There are a lot of times there is just one teacher for each classroom and I guess that's where you just do your own thing.

Q: Yeah. But it's hard in the beginning.

A: It is.

Q: I was the only Kindergarten teacher, the only first grade teacher and I longed to talk to someone.

A: Yeah.

Q: Am I doing this right?

A: Yeah, just for the reassurance.

Q: Okay. What is your role in your student's play? I think you kind of talked about you were usually doing some type of activity or instruction?

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A: I would try to go around, like I would just join in. I would go around and just kind of look at them and say, "Oh, wow, what pretty colors you have," you know, what bright colors, you know. You try to encourage them to do more of what they were doing. A lot of times I would have a card game. Like I would show them Crazy 8, except it's called Crazy Ape, you know. And we even did another card game. Of course, there was Old Maid and stuff like that and I would try to incorporate that. And I don't know that that really is a lot of different play but they loved it. They loved playing cards. They loved the idea of being big enough to play cards because they probably saw their parents playing cards. Or I'd walk around and ask them like what they were making and a lot of times I don't have any idea what they're making. A lot of times I don't have any idea what they're coloring, you know, but let them use their imagination. And I've also found that like it seems like the Hispanics don't have as vivid imaginations. They're more down to reality. Now that may be the area that I was in. With kids in general now everything is so real, they don't have any imagination. Fairytales or something like that has no meaning to them.

Q: A lot of their toys do not allow for creativity.

A: That's right.

Q: What do you think influenced your beliefs about play?

A: You mean as far as my schooling or classrooms or . . .

Q: I mean you've talked a lot about what you believe about play. What has influenced those beliefs? Was it your schooling? Was it your experiences as a child? Was it all of that put together or what is it influenced you?

A: You know, I think that a lot of it. . . First of all it would be my schooling.

Q: As in schooling when you were a child or ?

A: No. The college. A lot of that would have to do with that. But then I can see where my children would play and so I would bring that in. And not necessarily my childhood. That's doesn't have anything to do with it but the way that I told my daughter I wish I had gone to school before I had kids because I would have raised you so much differently. There would have been so much more encouragement words and so much more than to just expect, instead of just expectations, there would have been the encouragement behind it that I don't really feel like I gave you. You know, you always feel short of anything. You know, you feel like you're not quite doing as much as you should be. But and then she says, "But Mom, if you'd gone to school back before you had us, you wouldn't have had the same training that you do now."

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Q: Yeah, it was totally different. So I can look back and see where I wished I had incorporated more play with them and I think they would have developed and emerged a lot more. I just feel like they would have. Because I can see the kids now emerging whenever they're playing or they're playing with each other, the interaction that they need because a lot of them don't see that because maybe they've been at home all their lives and they didn't get to go to daycare, they didn't get to, you know, they visited with cousins or their next door neighbor and that was it. So now they're coming together as a large group and they're having to incorporate their thinking and a lot of time that's where I like the . . . like they have to hold hands and we have a big ball and they would have to use just their feet to keep it in the circle, and so they would, but they couldn't use their hands so they were holding onto them so it was a team, it was a team effort to keep that ball moving and you could see the aggressive ones and you could see the ones who were just standing there just if it came near them, if it came to them, they would kick at it but otherwise they didn't. And you could see their personalities, you know, and that's where you offer the encouragement, you know. "Kick that ball! Let's go Keith!" and Keith goes . . . So the play, I think I got off my subject.

Q: What we're talking about, it almost sounds like you're talking about just watching them has made it even . . .

A: Oh yeah.

Q: But I'll say your education. Did you have any, was there a certain class, did you have any classes on play or was it just kind of incorporated into?

A: It was incorporated probably in Dr. Jones class, in the Child Development Center. That's probably the most influential as far as play.

Q: But you didn't have a play class?

A: No, no.

Q: Okay.

A: Of course, your psychology classes and everything else all go together.

Q: Yes, that's where they talk about development.

A: Development, right.

Q: What constraints do you believe you have in implementing play in your classroom? That you've had in the last two years, what fits into the constraints on play?

A: Constraints?

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, in a school it was because it was an open classroom. And it wasn't even totally open, it just had a big entry way and we had a wall that kind of blocked us off which was different from the rest of the classroom, but that was a constraint because you felt like, I felt like I had to really keep them quiet because we were next to a third grade class, you know. And so I always felt that all year long. That's one of the reasons I loved it being out in the annex. I really did like it being out in the annex because if they were loud, they were loud, you know. We tried to keep, you know, use your inside voices, you know, use quiet tones, stuff like that but they're still going to be loud. Whether it's the blocks falling on the floor from a tower they've built or whatever it is.

Q: What do you think loud represents?

A: Oh, I think children are going to use their voices for development. I mean, I've seen that through my grandson and I saw it with other kids too. But he went into a room and it kind of echoes and so he went, "Ehhh!" Well, a lot of people think that's loud. Or you go into a restaurant and he's sitting here laughing and talking and blah, blah, blah. Not talking words but noises and stuff like that and other people kind of lot at him like he needs to get quiet, he's in a restaurant, he needs to be quiet. Well, as long as their happy sounds, I don't always feel like it . . . You know, if he was sitting there screaming or something like that, then that's loud.

Q: Well when I've asked the same questions from the other teachers, this noise issue keeps coming up and so I guess having a quiet classroom is valued in schools, I guess, is what you feel like you have to be quiet because . . .

A: Well, now, I think there's a difference. That's what I mean, I think there's a difference in quiet and sitting down and not saying hardly anything. I think they have to learn the gauges. You know, like I said, at Norman, we had to be quieter. We had to sit on them more to be . . . It's not that they didn't talk, but it was always, "Use your quiet voices," you know. We had to be careful because we didn't want to disturb the other class. But to not talk at all, you know, now there are a lot of principals that that's what they look for in their classrooms. They don't, it's the old school. The principals are still, they new principals are still coming out and going into the classes to where the hands on and the noise is not a factor. But there are still a lot of your principals out there that really that's what they look for. They feel like that's part of an organized classroom.

Q: What constraints did you have this year on play?

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A: Well, of course safety is always the biggest thing. You know, that's a big thing. They have to be safe in whatever they do. Constraints. Are we talking about me having constraints or the children having constraints?

Q: You. What constraints on planning for play and implementing play? What constraints did you feel like you had this year?

A: Well, for one thing your area, you know, unless you have a large area in your classroom, that is a constraint. And then I felt like I was really constrained when it was a variety of things. And I know that children, it's repetitious for them. You know, you have to be repetitive all the time for them. But I didn't feel like I had the options for them. I mean it was always, "Well, go read a book if you're . . ." And that kind of bothered me. If I didn't have something for them to do, well, go read a book. Well, to me they would get bored with that. But yet they never seemed to. They always enjoyed just going and just getting books of their choice. When I sub taught at the first of the year, it was a first grade class, and I subbed, the teacher was pregnant so she would go to the doctor and I would sub in there just to get used to the class to start off with, and one time I let them read books from this bookshelf that she had and when she came back when we met again she goes, "I don't let them read my books from my bookshelf." And I go, "Oh, sorry." And she goes, "They don't know how to treat the books yet, they don't know how to handle them." This is first grade. And I said, "Oh." And to me the only way they learn how to handle books is to handle them. I mean, that's the reason I liked the reading center that we did because these pages were, sure they're going to tear up. But they learn how to turn those pages, they learn how follow the words reading back and forth. They learn, I mean, left to right, and they start recognizing words. So, to me it's a constraint whenever you have teachers that don't really expect . . .

Q: The constraint would be the expectations.

A: Yeah. It's like they limited them.

Q: Yeah. The limits we put on children.

A: To me that's kind of a constraint.

Q: Okay. Is there something that has puzzled you about play? That you would just like to read more or watch children more? Is there just something that kind of makes you think, "Hum, why does this happen?" Or is there something that puzzles you about play?

A: I'm sure there is but I can't really think of anything right now.

Q: You'll think of it as soon as I turn it off.

A: Yeah, wait, wait, turn it back on.

Q: Well, we can come back to that later. What about. Is there an event that sticks out in your mind about play? A significant even in your last two years of teaching that involved play that really sticks out to you?

A: Give me an example of what you're talking about.

Q: Like something that you go, "Ah ha." Or an ah ha moment or something that kind of makes everything you learned in college kind of start making sense. Is there something that really sticks out?

A: You'll have to realize my brain has been dead for about two months now.

Q: You've had a lot of workshops in the last couple of weeks.

A: Yeah. I've had a lot of workshops. Let's see, ah.

Q: Well, we can leave that one too. Maybe you can just think about that. If there's a
       . . .

A: I may have you just jot these down and I'll call you back with the answers. Would that be okay.

Q: Yeah, those two. If there is something that puzzled you about play. Yeah those two take some time that you can't just think of like that. You have to reflect on it.

A: Right.

Q: All right. I'll write those two down and we can get back together on those. Those are the lost two anyway.

CARA

Interview 3
September 26, 2001

Q: We talked briefly about any constraints or pressure that you may have had as a
      teacher implementing play.

A: When I was in a school, parents wanted the children to have homework and bring
      home papers. There was parental pressure. Loudness, and how it looks to others
      was another problem. Also, I did not have a good experience with my mentor
      teacher. She would leave me alone in the room. It was difficult being taught one
      way and others expecting you to teach another way. I think it looked
      disorganized and maybe it was a little. I think there was pressure for what I was
      teaching to look like it had some structure to it.

      Last year, I did not have any problem, early childhood had been in that building
      for 14 years and the administration seemed to understand early childhood.

      However, one time, well on Fridays was free play and one time the principal came
      in that day and later told me he wanted more structure. I explained that on
      Fridays they had free choice centers and he understood.

Q: Were you prepared to plan a play based curriculum?

A: Oh know, I thought I would teach an older grade and then I get Pre-K.
      I was not planning on pre-k I thought, how do you do this?

Q: Is that when you went in and did exactly what was going on before you got there?

A: Yes, I just followed what they were used to.

      I really want to go back down and teach pre-k. I do not like giving bad grades.

Q: How are you using play now?

A: I am not. We were told no fluff, only total instruction.
      I try to make it exciting. For example, if they brought money for the school store,
      I have them count it out and tell what they could buy. We do edu cube, money
      bingo and tiles activities like those.

Q: Do they get recess?

A: Well, the principal said we could sometimes for socialization but not for just play. "no fluff" But I can not take the group that I have out. They do not listen. It takes me all morning to get through our Saxon math lesson.   I will tell you one thing they[college course] did not prepare me for or could even come close to preparing me for is classroom management. They[students] do not listen. I really want to go back down. At my age, I do want a major challenge everyday. I enjoy challenges but I can handle those of the pre-k age.

Q: Well, you are in your second year is there going to be an opening next year.

A: I think the pre-k teacher now is considering leaving teaching.
       I think she is tenure, but the principal is not happy with her.

Q: I hope it works out for you. Before I forget, were the transcripts of the first two interviews accurate?

A: Yes.

PROTOCOL WRITING
Returned Between First and Second Interviews

What does it mean to Play?

The meaning of play is having fun, but to learn to interact, to develop, and to socialize while having fun.

To play is not just for pre-K or Kindergarten, it is for all ages and all types of people. That's the problem with so much in the world. People forget how to play. Older people feel that only little ones can play. They never learned that while playing they learn to share, get along, take turns, listen and talk to each other (socialize and to interact). I hope that is what I am teaching them to do- problem solve.

Children learn by play to develop possibly what they would like to do when they grow up or what they appear to be skilled doing. They can find out what they are good at doing and what they need to develop in the future.

What are some examples of play in your classroom?

1. Building blocks
2. Puppet Theater
3. Play-doh
4. Dram/Role playing
5. Housekeeping
6. Puzzles
7. Cars- using blocks for roads and ramps
8. Playing cards
9. Blank paper with pencils, crayons, pens and markers
10. All kinds of manipulatives
11. The Calendar Board – they love to play school. I hope that means they would like to be teachers someday.

These are some of the things we do for play. Of course, there are many more that

we do but these are the ones that are usually done daily, either in centers or at activity time.

What was one of your favorite play experiences as a child?

Well, you have to take in the generation gap of now and when I grew up, my favorite play was role playing, mommy and teacher. I guess I did both those things. I loved to play jacks and jump rope.

APPENDIX B

DIANE'S INTERVIEWS AND

WRITING PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW 1
May 25, 2001

Q: Tell me about your educational background.

A: Let's see. I went to, as far as just college, I went to a university in the Southwest my first year, general studies, just regular basics. I went to a different university in the southwest for four years and graduated with an early childhood bachelor degree.

Q: Okay. Did you do any type of teaching, like student teaching?

A: I did student teaching. I student taught in kindergarten and I student taught in second grade, two blocks. Let's see, I did some practicum at the university child study center. I did a practicum at a Christian Pre-School. I did pre-K there. I did a field experience in third grade. And, uh, let's see . . . Last year I taught pre-K and Kindergarten in this public school.

Q: Half-day?

A: Pre-K half day, kindergarten, first year, crazy.

Q: Are you full day now?

A: No, I'm just Kindergarten. I'm morning Kindergarten and afternoon Kindergarten this year. But last year I taught morning Kindergarten and then I switched in the same room and taught pre-K in the afternoon.

Q: Oh, that was difficult for your first year.

A: It was because everything was different. I had blue tubs for Kindergarten and red tubs for pre-K and I had to switch out during my lunch hour. It was crazy. Two different teachers to plan with, two different everything. I was doing double duty. It was good experience though.

Q: How was your student teaching experience?

A: It was good. I learned a lot. I felt like when I student taught is when I actually . . . . I learned a lot of theory and stuff in school and there was a lot of basic information I needed to know to get out there, but when I actually got there with

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[1] All names of individuals, schools, universities and any other educational institution identified during the interviews have been changed for purposes of protecting identities.

the kids in a real life experience, I felt like that's when I really learned the most about everything. It was like, I wish I could have done this before and then go back, was able to, you know, understand it all. You know how it all kind of came together then and I was like going back through my books going, okay, now what was that again and you know, how did all that come together? So, student teaching was a good experience. In the beginning I student taught in Kindergarten first and I think back. I was doing the silliest things. I mean, you know, just, you have to learn. I learned, I wasn't sure how to talk to the kids. Once you get into situations where, you know, they are solving conflicts or doing anything. I remember looking back and thinking I wasn't real good with that. I mean, I don't know how to explain what I'm trying to say. I guess I just, ah, little situations. I guess now you have what they call "with-it-ness." I mean I have eyes in the back of my head. I can see what's going on. Then I was just like, you know, nervous, didn't know what was going on. Somebody would get in an argument or something and I kind of knew from school, but then I wasn't sure, you know, what to do. And then with the actual teaching part we did some, we were writing on envelopes, and I brought in envelopes like this small. I mean for Kindergarten I needed envelopes like this big. You know, little things like that. But when I got to second grade, my second block, I knew more about what was going on. But it was a good experience.

Q: Why did you become an early childhood teacher?

A: Why? Ah, why did I choose that?

Q: Yeah, why did you choose teaching?

A: Teaching. Well, I chose teaching because I've always liked school. My third grade teacher was my inspiration. She was awesome. She made learning so much fun. In fact, when I student taught, I student taught across the hall from her in kindergarten at an Elementary. So, ah, she just made it so much fun and I just, ever since then I just wanted to be a teacher. I just want to help kids and just, you know, there are so many things. I feel it is so typical what I say. Everyone seems to say the same thing. Help kids, make a difference, all those things. I do want to do that. But I just feel like this is just kind of my calling and where I need to be.

Q: Do you have any other types of experience with children besides the student teaching? Was that your first experience with children?

A: Oh, ah, kind of it was. Well, actually between field experiences I had to do during some of my foundations in certain classes, basically that was my first encounter in a classroom since I've been in school.

Q: What about out of the classroom like in a camp? Did you do a lot of babysitting?

A: I did a little bit of babysitting when I was younger, but not really. That was my first. I got it all then.

Q: What do you remember about playing when you were a child, about play? Is there something that really sticks out?

A: Yeah, I remember, I was thinking about this the other day when my kids were playing because I listened to their conversations and I remember that I loved to pretend. I loved to play in the dollhouse and I loved playing with my dolls and I would cut their hair and all these things. My Mom would cut hair so I would always imitate her. I would talk to myself a lot. It sounds kind of silly, but I just talked to myself and would pretend I was talking to somebody else. Not really have an imaginary friend, but I just acted out things that I had seen or that I fantasized about. Playing with other kids or, you know, playing in a kitchen or you know, pretending I was the Mom or whatever. Kind of the same things the kids do here. I don't know. I loved what typical girls do. I didn't like blocks. I didn't like puzzles very much, but I liked to be in the writing area. I loved to just be at home coloring. I loved to color and write things and just really imitate life.

Q: Did you have any play experiences in your school when you went to school?

A: No. See, I don't remember playing in school. That's the thing. Everything I think about was at home, you know. But no, not at school at all. Never.

Q: But you talked about that third grade teacher and how she made learning fun.

A: Well, I think it's because of the activities we did. I think the one that sticks out in my mind is we were a VIP every week. Very important person. And she would lay us out on a table and she would trace our bodies and then we would fill it all in and so our whole silhouette would be on the bulletin board for a whole week with our features and everything and everyone would write about us. And it just made you feel special. We kind of do that now with star of the day. It just made us feel special. They told us why they liked us and we got to tell them what our favorite color was and all those little things and we just got to be, you know, important for a week. The focus was on you for the whole week and that was so cool. I just remember she was very personable and I felt like she really truly . . . I guess it was more her than it was the actually playing. It was more that I felt like she actually cared about us and she put extra time into what she did. She was just so passionate. And even now she still is. I see her as an adult and as colleagues together. She is just a passionate person. I don't know. She just loved us. We didn't play a whole lot. We got to be in groups a lot and do group activities. So that helped. They are great, you know. I remember we always sat in groups, so we did a lot of interaction that way. And that made us more of a community.

Q: I don't think I had any of those types of experiences in third grade.

A: Yeah. The rows.

Q: We were separated. So, what do you think it means to play?

A: Uh. No boundaries as far as their level of thinking and fantasizing and imitations and all that. Ah, playing, just carrying out your own—I don't know how to explain it in layman's terms. But, like for my kids, playing is just, they just go to the blocks and they can make and do whatever they want. They can create whatever, you know, there are no limitations as far as playing there. When they go to the writing area they can—I don't know how to explain what I'm trying to say. I'm trying to sum it up. I guess playing for me is just free exploration, no boundaries on where they can go with it, working out problem situations through their play as far as imitating things, imitating life, situations they have with their peers, whatever, through blocks, or through writing or through coloring or through manipulatives and things like that, or just with their own friends or whatever.

Q: If you were going to describe play to someone and what are the features of play, like you said no boundaries. If someone was going to say, well we play in the classroom but to you maybe that's not play, what do you think is play?

A: Okay, yeah, I see what you mean. Because parents come up to me and go, or I even told them in the beginning of the year at orientation, you know, you won't get a ton of papers home every day. And you will hear that we were playing because playing is, I usually tell them, playing is first of all a developmentally appropriate way for children to learn. When the boys are in the blocks or the girls, or whoever, and they are what I call playing, I would describe it was they are learning how if you get too high with the blocks, they are going to fall if you put too much weight up there. I describe that to my parents as, you know, playing with a puzzle is they are learning spatial awareness. How does this fit? They are learning geometric shapes and all those things go together. That's kind of how I explain it. I kind of give them a specific example of it. I really don't know how to sum it all up. It's all different, but it's their way of learning because children don't all learn the same way. You can't just go up to a Kindergartner and teach them geometry. Of course, they don't need to know that anyway, but in some terms in a more generic way of saying things. They just play to learn those things. Like my boys the other day, they made towers and they made castles and they do all these things and that's building blocks for first grade when they learn how to do whatever in second grade. You know, they learn how to do different things. I don't know. I feel like I'm mumbling.

Q: You say you explained it to your parents?

A: Yeah. To parents, other teachers, I talk to my kids about it. I'm just like you know, because at the very end of the day we usually try to talk about what did we do at school today. You may not have a lot of papers to take home, but try not to

go home and tell your parents, "I didn't do anything, I just played." When you went to the blocks Bryan, what did you do there? What did you make there? You know, what did you learn from that? How did you learn when this block didn't fit here, what did you do to change that? You know and he's going to be my little engineer. I don't know what they're called, but he made this whole thing and they all turn around.

Q: The gears?

A: The gears, that's what they are. You know.

Q: Do you find yourself having to defend it?

A: Defend it? Ah, you know what, I really haven't. I've gotten pretty lucky. So far, I haven't. I'm not saying that. . . I feel like I learned last year and this year at orientation hopefully I think everyone most of the time they listened to me as far as what I thought about play and how we kind of do things around here. So, as far as that subject goes, I haven't had anybody object to it. I have a lot of volunteers that come in and love it too. I have gotten pretty lucky. So I thank God for that.

Q: You used the example of blocks for play and you said imitation. Is there any other feature? If you were saying, well, that's not play, what would you not consider play?

A: Maybe more directed instruction. More direct. A lesson like when I teach like their journals or something. When they write. Okay, like we brainstorm words for the word wall. They were working on the letter R. We brainstorm words for the word wall, we chose a word and in our journal we have a certain format that we use. We write the letter at the top, we draw a picture, we write a word. Well that's a direct instruction where they go back and. I mean I don't consider that playing. You know, that's more of a lesson. I feel like they need a balance of that. They need to know how. To get on another subject, I feel like they need to play, it's an appropriate thing for them to do obviously at this age to do what we consider play. But I also balance it out with a little direct instruction also because in the real world, as I didn't know, but I know now, that especially when they go to first grade, they're going to have to sit there a little longer. The teachers are going to expect them to do a little bit more at their desk and everything, so I try to get them, kind of give them a balance so they don't go to first grade just wanting to play and just be free, you know, and the teachers are trying to get them, you know. Which first grade I think, too, they need to have play there, which they do here, but I just mean that I try at least toward the end of the year to kind of balance that out. The direct instruction I do not consider play.

Q: Okay and that was a good example you gave.

INTERVIEW 2
August 7, 2001

Q: Okay. Last time when I turned the tape recorders off you said, we were talking about play, that you question yourself, "Are they learning anything?"

A: Yeah.

Q: So, tell me a little bit more about what you meant by that?

A: Well, because it's not, you don't have the documentation as far as like, you know, if you give an assignment, like to write their letters or to do something like that you have documentation of what they've learned. Can they do it, can they not? When they play, you don't know, you don't have like a, I don't know how to explain it. You just don't know because you're not there the whole, I mean, you try to facilitate their play and everything, but you're not there the whole time. You're working with another child or whatever in the real world and you're not sure what they're learning or what's coming out of it. Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. Ah, I don't know.

Q: So is there anything that you do to ease that? What do you do to ease that uneasiness about "Are they learning anything?"

A: With questioning techniques, you know. Questioning them, you know, like, ah, maybe if it's in the block center and they're making, I don't know, they're trying really hard to, you know, make a castle or something like that. I might be they're learning spatial awareness and balancing and, you know, all those things. And when they finally complete it or they're working hard and they're figuring out, okay, this can't go here, it's going to make it all fall or if this goes here it will hold it up, and I guess once they complete that task that shows me that they're learning, you know, just kind of the way that they go about putting their structure together kind of shows me.

Q: Yeah. So and last time I think you said that you'll have them write their letters. You'll say, okay, write this. So, is that another way that you use to kind of deal with that uneasiness about "Are they learning anything?"

A: Yeah, I guess so. Sure. I mean, you know, you always want, you know, I mean, I don't know, I just think it's also good to have a balance of both things. I mean, you know, you need to, I feel like also, you know, it is good for them to practice, you know, I don't know, um . . . I think for me it's just another way to see that

they are learning. There should different ways: play and, you know, the written, I don't know.

Q: Documentation?

A: Yeah. So you can see it, you know.

Q: Okay. You gave some examples last time about how you incorporate play and I wanted to know a little bit more about your role.

A: My role with play?

Q: Uh, huh, .

A: Well, I believe, I think my role is to, like I said before, facilitate it. You know, if they're in there, I don't know, playing beauty shop, I can say, you know, "Well, did you just wash your hair? Well, then what do you need to do now? Do you just start taking the curling iron to it? I mean, is their hair dry or what?" You know, little things like that. Just kind of helping them think out those sequences in real life. And, ah, I can just ask probing questions that, you know, will help them think about real life and what's going on with play and how they're carrying it out. So my role, I think, is to ask questions. Just kind of, you know, and just interacting with them, you know, pretending, you know, that I'm the kid and they're the mom and let them kind of, you know, play that way.

Q: Do you find that when you pretend like that, do you find their play changes when you start . . .

A: I think it depends on how comfortable they are with me. I think the more you build, and this kind of stems from the beginning of the year, I mean, you know, the more comfortable they are with you, the more of a community you've built, the more comfortable they're going to be and they're just going to be kind of, they'll play normally. But sometimes, of course, it may change a little bit. Sometimes some children get a little apprehensive or they don't . . . Like, "Oh, the teacher's in here."

Q: The play changes.

A: Yeah. The play does change. I guess you could say that's pretty simple. It does sometimes. You know, I hate to say it, but sometimes the little girls will just be like, " Oh, I don't know." But if I get in there with some little boys or whatever, they'll kind of be like, "Oh, I don't know if I want to be mom," you know. "I'll let you be Ms. Datson," or whatever, "and then I'll be the dad," or whatever, you know, they do. It does change.

Q: Okay. What about another area like blocks or you talked a lot about the gears or something. So what when you're playing with them that way do you see change.

A: I sometimes see that they want to, I guess maybe sometimes they just, sometimes they'll not want to, I guess you could say play wrong or do it wrong or whatever, and so they're trying to kind of somewhat impress you or, "Look," you know. And that's great. And it's not that what they're doing is changing so much but I think sometimes they may get a little apprehensive about what they're doing. But they shouldn't if they're comfortable enough with you. If they know the teacher is going to accept whatever they produce it's fine. But with the gears sometimes it kind of helps them in a way because, you know, I can facilitate like a higher learning, you know, "What else can we make out of this? If you put this here, could you build up on top of that?" You know, it kind of helps them.

Q: Do you consider yourself playful?

A: Yeah.

Q: Describe a little bit about that: playfulness. What do you do to be playful?

A: Well, just come down to their level and just, you know, talk with them. Just fantasize with them. Just get into the role that they're in and just dramatically play with them. Just pretend.

Q: I remember when a principal would come in that he would have to look all over the floor for me because I was usually down there with them and so they would have to look all over. "There she is over there." And sometimes I was a little apprehensive because I felt like, "Is this professional?"

A: Right.

Q: You know, I considered myself pretty playful. So is there anything else you do that you think would be considered playful?

A: Well, I guess just in general, you know, laughing at them, just having fun. Kind of like I said, just coming down to their level, especially when they are like in the blocks or in their dramatic play or playing with some of the [materials]. Find out what they're talking about, get in on the conversation, you know, and just laugh with them, you know. Have a good time.

Q: Okay. Let's see, you talked a little bit about how you encouraged their play by questioning them or saying, "What would happen if you tried it like this?" What do you think has influenced all your beliefs about play?

A: Well, the influences that . . . I guess the major influence is, I hope this is the way you want me to go with this, but are the children. The children when I see that

they are learning, when their language is developing more because of interacting more with each other and their language is developing, their life skills are developing, they're working out problems through, you know, acting out things, they're learning spatial awareness through blocks, I think that they are the ones that really influence how I perceive play. Because if they're not, if none of that is coming out of it, then it's not worth it to me.

Q: So the children have influenced your beliefs?

A: Yes, the children have. Because, you know, you come into, you get out of college and you think we're just going to "play" and do all these hands on things and everything and you get in there and you want to but then there's other side influences that make you think. Like principals and other teachers and people that believe other things that make you question yourself. But then when you see your children playing and learning, it's hard to get everyone else to see. "Look, look, look!" They are learning and it's good for them.   So the children really influence me.

Q: Okay. When you said when you come out of college you say we're going to just play, do you think when you came out did you really have, because now you have two years under your belt, do you feel like to have a grasp of what they actually meant?

A: Yeah. Well, slightly. Not as much as I learned during two years of teaching. I think you learn the most then, when you're with the kids all day long. Yes, I learned the most when I taught my last two years. When I got out of college I had some sort of an idea but not as much as . . .

Q: So do you think you were ready to defend play when you got out or totally explain it?

A: Yeah. I think somewhat, maybe 70% of the way. I think I can explain more now that I've had more experience with it. But before it was just observing or just a few practicum. But once you are immersed in it all day long every day, you know, and that's what you do, then you can defend it more.

Q: I want to go back to that the children have influenced you but you said there are other people who don't believe and so you feel like you always have to say, "See, look." So I guess you're kind of having to . . .

A: Well, honestly not as much here at this school. I mean, there's a few here and there. But I'm really not having to defend it too much. But I think in order to stay, in order for the overall appearance of, "Are you working? Are these children learning?" for the parents, for the administration and things like that, somewhat you have to do a balance between play and direct instructions. Because I just feel like children, I still think they need a balance because when they do get

to first grade or when they do get somewhere else and things kind of change, I think they still need to be prepared for that also. I think there should be lots of time for play and then extra time for other activities.

Q: So you think when they get to first grade does it change?

A: Well, I don't know that it changes a whole lot here at this school but I know that they are here all day and there is more direct instruction. They do still have centers so they are used to that. Honestly, our first grade teachers here at this school really aren't just pencil, paper, drill, skill. This is a very early childhood school somewhat. But there is a balance there, too. So I feel like I have to . . .

Q: How would you handle it, especially now that you're getting ready to change grades? You know, is play going to have the same . . .

A: That is what I'm struggling with big time. I am, I have my desks in groups, I have shelves full of games and everything, but I don't know. I just talked to the pre-K teacher that I'm good friends with and we've just been talking about, you know, do I still have centers? What do I do? I mean, I feel like, I don't know. I think that they still need play. I'm not sure what they're going to come in knowing. I don't know their maturity level. I haven't been with second graders in two years so I don't know.

Q: Okay. Back to this, you know, with older children you say you don't know, you're uncomfortable. And some of it, you said it's been a couple of years since you've been with this age of child. But, what about some of your courses? Do you feel like they . . .

A: that my courses helped me? You mean did my courses help me to prepare for older early childhood?

Q: Yeah.

A: I don't think so, not at all, because, in fact, I wish that I had been early childhood elementary because, of course, I don't know much about the elementary department or whatever, as far as if they did prepare those elementary majors or not. But I know in early childhood it was so based on play, play, play, manipulative, hands on, all those things. But when you get in the real world, and especially in second grade, I mean they have to learn how. They're reading, they're doing handwriting from what I've heard, you know, they're doing all these things. They have to, I don't know, I just feel like early childhood only focused on pre-K and Kindergarten. It did not focus on first and second grade, from my experience. Maybe touched up a little bit on what are dipthongs and little things like that, you know, grammar things, but nothing like, what do you do when you have a seven year old? How do you, ah, adapt that to the early childhood philosophy? So, in so many words, not really.

Q: Well, I can understand. I went from Kindergarten or first grade to fourth. It was a challenge.

A: And I know that second graders I'm predicting, you know, like a lot of teachers say, "Just teach as if they don't know. Just start from the beginning. Do some play." I've heard, you know, just put some manipulatives out, teach that way and I plan on doing that. But like my question is should I put out centers? What should I put out? Will they have fun? Will they be bored? Will they think it's too babyish? You know, I don't know. So, it would have been nice to have had classes that really put us in situations like that or taken us to rooms with very early childhood, first, second or third grade class.

Q: Because you just were seeing it in, I think you said you went a field study and you were only seeing that kind of play in pre-K and Kindergarten?

A: Yeah. I was very much geared towards Kindergarten. In fact, you know, honestly I knew that my degree was pre-K through third but I kept wondering, you know, what about first and second grade because every class I took focused on Kindergarten and pre-school. And it was all, it just seemed like to me they made it, I really looked up to my teachers. They were very knowledgeable. I learned a lot, but I just didn't feel like I was prepared when I got out there and that wasn't fair. It's not fair to spend $20,000.00 and not know what to do.

Q: I think that you've said that it was play, play, play, so you know that play is important, but it's just how?

A: Exactly. It was how to facilitate it. How should your room look? How should you arrange your room? Because that's the trouble I'm having right now. I mean, I don't know. I mean I've got my desks in groups. I know I should do that. I've got a table there for games. I've got shelves, but what do I pull out? What do I have them do? You know, I would like to have gone to early childhood second grade rooms, first grade rooms. Ones that they think are developmentally appropriate for that age group and been able to watch someone teach in that kind of an environment, taken pictures of their room, interviewed the teacher, things like that that I think would have been very helpful. I think more time out in the field would have been much more helpful for me. I learned a lot reading my books and everything, I did. You learn a lot of theory and everything which I've used a lot, but definitely I think student teaching should be at the beginning because then you can apply it all to what you're learning in your books. I don't know how they could change that but more field experience I think would be really good.

Q: Okay. Ah, what constraints do you have on implementing play. And I know you said you haven't had a lot of constraints here but you could talk about parents, administration and other people. So anything else you want to add to that?

A: There haven't been really any other constraints. Like I said, I haven't had a lot of objections to play, but I mean sometimes there will be a few people that will say, you know, "Johnny never gets any homework." And I'm like, "He's five." There are plenty of years for that. But I'm just saying, you know, here and there. Basically how I deal with it, really I deal with it kind of in the beginning when I have orientation with all the parents. It's like, "This is how the class runs. This is what we do. Don't get excited if your child doesn't have homework every night," and all these things because if I send anything home, it's an activity that the children do with their parents to get parental-child involvement, if anything. You know, mainly things are done in class, hands on learning. And I just explain that really in the beginning so most of the time I don't have . . .

Q: Were you prepared? I think that orientation gets easier every year because you remember what exactly you need to cover, but how was that first year explaining that?

A: I didn't. I stood there next to the teacher that had been there two years before and just let her tell everybody all about their classes together because I had no idea. I didn't know what I was doing the whole year. I mean, it was just like crazy. But then after that first year, I picked up on what I needed to do for the next year. What do I need to remind these parents? You know, if it was snack or these kids aren't bringing their backpacks or something is going on that I focused on that for the next year. So I just basically let the other teacher tell them and when something came up, I sent a note home. Please remember to do this. Make sure that, you know, the best I could do.

Q: It's good to have those other teachers to help.

A: Definitely.

Q: What place do you think play has in school, indoor and outdoor?

A: Repeat that again, I'm sorry.

Q: What place do you think play has in schools?

A: Well, I think it should have a place, you know, in the classroom and outside. Like I said, I think there should be play in the classroom and play outside. Just like we do inside, outside can be just as, play can be facilitated just like it is inside, you know. Learning how to balance yourself on the bars, go around on them. Swinging is a big deal, especially for Kindergarteners. A lot of them don't know and you really take that for granted. Talking about moving your feet, you can still facilitate it out there. Running, getting exercise, going down the slide, all those things you can facilitate. There's lots of things you take for granted that you can do that they can't. So it's important both inside the classroom and outside.

Q: Do you play as an adult?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: In what way?

A: Oh, I don't know. I mean, let me think here. Well, we play, you know. In my opinion, going out to dinner and talking and, you know, walking around Bricktown, or doing something like that. To me, that's kind of play as far as like shopping, I don't know, to me that's play. Playing would be, you know, going to work out, you know.

Q: The things you chose to do.

A: The things I chose to do. I don't know. I mean, that's the only thing I can think of. Just playing in my creative memories with my pictures, you know. Playing in my house, decorating or, you know, whatever. Things like that.

Q: Can you imagine what it would be like not to have that opportunity to . . .?

A: No.

Q: Okay. Is there something you wonder about play? Something that's always puzzled you and you're thinking, 'Huh. Why does this happen?" or "That's really interesting."

A: I guess what's really puzzled me is how important it is. Because, like I was telling you before, I remember as a kid just in my mind all the time. I don't remember playing a whole lot at school, but even at home, just in my room or somewhere at home, just talking out and acting out those life situations, pretending I'm the mom or playing school. We always played school or always played secretary or something like that. It's amazing how important it is and how we all do it without even thinking.

Q: Yeah. I think it was last time you mentioned something about gender.

A: Um hum.

Q: That you kind of, the differences with the gender in play, the boys and the girls.

A: Yeah.

Q: Is there something about that that has puzzled you?

A: Well, yeah. What's really interesting to me is how many boys go to the blocks and how many girls go to dramatic play. But I think in my experience the last two

years, if children get more comfortable, they'll switch somewhat. I mean girls, especially the better friends they become. I mean, you know, I have a little girl and a little boy that just became great friends and they go to the blocks and just have a heyday. Now, that little girl would have never gone to the blocks at the beginning of the year. She was very girly and just, you know. But it's just amazing how, like I said, just generally, the boys just go to the blocks and the girls go to . . . and I don't know, I can see why somewhat, but I don't know, it's just interesting how gender does kind of play a role. And some of the boys think, "Oh, I'm not going over there to play dress up." But sometimes they do. So I don't know.

Q: Is there anything else that you've kind of wondered about in play? I guess you said the how--how to facilitate it more.

A: Well, yeah, okay, on those terms, yeah. I mean, how to facilitate it more, how to arrange your room to allow for more play. I don't know, things like that.

Q: Is there an event in teaching that has evolved in play that was really significant, that stands out, like, "Ah hah, they do learn," or "Ah, that's why it's important?" Is there one event that you can think of that really stands out to you?

A: Um. I don't know.

Q: I know that one's kind of hard to say off the cuff.

A: That one is hard. There are so many different situations. I can just think of all different, I don't know. I mean, I guess when, kind of repeating what I said, but when a few of these boys they always race to the block center to make the same bridge, the same, just trying to perfect that, and I guess, you know, when they finally did, that was just like, "Oh." I mean, you know, they have a task, you know, just like any other situation. They have a task, that's their task and they can complete it by completing their bridge, getting it to stay up, getting the cars to go over it.

Q: It took several attempts, huh?

A: Yeah, yeah. That was really an "ah, hah" situation for me.

Q: Okay, okay.

DIANE

Interview 3
October 1, 2001

Q: We discussed the constraints of play, you said you really did have many constraints however; you mentioned parents several times.

A: Yes.   They expected homework, grades and structure. They wanted their children to be reading.

Q: How did this effect you implementing play in the classroom.

A: I felt that I always had to explain what I was doing. Especially if I had a parent volunteer in the classroom.

Q: I remember you telling me you really tried to explain how you used play in the classroom during your orientation at the beginning of the year.

A: Yes.

Q: You always mentioned pressure from others. Who are the "others"?

A: I don't remember exactly what I was saying.

Q: You mentioned outside influences that make you question yourself.

A: Parents do.

Q: When I asked you about the meaning of play to you said " no boundaries do whatever they want"? Can you elaborate on that?

A: I meant no boundaries on their thinking, problem solving .

Q: Was play their free time.

A: Yes, well no, well I had center time where they may have a have to. They had free time and center time.

Q: You described your role in your student's play. You seem to have a playful spirit. What has influenced your spirit?

A: Well it is part of my personality, and my courses influenced my ideas of play.

Q: Now that you have gone up to second grade are you using play in your classroom?

A: To be honest with you, No. Maybe games a couple times a week. There is just not time.

Q: Do you mean educational type games or what?

A: Yes, phonics games or other educational type games.

A: I hate it, but I have to do their reading scores every 6 weeks. There is so much to do.

Q: Do you feel a sense of pressure?

A: Yes, because of the test, and what it would look like if people came into the class. The longer you are out[college] the more you conform to the other way.

Q: Were the transcripts from the first interviews accurate?

A: Yeah, from what I remember.

PROTOCOL WRITING
Returned After Second Interview

What does it mean to play?

Play means to act out ones understanding of life. Role-playing is a form of play children use most often. Examples of this is acting out making dinner, babies, beauty shop, cowboys and Indians. What children see in real life, they role-play in a playful setting using their imaginations and/or props. This enables them to solve problems by acting out their feeling & ideas of the situation.

What are some examples of play in your classroom?

Dramatic Play Center – beauty shop, etc.

Blocks – playing cars, ramps, trucks, buildings.

Manipulatives Area – patterns, shapes of items put together, building, etc.

Art – creative expression using scissors, glue, paper, etc.

What was one of your favorite play experiences as a child?

As a child, I do not remember "playing in school". I do remember playing at home with brothers and sisters. One of my favorite play experiences is going to the park an playing on the equipment & using dirt & mud to make mud pies & sand castles.

APPENDIX C

EVELYN'S INTERVIEWS AND

PROTOCOL WRITING

Interview 1
June 14, 2001

Q: Tell me, what did you teach last year?

A: Last year was pre-K part-time and then the year before that was T-1. I don't know if I'd ever do T-1 again.

Q: Okay. So you are in your second year teaching Kindergarten. So what's your educational background.

A: Like I said, Bachelor's Degree in early childhood, minor in psychology and a little bit of sign language.

Q: Really?

A: Yes. I worked in Tennessee as a hearing and hearing impaired pre-K. I had ten hearing and ten hearing impaired so my sign language came into play because I had children I had to sign to and children, of course, I was talking to. So, I was getting ready to get my Associates Degree right before I got married.

Q: Okay, so where did you graduate from?

A: A Northeastern State College. It's now a different name.

Q: A Northeastern college. Okay. And why did you want to become an early childhood teacher?

A: Basically, I guess growing up always babysitting and just working with kids in the neighborhood. Nothing else really got my interest. When I went to college I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and I just took a couple of classes and thought, "Hm, that's what I want to do." So really it just came from babysitting at an early age and working with my cousins and children in the neighborhood and that was really about it.

Q: Okay. What types of experiences had you had with children before you started teaching?

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[1] All names of individuals, schools, universities and any other educational institution identified during the interviews have been changed for purposes of protecting identities.

A:	Like I said, I guess babysitting and I would consider most of my Headstart experience was after college, so that was teaching. But really, just babysitting. Babysitting was all that I really had.

Q:	And then you had the sign language.

A:	That was after my Bachelor's Degree. I just decided having a hearing impaired cousin and no one in our family knew sign language which is incredible to me, as an adult. As a child growing up it didn't even dawn on me that no one could communicate with her really. Then when I started working in Headstart and I had a four-year-old that no one wanted in their classroom because no one knew sign language and she was just an off-the-wall child but she couldn't talk. And so I decided to do something with this little girl. And her mother, I told her mother, if your child comes in my class and you want me to work with her, you're going to go to school and you're going to learn sign language. I said I know a little bit, but it's not going to do me any good to work with her here and when she comes home you know nothing. So really that was where it started. I knew basics from working with and talking to my cousin growing up. But I told her, we are both going to go back and get some training so that your child can learn. Because she was a young mother and I don't think anybody was giving her really any guidance. And she had more than one child. So I told her, I said, "You're going to commit to this if I'm going to commit to this."

Q:	How long did you work in Headstart?

A:	Four years total. Two different programs: one closer to my home in Willingsborough and then one in Camden County. So it was two different programs. But it was all Headstart, so about four years.

Q:	Okay. What do you remember about playing when you were a child? What are some of your play memories as a child?

A:	Most of them I guess were with my brother. Trying to do everything my brother did. I had an older brother. Just trying to do everything that he was doing and if I could have turned myself into a boy and played football I probably would have.

Q:	Really?

A:	My parents said, "You can't play football but you can be a cheerleader." So I was a cheerleader. That was as close as I got to the field.

Q:	Isn't there a girl that is kicking now for a college team somewhere?

A:	I don't know. I've seen it in the movies, but I don't know if it is for real.

Q: I think I heard that on the news. I don't know. What type of play experiences did you have in your schooling? Did you go to school in New Jersey?

A: Oh yeah. At a younger age I guess it was pretty good. It was a lot of fun. As I got older I think I became more self-conscious of my body. I was scared to do a lot of things. I was very hefty up here. So sometimes I wouldn't play as hard as I did when I was younger. All my friends didn't have all this so . . .

Q: So that affected your play?

A: Yeah, it did. Because the boys knew that that . . . so therefore sometimes I would sit back and be conservative and not really want to play too much.

Q: Did you get play opportunities in your school?

A: You mean as far as playground? Playground, yes. In the classroom, I can't . . . ah, nursery school. My mother sent me to nursery school and I remember playing there but after than I really don't recall playing.

Q: So Kindergarten, first grade, second grade?

A: No definitely not first grade, definitely not second grade. Maybe games every now and then but not really. I don't remember playing.

Q: But you did get playground time?

A: Oh yeah. We got playground time every day. Now that was fun. Like I said, maybe K through 5.

Q: Tell me about those playgrounds? Do you remember how many?

A: I guess maybe three classrooms full of first grade. There were always maybe three classrooms. I remember in our school we always had three classrooms of the same grade and so all of our age, you know, first graders out there all at once.

Q: How many recesses did you have?

A: Oh, just one. Well, other than gym, you know, PE. Really just one after lunch.

Q: Did you have PE every day?

A: No, twice a week.

Q: Okay. I think we had like every other week.

A: No, no. We had it like twice a week. It was like a Tuesday-Thursday or Monday-Wednesday or Wednesday-Friday. It was just twice a week.

Q: Okay. What do you think it means to play?

A: Now? I think it's the most important thing in my classroom with pre-K. And even when I had T-1, I made sure they did learning centers because it teaches them to work with someone else.

Q: What does it mean to play? If you were trying to describe what is play and what is not play to someone, how would you describe play?

A: Positive interaction with peers. I mean to me, play, you can play alone, you can play with your peers, so it's hard to describe play. I never really thought about that but positive interaction with your peers. I guess that's how I would define it.

Q: . But you know how teachers sometimes have rows and children interact? So would that be play to you if they were interacting?

A: They have rows? You mean . . .

Q: Like desks. They're sitting at desks and apart and they're talking and they're interacting but . . .

A: No, I don't consider that play. I guess I'm thinking more, I guess that would be maybe an upper grade I guess. Like in T-1 I had them in learning centers and, actually, no, in T-1 I don't think I called it play. I think I wanted them to take it more seriously. It was learning and it was fun but I didn't want them to consider it play. I wanted them to know that they were learning and they were working together but not playing. Because if I had said play at that age with that group it would have been totally out of control. Most of the children that I had were developmentally, there was something going on as to why they didn't go directly to first grade. They probably should have stayed back in Kindergarten but they were too old to stay back in Kindergarten, too big. So, you know, they went to T-1. Are you familiar with T-1?

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: So that group that I had if I had said play that would have really . . . I don't think that would have . . .

Q: So you think even if you used that terminology?

A: If I had said play it would have gotten out of control in there. Yeah. I would have seen a lot of classroom rules broken by saying, "Play together." Yeah, play was not a, no. I would let them know they were working together as a team, but

not playing. Now, in pre-K I would say play. I would tell them they were playing but not in T-1. Now that I think about it.

Q: Did they ever play in T-1 when you were teaching?

A: Yes, we played games. We would play match games but we would make teams and we would race to the board to write the shape or draw or write the number or, you know, write the word, or whatever it might have been. Or we might have played Bingo or something like that. We would play games as a group but not in a small group. They weren't able to really do that.

Q: Okay. So can you describe your play set up in your pre-K.

A: Oh, I had it in areas, in different areas. I had the house area, the housekeeping area. We were a writing magnet school so I would have a writing center, the library, the manipulative area, the art area, the block center. They were different centers. I called them centers or areas.

Q: Okay. And tell me about your set up when you taught transitional 1st grade.

A: Now transitional I had them, we had so many different seatings because I really wasn't sure what a T-1 was all about. I never heard about T-1 until I taught here.

Q: And that was your first year?

A: That was my first year and I never knew what it was about. She was so excited for me to take it because I don't think anybody else really wanted to take it and now I see why. It's a hard grade to teach. And being my first experience, it was very hard. And that was my first year and I was being observed, you know, to get my license. But Dr. Jones was very understanding and she had a lot of encouraging things to say. And most of the time when she was there they were very well-behaved. I had a few, you know, little things go on when she was there but most of the time they were very well-behaved while she was there.

Q: Yeah. That's a hard year to be in that kind of situation.

A: This year looking back at those students, some of those students haven't developed and they really do have serious problems. Not problems. I shouldn't say problems, concerns. A lot of them had to go to Special Ed. So a lot of different things going on. But I don't think in T-1 they were able to be classified as Special Ed. I think they had to be in first.

Q: It's kind of a long process. But tell me what about your environment that was different between when you taught T-1 and the pre-K.

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A: Well, they were in desks. In T-1 they were sitting in desks, whereas in pre-K, we really didn't have desks.

Q: In groups or ?

A: I started out with them in groups. I had them in groups by color and shape. I started them out that way. And then as I got to know them and they got in there I said, "Okay, this isn't going to work." It was too distracting for them to see each other across and then we went in twos. And so they were sitting in twos and twos did well. They were rows but they were twos, like two, two, two.

Q: Yeah, okay.

A: So sitting in twos they did very well.

Q: Okay. So you kind of describe play as interaction and you talked about the play as in having the centers. Is that what you called them, centers?

A: Centers or areas.

Q: Yeah, you say areas. So you described play time. Did you have a play time?

A: For pre-K?

Q: Uh, huh.

A: Yes, I guess I would call it area time or time to go to our areas. I didn't necessarily . . . It was time to go to our areas. But they knew they were playing in those areas. So, yeah, it was a play time.

Q: And what did you experience as you set up those areas and what did you experience during that play time? What was your role? What did you do?

A: Oh, I was the facilitator I guess you could say. I would watch and float around from each area but most of the time I tried to have a small group with me that we worked on something. It might have been in the art area or it might have been a writing skill, something that I focused on that day or something that we were focusing on that week. Depending on what our theme was. I tried to have a small group so that I worked with each group and got to work with each child. I guess you could say I was like a facilitator during that time. Making sure they stay on task. Each area each day I had a different task that we were on. You know community helpers?

Q: Yeah.

A: Okay. In each area there was a different theme or something going on in the area I wanted them to focus on. We talked about the firefighter. Maybe they were pretending they were on a fire truck. They built a house and the house was on fire and they're putting on the fire hats and they're driving to the house to put the fire out.

Q: Okay. Yeah.

A: In health theme they might have been dialing 911 on the telephone. I mean each area before we went into our areas I told them what their focus was. Now after they did that maybe that idea that I gave them they could do whatever they wanted but it was just an idea to keep them focused so they're just not over there just doing anything. Just trying to give them a plan of what to do and that was my focus through the year that you have to have a plan for what you want to do each and every day so that you accomplish your goal. And that was my focus. You need to have a plan. In the beginning I would try to give them those ideas of what we were going to do in those areas. As we got towards the end of the year and they were used to me giving it to them, they started to learn to think

for themselves, "Okay, what can I plan to do in that area today." You know, we knew what the theme was and from our themes what can you plan to do there. I kind of got them thinking but my thing was to teach them to make a plan for themselves each day and make sure you carry out that plan and you reach your goal for that day. You know, and I mean as small children, you know, each day is good enough. You don't want to have a plan for your life at pre-K age but I'm hoping that it is something that they might carry with them that let's make a plan or I need to have a plan to carry out so I can reach my goal and hopefully as they grow they'll plan, you know, and have plans and try to reach their goals through their plans.

Q: Okay. So what was the difference between this year? Was this year easier than your first year?

A: Oh yeah. Well, I have more experience with the pre-K age than I did with the T-1 age. I guess I can say from Headstart, working with three and four-year-olds. The pre-K in Tennessee was four-year-olds . I worked at a daycare center too.

Q: Okay. So you had center experience too.

A: Um hm. Well, I worked in a daycare on campus.

Q: I bet that was good experience.

A: Yeah. When I was in college we had a center on campus that I worked in like a little part-time thing.

Q: Okay.

A: It was really the faculty and staff children that came.

Q: So you had more experience with that age group but you planned for play with the pre-K and so you were used to planning for play.

A: Exactly.

Q: And with the T-1's was the planning difficult. Is that what was hard for you?

A: Yes. Because everybody was on a different level. Everybody was on a very different level. But we had benchmarks that we had to meet for T-1 and so I had to stay with the benchmarks each quarter to make sure they were meeting those goals or attempting to meet those goals to prepare for first grade. So that kind of results in a little more pressure as far as the planning and trying to get them to the level that the benchmarks say they should be at at that time. Whereas, pre-K I made up my own benchmarks.

Q: Not as much pressure.

A: No, and I guess I knew off the top of my head, "Okay, they need to do this, they should be doing this, this, this." I need to introduce this to them. This is a skill they need to know or have had a little experience with before going to Kindergarten. So I already knew off the top of my head. I didn't need a piece of paper to say, "Okay, T-1, what in the world are they doing in T-1." With pre-K, I'm like, "Okay." You know going in the door. I already had ideas so it was easier for me. I mean during the summer when I found out I was going to have pre-K I had every area thought up. I had already thought of things to do, I had already planned stuff, made some things. When I was going into T-1, I didn't even know where to start or what even to expect. So in the beginning it was hard to plan.

Q: What did you do for your student teaching?

A: I had second grade and then I had fourth grade. Second and fourth.

Q: Okay.

A: And it was funny because I always thought I would enjoy teaching second grade and I never really had the opportunity. I always kind of stayed in that pre-K range except for T-1.

Q: Well do you think you could have planned if you could go back now? If you had to go back and teach that T-1 again, let's say you were going to teach that, could you implement some of the stuff that was this year that was easier?

A: Implement some things I used in pre-K?

Q: Yeah. I mean anything that worked well that would have worked with that, that
      went easier that second year? You know, that first year you're just trying to
      survive.

A: I sure was. Is there anything that I would implement? I'd probably try to get
      them to make some type of plan and I think I would probably need to make a
      better plan. It was just difficult knowing where to start, knowing what level
      everybody was on. It took me maybe three months to find out where everybody
      was to know where to even start.

Q: Yeah. Well, everyone in your pre-K, were they close to the same level?

A: Yes. Just about everybody, maybe minus one or two had already been to a
      daycare setting so they're familiar with the person called teacher. Someone they
      were supposed to listen to and respect and follow directions. To me, pre-K this
      year, those children are beautiful, beautiful. If they stayed home with their parent,
      their parent did a very good job. Okay, and the ones who went to daycare, the
      daycare gave them the experience of what it's like to be in a classroom with a lot
      more children and that you're not going to get all the attention. That was maybe
      my main thing with children who had never been to pre-K. They might have been
      the only child home with their mom and they get all that attention. So that was
      nothing. You know, that's not a major problem to deal with. I love to given them
      attention. That was no problem. They still got their attention but they learned
      how to work with the other children as well. So, that was easy this year. It was
      great.

Q: When you talk about the pressure of the benchmarks, how did you realize that
      they were making those benchmarks? How did you keep track of that? You said
      that was stressful.

A: I just had to keep assessing. I mean each week, each Friday, we had some type of
      assessment. I mean on that Wednesday when I introduced it on Monday, we
      worked on it Monday and Tuesday. And Wednesday I might have a little pre-
      assessment to see where we were to let me know what I needed to do for
      Thursday. And then Friday we tried to do a final one, you know, so I'd know
      what I needed to do for the next week. And basically that was how I did it. They
      were on such drastic levels. Some of them were maybe behavioral type things,
      problems, you know that they might have had as to why they couldn't sit in their
      seats or the others might have been in developmental things. And so it took me a
      while to get through that. I couldn't figure out where everybody was and what the
      concern might have been as to why they did not move on directly to first grade.
      And I think that was part of my frustration too because I wanted to help them with
      whatever that concern was. If it was discipline, okay, let's try to get your

behavior in order so that we can learn. I thought I needed to know what the reason might have been as to why they didn't go to first grade to help me get through that. Whatever that blockage was I needed to know what it was so that maybe I could help you get over that and you could move on to the next thing. If it was behavior, I really focused on the child with behavior. Keeping things positive and keeping him on the right track so that they would be able to learn. Because if they're busy getting into little things, they're not learning, they're not paying attention to me. So I had to learn what made each child click and get to know each child.

Q: Let's go back. This is something that I wondered. You said they were getting into things?

A: If I'm not keeping their attention, if I'm not on the level that they're understanding what I'm talking about then they're finding something to get into, whether it was their desk, their friend's desk or just doing something that's not following my classroom rules, misbehaving. And I found that when I was not talking to them on their level or if I was over their head or below their level, that's what they did. They got into something like I said, whether it be their desk, their friend's desk or just totally distracting the whole class because they weren't ready to concentrate or whatever I was saying was over their head. So that's what I mean.

Q: So what is your belief about the role of play in development?

A: With pre-K I think it's very important because I think that will help them learn to interact with one another. I think play encourages them to interact with one another.

Q: Okay. Do you think that it teaches social skills?

A: Um hum, yes.

Q: Is there anything else in the role of development in early childhood?

A: As far as play is concerned?

Q: Um hum.

A: Well, I know the big thing that they learn is that sometimes you win and sometimes you lose when you're playing.

Q: They are learning life's rules.

A: Oh yeah, exactly. They really do. Sometimes things aren't always going to go your way and you have to wait your turn. You know, they learn a lot of little

things that are big things. You know, they learn how to communicate. There are a lot of little things that they learn through play. And at four years old, that was the best way for me to get it through. I surely couldn't sit them down in circle all day and explain, you know, how they're supposed to act or carry themselves. But they learn through play. The little incidents that went on in the areas were instant learning and presented perfect experience. You know, A time for me to teach them something whether it was sharing, the words that you're using, the way that you ask for something. You know, that's why I was saying I was like a floater. Because I could hear everything that was going on and sometimes their conversation gave me instant, okay, that's a learning moment. Let me get over here and talk to them about that.

Q: Um hum. And do you think there is a time that they stop learning through play?

A: I think they're always learning. I think they're always learning something. If it wasn't something that I interjected, it might have been something their friend said. I mean at four years old they're saying some remarkable things. I'm like, how did they know that already. Or you know, "That was very good that you said that. That's teaching such and such how to do this or how to do that. You know you're a teacher too. You just taught me how to do this." You know what I mean.

Q: So is there a time that you think that, you're talking about four year olds, is there a time when you stop using play for teaching?

A: Yeah. The main time that I stopped saying play was writing class.

Q: Okay.

A: Because I wanted them to know the importance of writing and how important it is, you know, to sit up straight and you know, so that you're writing nice and neat. You know, not that they were. They were learning how to write their name. I didn't put a whole bunch of pressure on them to sit up straight but they felt real important when it was time for writing center. To write, you know, they felt like they were big boys and girls because it was time for writing center. That was the only time it was not play. That was probably the only time I did not use the word play.

Q: And at what grade level would you say you would quit, and I know you've only taught two grade levels but in your opinion when do you stop using play as the facilitator of learning?

A: Well, like I said, I think you can play games. You know what I mean? And they're still learning through that play. And I think that can go on and on and on through 12th grade you're continuing to play. I mean you're learning different lessons as a senior in high school. Maybe you can take that major lesson

depending on what game it is that you're playing. It really to me prompts a lot of discussion. It can. In fourth grade I know she used to play a lot of games and she would turn those, they were really lessons but she made it a game and she had a lot of discussion during that game. So to me you might always use the word play. That word can go a long way and mean a lot of different things.

Q: It can, it can. That's what I'm trying to learn about. What do teachers see that it means.

EVELYN

Interview 2
August 13, 2001

Q: I wanted to ask about one of the answers you gave last time. It was regarding
        your t-1 experience. I want to know a little more about that. One thing you said
        is that you did not want to use the word "play" with them. Can you explain a
        little more about that?

A: Basically, I guess I mean the developmental level that each of them our on. That
        is the main reason. They were not mature enough to handle play or playing a
        game or what ever they are going to play.

Q: What would they do?

A: They would get real giddy and silly. It became more frustrating than fun. It was
        not a good thing to say "play". If I said we are going to play a game they would
        get real excited, I guess you suppose to get excited when you're going to play a
        game. But if it was a learning game, it did not seem like they were learning
        because they were being too silly.

        Okay, I understand.

A: They other thing, sometimes when we played a game they could not handle the
        losing part of it. We ever we played a game, the kids lost they got mad at each
        other. They did not want to be friends with each other, or they would say nasty
        things to each other, that type thing. It was negative things like that.

        OK.

Q: You said you used small groups with them,

A: Yes, I had to. Because large group did not work.

Q: Did you allow them to all go and choose an activity?

A: Not with that group. Maybe, if I would have had a different group of children,
        but not with that group. There were a couple that could work with others but the
        rest of them they just could not get anything done.

Q: So if you were working with a small group, what were the rest of the children
        doing?

A: We worked in a small group, pretty much. There were only eight of us. Two could work independently and I might work with two. The other children may have worked in groups of two. I tried to split them up who needed help and who could model things, someone who was doing the right thing.

Q: If you were working with a group what did the other children do,

A: Learning centers, or if I was trying to introduce vocabulary or something like that reinforcing something that we may have done in a large group and they did not seem to grasp it. I would then work with them in a small group.

I liked to try to work with everyone to see how they were thinking.

Q: Tell me about your learning centers. Did they involve play or were they teacher directed, You mentioned something about using learning centers to reinforce skills.

A: No, I was a floater during that time. They were actually things they could do independently, pretty much. They were things that were introduced during a large group, pretty much. Whatever was done in large group in the morning was reinforced in the afternoon.

They were things we may have done in large groups.

Q: Did they have a choice of what center they were going to?

A: I put them in groups. It depended on my number, my group number changed all year. Some children did not attend for along period of time due to moving or whatever I put them in groups. I forget what I was saying, I put them in groups according to how could work with someone who could work independently and well ,if two were strong students working together. I had someone a strong and a weak you know someone who needed more assistance or guidance or even just a good model.

Q: What materials did you have in your class?

A: I had very minimal. There were not a lot of materials for me when I got there. Many things I bought my self. We did get $100 a year.

Q: What did you purchase with your money?

A: Shape bingo, number bingo, alphabet bingo, those types posters for the wall to reinforce things they were learning.

Q: What about the materials in your pre-K?

A: Everything in that room I brought myself. I found it here (home) or found old things. I did not get any money. Anything that was bought like manipulatives or anything I bought myself. However, I did ask the secretary if I could get a kitchen set because there was not anything for a house area. Other than that, the librarian gave some buy but by the time I got the materials from her, it was the end of the school year.

        I did borrow things from the kindergarten teacher, or get stuff that she did not want. I made things myself. I bought construction paper and had to make things myself.

Q: You said something about how you would give them a plan, so they were not just not doing nothing/

A: I gave them a focus. My pre-K. Maybe if were talking about fire fighters I would have them focus on building a fire station or practicing stop drop and role. I had more focused things in area other besides the block and house area. The manipulative area there was more of a focus, for example puzzles. I went to the library and got firefighter puzzles. I might have made a game for them to do. I made a game where there was a fire and they had to work their way to the top.

        The house area or block area to me was where I had to give them an idea A focus on our theme. After they finished our goal, they would ask Ms. M. can I build this now? I It may not have anything to do with our theme but I would say yes. Our goal for that area for this day was and once they reached that goal they could build something in their mind.

        That was my thing, that was my plan. I wanted them to leave pre-k with. You need a plan to reach your goal.

Q: What is the place of play in other grades if you were the teacher? Like 2nd grade?

A: Play like games or playground . I would also do learning centers. Because you get a lot done. I like the concept of learning centers. There is so much that can be done You get a lot accomplished. There a lot of learning going on at one time.

Q: What play opportunities do you think should be for other grades?

A: Well, I think you could use learning centers up to 5th grade. They could be functional up through 5th grade. If you use them the right way, If you do them at their level it would give teachers more time to work individually with children, you can float around the centers. I think you can use centers up through 5th grade.

Q: Do you consider the learning centers play? Why?

A: Yes, because they interact.

Q: When did your class play?

A: Well, the principal , she did not think they should play. She said the test scores were so low they did not need to play. There was no time to play. But there was a brand new playground at there.

At the end of the year, they did eventually get to go out and play. At the end of the year, put it this way during the year PE or gym was consider their play. They eventually did get it. After lunch, we started to get to take them out for 10-20 minutes. That was at the end of the year. It was at the end of the year and think it was because some of the parents started to inquire about. I really did not go into why it came about that we could start having recess. She {principal} just said we could. And I did not ask.

Q: No recess, would make for a long day.

A: We got a break during lunch or PE or library.

Q: Your principal said you could not have recess because of low test scores. You would be surprised this is going on in several places.

A: To me, the more you put them behind a desk, they need a break, they need an outlet. They need a break. During lunch they could not talk, for eight months they had to put their heads down until their teachers picked them up. This was in first grade. This started in T-I. You ate your lunch and you put your head down. If kindergarten came to lunch it was so fast because they needed the tables that it really did not matter.

To me this just caused more frustration, they had no outlet. They got there at 8:00. Until 3:00 where is there break. They could not talk to their friends. There break was music or library. I would get a lot of complaints from those teachers. Many of my students acted out in music or library and things like that because that was there only outlet and they could not be still. That was their only unstructured time.

Q: That must have been frustrating for you?

A: Well, yah. I was expected to discipline them but that was there only break In your room, it doesn't look like you have control if they are doing to much talking or having to much fun.

Q: Did you ever approach the principal or anyone about them not having recess or anything?

A: I basically did what I was told. There were very few of us that did not explain. I did not make waves. Not that I agreed with it, maybe I should have spoke up.

Q: You said you struggled about do you fight for the kids?

A: Yes, to have that play or have that outlet or making waves and not following what your administration wants you to do. I was torn with that all year. I would come home and tell my husband about it and of course and he would tell me to say something to her. And I would think how can I approach her and it not come out in a negative way. There was so much negativism. There is so much of that in the school. I just did not know If I wanted to be a part of that. So, I just did not say anything. I was still torn, it was breaking me. It was tearing me up inside. How can I say something without being a trouble maker and still be looking out for what in the best interest of the children. I dealt with that all year, I never addressed it and I prayed about and then we had recess. Ok, I thought prayer works or she got tired of hearing it.

The way I got the pre-k out was to tell her. Regarding development, that I did not know if they could climb a ladder. I did not know if they could run unless I to take them out because we do not have PE.

Q: That was a good way to approach.

A: I got away with taking them outside, we went outside almost everyday, weather permitting of course. As long as it wasn't too hot ,we would go outside. When it snows, we would go out and catch snowflakes on our tongues.   I started to get smart and find away to get them outside.

Q: Was your administrator ever in your room?

A: You mean for observations and stuff?

A: Oh yes!

Q: When she came into your classroom, did you ever feel pressure not to do the learning centers ?

A: No, because I called it learning centers, I did not call it play. I used the words to help me. If though they are learning and maybe playing a game I did nit want her to think they were playing.

Q: So you felt pressure not to use the word play.

A: I did not want her to think they were playing maybe my first year it was pre-k and it maybe ok but T1 no I did not want her to think they were playing. With T1 I guess you would figure they are behind because they did not go on to first. They

need to work hard. She saw the make up of my class. She did not mind it or anything she just knew that was how I did my class.

Q: What do you think influenced you beliefs regarding play?

A: Really my experiences, I guess just my college courses, they talked about the importance of play in early childhood, I guess that is where it came from, working in Head Start for three years, all the trainings we went through talked about play.

Q: Did your courses prepare you on how to implement play?

A: No, I got that on my own. Trial and Error. I did remember any of the book knowledge or anything like that. I worked at a daycare on campus that helped me to learn what to do. I guess, I put it together with what my professors were saying. Trying things

Q: Where you prepared to teach T-1?

A: Oh no, we did not have that in New Jersey. I asked her what it was about. I was energetic saying sure. I did not know what it was about. She said it was kindergarten students that did not go on to first grade and still need to reinforce their kindergarten skills. I said ok fine. But, it was more than that. When I got there it was more than that. It was a lot more developmental, behavior problems and special needs students. I also had two little girls that spoke Spanish, so there was that language barrier too. I did not know that is what I was coming into. I did not have any guidance. I just asked some of the other teachers in the building that had experience with t-1. I wanted to ask and kind of did not want to ask. I wanted to use my own innovative ideas. Ok I jumped in and said I have to figure out where these children were before I ever attempted the bench marks. They gave me a notebook with the benchmarks.

Q: Has there been anything that has puzzled you about play?

A: I do not know.

Q: Anything like gender, if or how they learn through play.

A: I know they learn through play. I do not know what has puzzled me. I am sure I will think of something when your not here.

Q: If you think of something, just let me know.

EVELYN

Interview 3
September 25, 2001

Q: I just have one question. Did you get a chance to review the transcripts from the other interviews.

A: Yes.

Q: Were they accurate?

A: Yes.

Q: Thank you!

PROTOCOL WRITING
Returned Between First and Second Interviews

What does it mean to play?

> Learning
> Interaction
> Team work
> Rules
> Directions
> Imagination
> Exploration
> Manipulation
> Solitary
> Par
> Getting along
> Sharing
> Winning
> Losing
> Cleaning up
> Fun
> Discover
> Communication
> Laughing
> Listening

What are some examples of play in your classroom?

My classroom is divided into different areas:

House/Dramatic Play - (imagination, acting, role playing, dress-up, communication).

Blocks – (building, creativity, imagination, role playing, counting, exploring, gross motor, fine motor, team work).

Manipulatives – (math, fine motor, sharing, thinking, manipulating, patience).

Art – (creativity, imagination, exploration, fine motor, language).

Writing/library/listening – (fine motr, quiet time, comprehension, listening, exploration).

Sand/water – (exploration, sensory, manipulation, create).

Science – (experiment, discover, explore, create).

Each area of the room encouraged positive interaction, play, exploration, discovery and imagination. The children learned through their interaction with peers. Our theme of study would give new ideas to try and explore and introduce new materials.

What was one of your favorite play experiences as a child?

From what I can remember, when at home I enjoyed playing with friends at the park or riding our bikes. At school I enjoyed recess and competitive games. When my older brother had time for me, we would play board games until we started to fight. He didn't like to lose to his little sister. Play experiences were positive for me.

APPENDIX D

JILL'S INTERVIEWS AND

WRITING PROTOCOL

Interview 1
May 25, 2001

Q: Okay. That's your background. You did tell me that this is your second year of teaching and you're teaching full-day Kindergarten?

A: Yes.

Q: And did you have a student teaching experience prior to this?

A: Well, last year I taught Kindergarten and this year I'm teaching pre-K.

Q: Okay.

A: And, yes, I did my student teaching. I did six weeks in a four-year-old early childhood pre-K classroom and I did six weeks in a fourth grade classroom because I've got a double major.

Q: Okay. So, why did you want to become a teacher?

A: I think it's kind of always what I wanted to do. I come from a family of teachers which I know happens a lot. My Aunt and Uncle were teachers, my Mom is a teacher. A lot of my parents' friends were teachers. It's something I used to do with my Barbie dolls. You know, I played teacher and this, that and the other. And I thought it would be a lot of fun to work with the kids and help them learn and grow and it has been. That's what I've enjoyed.

Q: Okay. What types of experience have you had with children besides your teaching experience?

A: Actually, I went back to school after I had already had my first child so I have two children. I have an eight-year-old and a four-year-old so I have the experience of being a parent and coming from a parent's point of view. I've worked with children at church. I've worked with different ages, both in Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, that sort of thing. When my son was about 2 ½ to 3, I took him to a Mother's Day Out program two days a week and during the summer, one summer, they were between teachers and I filled in that spot and it was the most exhausted I have ever been. I was worn out. That age just wore me out. But that's also an experience that I've had with the younger group. But I've

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mainly tried to stay, you know, third grade to Kindergarten is where most of my experience has been.

Q: Now, you're teaching pre-K. Is it half day?

A: Yes.

Q: How many days a week?

A: Five. I wish it were four, but it is five.

Q: Yeah. Some places are four days a week.

A: It would be nice to have the planning time and the time for parents.

Q: What do you remember about playing as a child?

A: I think you talked to Dr. Ham, one of my college instructors. For one of our classes, she makes us do a play diary and we have to have 20 to 25 entries of things that we remember playing as a child, either games or specific experiences or at school. It was so hard for me. After I went back and looked through pictures and stuff, it really brought up a lot of memories of things. Playing outside, riding my bicycle, being on the swing set, having a little fort-type thing in the backyard that we played house in and set up haunted houses in. And then I can remember things I used to do at my grandparents' house. My grandparents were a big part of my life and I spent a lot of time over there on the weekends and things with my cousins and on vacations. I have a lot of different memories.

Q: Okay. Did you have any play experiences in school? What do you remember?

A: I remember play on recess, I remember having to do PE and that's how I felt about it—that we had to do PE. I don't remember it as being, maybe one day a week or on special occasions we got to play, but the rest of the time it was very structured. I don't remember, like we do now, centers. You know, I can remember first grade lined up in the little rows and I don't remember learning through play like, you know, we've learned to do and have found it more engaging to the kids. I don't remember doing that type of play. I can remember playing after school and doing things like campfire and church activities but I don't remember playing at school a whole lot, other than recess. I remember we had three recesses from second grade and under because we had a morning, lunch and afternoon. And then I can remember when you got in fourth grade it was like, oh my gosh, you don't have that morning recess anymore. You know, they cut out one and then you just had lunch and afternoon. And now, I think, I know the kids in our school just have their lunch recess and that's it.

Q: Yeah. It's changed a little bit. What about your class? Do they get to go outside?

A: Most of the time. Unfortunately, if we are running short of time, that may be the thing that we lose out on. But they do so much, they are so active inside, I don't feel like it's too bad. But if it's pretty like it is or when the weather is changing, if I don't take them outside, I can really tell a difference. So, we try to go outside for at least 15 minutes every day and if it's beautiful, we have been known to just stay out there all day.

Q: And what time do your kids come in the morning?

A: They come at 8:15. Well, they can come any time between 8:00 and the bell rings at 8:20. But most of mine come right at 8:00 or before.

Q: Okay. And what time do they get out?

A: 11:15 in the morning.

Q: So you don't have them very long.

A: No.

Q: Okay. So what do you think it means to play?

A: To play is to have fun. To do something . . . I mean, play and fun to me go hand and hand. You know, I think it's just the nature of the world and the memories that we have. When I see my students playing, they are talking, either alone or to each other. Sometimes they're using imaginary play, sometimes they're in the home center and you're mom and you're dad and you're this, that and the other. I have some that are a little older that like to get more structured games, but most of the time their play, or what I think of as play, is they're in there doing . . . What we have is choice. Let me start over. What we have is choice time in the morning when they come in and it's just a good transition time for them from the time they walk in the door to the time we have to start actually settling them down for their calendar time and everything. And they can just go from center to center and play as they want to with whatever materials I have set out. And so it's just kind of a free choice activity and I don't have very many rules and structured things. I don't have a lot of rules except for like population or, you know, no throwing the blocks or safety rules. But play to me is just when they are in there and they are making up their own games and they're choosing what activities they do and they're choosing who they play with and they're just enjoying themselves and talking things out among themselves.

Q: Okay. You said you have choices for them. So, is there like something they're supposed to do at each center.

A: No, at the free choice time, which is the first 30 minutes of the day, they don't have to do any one particular thing. I don't have a have-to center during that

time. They just move and they stay as long or as short as they want in that center unless there are several that want to go into one in particular and then I might say, "Okay, five more minutes and then you guys need to move onto somewhere else." But no, during their choice time, that is their choice time and I don't have a have-to center during that time. I do my academics or my teacher directed centers after my calendar and group time and then yes, I'll say, "Okay, here's four choices, you have to do two of them." But no, during choice time, it's just choice time. It's just their free play time.

Q: So tell me about one of the activities that you put out for them that they have to do.

A: On the academic centers or teacher directed centers, they like to do file folder games where they match numerals to objects or upper and lower case or, you know. And I'll use a little piece of sticky tack and I'll say, "Okay, when you get done, bring it to me," and I'll give them a sticker or a stamp or something that shows me that they did that center even though they may not have something to take home. If it is something that they take home, then I either sit there with them and help guide them through the center. It may be like tracing shapes. We may use stencils or one of my favorite things is we've used wicky sticks to make numbers and shapes on the desk and then lay the paper over and then they can do a rubbing of it and that lets them have . . . You know, they've done something that's not paper and pencil but you have something tangible to take home to say, "Oh look, I made a triangle all by myself," or, you know, at the very beginning of the year when we're first learning. But those are kind of my teacher directed centers. Like journals where sometimes I give them a topic, sometimes I do not. Sometimes I say just whatever you want and they draw their pictures and color and everything and then they tell us what to write so we stamp them with the date and then we write in them and at the end of the year they will take those home. And at conferences I let the parents look through them and stuff. But those are some examples of some teacher directed centers.

Q: Okay. Well, you were talking about when you went to school that you don't remember any type of play other than recess. So, if you were going to describe play to someone because, you know, you were saying that that was not play when you went to school, what would you say are some of the features of play?

A: I know the textbook definition, but you probably don't want the textbook definition. You know, it is something that you chose to do. Not something that you always have to do. It's not always . . . play does not mean that you're always sitting still. A lot of time, play involves being up, being active and, you know. It was very hard for me when I first started because I really grew up in the old school, literally the old school. So it was kind of hard for me when I student taught. I was like, "Oh, they're too loud," you know. If you came in my classroom now, you'd be going, "Oh, my gosh," because they're talking, they're active, they are engaging each other. So I think there's talking, there's

movement, there's fun. But they are actively engaged in what they're doing. They are interested in what they're doing. I think choice is fun. They're choosing to do it, they're having fun doing it, they're learning while they do it, but they're learning on their own terms sort of. You know, they're learning in an environment that's comfortable for them because they also learn from each other when they play. They learn vocabulary and concepts and sometimes it's not always good, you know, sometimes they learn things you wish that you hadn't heard. You know, they learn a lot from each other because they all have different backgrounds and different experiences.

Q: Okay. You said this isn't your room?

A: No, we walked through my room.

Q: Okay. So, how is your room set up?

A: Do you want to go look?

Q: Sure.

A: All I can tell you about this particular situation is that he would be better off here than where he was and that he very badly needed maybe not the academic part, which he did, but that was secondary, he needed the social skills and to be with other different types of people where he wasn't the center and learn to get along and, you know, that sort of thing. So it was really sad when he didn't come back. But it was also frustrating when he kept being gone because he was missing out on so much and my little girl who was absent so much the first semester, she still hasn't caught up. She's not where she needs to be.

Q: So what do you do if they're not where they need to be?

A: We just keep chugging along and I just spend more time one-on-one with her or I pair her with . . . I have two boys, my twins, who should have gone to Kindergarten this year. They turned six in March. But their mother, because of all the health problems and all the surgeries, was afraid they were lacking in social and so she put them in this pre-K and so we've just kind of done what we can. But they are very bright. She like home schools them and so I pair her with one of them or with another girl she's friends with and I have them work together on stuff. Because the boys are real good about not doing it for them, but helping them. And I've also tried to teach her ways that she can work things out for herself like if we're doing matching numeral to object, she can count the objects but she doesn't know what the numerals are, I'll tell her, "Okay, go look on the calendar. Go start at one," because they can almost all do the calendar for calendar time, you know. So she'll try to find that six or the seven or the five or whatever. Then she has a visual idea of what that five looks like and she can go back and say, "Okay, is this it?" "Yes," you know. But I just assessed her letters

today and she's still not recognizing like the letters of her name or the first letter of her name even. Which, she's the only one who can't even tell me the first letter of their name, who doesn't recognize it out of order. She recognizes her name most of the time, but she's also going through a bad home life adjustment and things too. But Grandma is very supportive of her and I've just told her, you know, that she just needs to build an awareness of letters. I told her, you know, when you're cooking dinner, when you go to the grocery store, when you go to McDonald's, you know, "Oh look, on that sign from McDonald's is a big M," you know. Just to build an awareness of letters because she still mixes letters and numbers. You know, she doesn't know the difference between letters and numbers which is not abnormal at this age, but I just . . . She's probably right now the lowest one that I have and she's much brighter than that. She is able to do more than that, but she's not.

Q: Are you required to do those assessments?

A: No.

Q: You're just doing it to know where they are?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you have to give a form to parents?

A: I have. My principal encouraged me to do some sort of a report and what I'm doing is one that I got from . . . The state department gives you a handbook for the four-year-old program or suggested guidelines or whatever. They have a 14 page assessment form for each child.

Q: Oh, my.

A: And that's undoable. That's just not doable. Well, I didn't realize it at the time, but anyway what the teacher I student taught under, what she had done was compressed all of the biggest, you know, highlights of these, and she made them real small and she made a two-page carbonless report card. What she would do, she had like five copies and you would get the bottom copy first nine weeks, the second copy the second nine weeks, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and eventually they would get all the carbons and you would have the original. And, I thought, golly, that's such a good idea. Of course, I'm not going to be able to do carbon forms so I just did the report card front and back and then I run them a copy basically each time where I check off things like, you know, recognizing colors, numbers, letters, like recognizing shapes, writing shapes, numbers, your name, front to back progression of the book, special concepts, motor skills, social skills, things like that.

Q: Wow, that's a lot. I wasn't aware of all of that for the four-year-old program. That certainly is a lot.

A: There's not past skills, but there's this.

Q: Which take the place of.

A: And it's not even required. I mean, you know, because it's an elective program, you know, it's like here's what we feel like should be covered, you know, use your own judgment.

Q: Okay. What are your beliefs about the role of play in a child's development?

A: I think it's necessary and I think you can really tell the kids who have not had free time or you know, some daycares are different than others. You can tell the ones where the kids have always been handed things to do because when they have choices they don't know what to do. They really don't know what to do. I've had several actually like that. Or on the other spectrum have had so much free time and free play that it's hard for them to understand that there's limits or you know, you can play within these boundaries, you know. You can play, but you can't throw cars. You can play but no, you cannot use them as a teeter totter and sh....ong them across the room. Or, yes, you can play but you do have to take turns or you do have to share. So, I have kids that come from a lot of different play experiences. Some are the ones who play, but they only know what to play with if you get them something or tell them where to go. Or I have one who is doing better. I have one little girl who had a really hard time. She would just stand there until you gave her a suggestion and now she does better. She comes in and she plays but she asks you before each transition, "Can I go play over there now?" And I'll say, "Well, so and so, how many people can be in there?" "Four." "How many people are playing in there?" "Two." "So what does that tell you?" And I try to do it in a way that helps her to understand she can make that decision for herself and not be derogatory at the same time.

Q: Do they understand the counting, the role that plays in population?

A: Yes. Although next year I'm going to do more concrete . . . I have not given them population cards or clips or anything, we've just kind of had verbal or however many chairs are there that's how many people can be there. But next year for things like the more open place like the block center or if I have cars or, you know, in my open spaces where I have bigger things out like cars or legos or blocks or bears or whatever, I'm going to next year use the little clothespins and I'm going to say, "Okay, this is the center and this is how many can be in there." Because I had lots of trouble with the open center. You know, it's just too small for more than four people. And if one of them pretends to go somewhere else and comes back, someone else will slip in their slot. Some will say, "You left the home center," you know, even though technically they were still playing there.

Q: Sometimes they leave to go get something and so that can cause a problem.

A: Yes. So we're going to use a more concrete thing for them.

Q: Okay. That's interesting to know. You know I think we will stop there.

Interview 2
May 31, 2001

Q: Okay, there's couple of things I want to ask you from our last interview. You said last year when you were teaching Kindergarten you did everything as a class.

A: Yes.

Q: And it was difficult. Tell me about that.

A: I went in in a very difficult position because the kids had all started school for about a week or ten days with one teacher and then the school district decided that they didn't need two full-time teachers, they needed one. So one of the teachers was reassigned to a different grade in her same building and the other teacher didn't want to travel so she ended up taking a job at another district and they had both been there for like 12 to 15 years teaching Kindergarten. I mean I was a two different schools, but at each school, the teachers that I replaced had been there anywhere from 12 to 15 years and then they came in and said, "Well, our enrollment is such that we have room for one full-time teacher and one half-time teacher." And then the other school did the same thing. "We have room for one full time teacher and one half-time teacher." So in the one school that I started at the parents were very hesitant. They had a very difficult time with the transition, the kids had a difficult time with the transition, I had a difficult time with the transition. At the other school it went beautifully. The kids did beautifully, the parents were very supportive and welcoming and it ended up being a much better situation for several different reasons. But in the one school where I was having a difficult time, because of the history with the other teacher and everything, he wanted me to do exactly what the other Kindergarten teacher that I was teaching with was doing so that he could tell parents, "Well, your child is getting the same education. They're doing the same things." So, I was put into a situation where I had very little autonomy and I was doing things that I didn't believe in very much. I didn't feel they were very age appropriate and I was doing them in such a way that didn't give the children much choice or chances to do things on their own. I mean like everything was spoon fed to them and very rigorous time schedules. And the program that they did, they did probably two phonics papers a day. The main thing that I had problems with was the way they did language arts because it was very, well, paper and pencil and it was very, everybody did the same thing all the time. Like I say, forming the letters, you know, I would stand at a teacher's spot and they would sit at their little desks and you know, we would do, "Okay start here and everybody do this," which is okay when you're demonstrating and this, that and the other, but that's one of those things where it hit the middle kids, the kids that were right in the middle. The kids that were above that, it was

redundant for them and they didn't need it and the kids that were below that weren't ready for that at all, you know, to be forming letters on lined paper or, you know, anything. Or they weren't ready to blend ca-at, you know to read the word cat. They just weren't ready. But anyway, I didn't do any kind of centers. I did pretty much the schedule that the other teacher did and the only thing that I got to do that I wanted to was during their large group time. I did the calendar and math and then I chose my own like stories or things like that to read. We didn't necessarily form a base on that but we did for everything else.

Q: So how are you feeling doing that type of teaching? What were you feeling doing that type of teaching?

A: It was just very difficult because the kids were unhappy with it, I was unhappy with it and like I say, the other teacher could make it work because she was very structured and rigid and yelled at her kids and said, you know, they had a lot of work that they had to do on their own. They put up work spaces, you know, make sure you don't look at anybody else's paper and I don't know. I just don't think that it supported the kids. I didn't feel like I supported the kids very much. I didn't feel like I had time to sit and work with those who needed the help very much. So I was not happy with the whole thing. Especially because at the other school I did go along the same lines as the other teacher but she . . . and the administration told me I could do what I wanted to. And the other teacher was more of a support and a mentor and she would say, "Okay, here's what I'm going to do, here's what I've done in the past. You are welcome to, I'll share my files, my ideas with you." But I was also able to do what I wanted to within that. We did the same letter of the week, but we didn't necessarily do everything else the same. We tried to stay the same on the letter of the week and on the math, but that was it. And even with math, we didn't always, weren't always just paired up, you know, right together. So I was doing two different sets of lesson plans for two different schools and two different teachers and two different letters of the week and two different math programs and two different . . . But anyway, I was much happier and I felt like the kids were much happier in the classroom where they had some more individualized attention and I was choosing activities for those children and the children that it didn't fit, I was able to work with them a little more on their level or change my activities to fit their level.

Q: Tell me about some of the activities you were doing there at the school that you were happy with?

A: Well, I was doing more hands on things. More things with, you know, very simple things with playdoh, with sand, with popsicle sticks, with doing elephant and E. We did the old, it's such an old program, the alpha time letter people. Have you ever heard of that? I don't necessarily care for the alpha time program but I've used those alpha time letter people on the first day. We use the blow up pillow people and we use the song and then just to give them a concrete thing to visualize and you know, where does Mr. C get his sound from ca-ca-cotton, ca-ca-

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candy or Mr. G with gooey gum. We walked around the table to the music and whenever it was goooooey gum we slowed down like our feet were stuck in gooey gum, you know. And I just tried to give them things that they could relate to more and things that they had a little bit more hands on opportunities with and not so much pencil and paper work but more things where they had a little bit more expression. And I still didn't really do a lot of center work. We still pretty much did everything together as a class because that's still how that other teacher that I loved so much, that's how she did it and that's how I did it as well.

Q: And you said this year you kind of thought, this is a quote, "How do you incorporate play without it being chaotic?"

A: Right, right.

Q: So what have you gone through this year trying to implement play? What has it been like for you?

A: It really, it's gotten better but the one class that had more autonomy and had a little bit more fun, I think I kind of learned a little bit from them that it's okay to let them, you know, have controlled chaos. It's okay to let them play and have fun, as long as, you know, you have a signal or you have something that they all know when it's time to round it up or, you know, give them the five-minute warning or the ten-minute warning. I've just learned, it's been hard because you kind of go, "Oh my gosh, it's so loud in here!" But also I've learned ways to manage it a little better. But still sometimes I'm like, "Okay, what are they really getting out of that? Are they really learning anything?"

Q: And what do you think? You know, I hear that over and over. Are they really learning anything? What do you think makes the uneasiness?

A: I think because a lot of us or people my age were, you know, we talked about playing school when you were a kid and how we just really didn't do that much. And it's like, oh, you know, if a parent walked in right now would they understand why I'm letting them have free choice time with blocks? Would they understand why I'm letting them form the letters with playdoh instead of pencil and paper? You know, would they understand, you know. Are the kids making the connection between what I'm trying to teach them and the good time, the fun that they're having? Are they making the connection between what they're doing and how they're playing and the lesson I'm trying to teach them. You know, I think that's probably where a lot of the uneasiness comes in. You know, just because I'm being less structured, am I still being effective? It's probably where my uneasiness comes from.

Q: So, how would you compare last year where you were doing things as a class and this year you've kind of made a little bit more of a play-type environment as you've described it? How do you compare the years?

A: This year I think I'm still learning as I go. And I did both. I did some direct instruction to the whole class and then I did things where I just set them up to learn and then waited until they came to my center and I could work with four or five at a time to do my actual teaching with, you know, maybe letter formation or helping them do one-to-one correspondence or things like that. Where I might model that and do that together as a class, but as far as the individual instruction and, you know, trying to let them do it independently, you know, I was able to monitor their progress better when I do it in small groups than when I did it in large groups. I'm not sure if I answered your question.

Q: You did. But you talk about being happy. Did you find yourself happy this year?

A: Oh yeah. I've been much happier, much happier. It's gone much better. The kids are happier. You know, they are more relaxed and they're not as intimidated at trying new things or I don't have as much of a "Ohhhhh" feeling when it's time to do work. You know, some of them will do it to tease and stuff, but I don't have that "Ohhhhh" feeling from the kids when it's time to learn. Learning is not something they dread as much as the kids that knew that "learning" meant pencil and paper and direct instruction and something that may or may not be completely over their head. Because that program also had cassette tapes that you were supposed to play and stop and then play and stop, you know. And I feel like I'm still teaching them, you know. I'm still doing listening activities, you know, but I don't have to do it with them enclosed in their little secret space and filling out the correct answer and all that. I can do it more of a just, you know, watching and monitoring progress rather than having to have an actual sheet to look on, or whatever.

Q: You describe unhappiness in that class that you had to do everything at the same time, like the other teacher, and you describe that that was an unhappy time for you but you also describe that your schooling was kind of that way. So what made that uncomfortableness with teaching that? Do you have any idea?

A: Well, part of it was that it was my first year and I had so looked forward to being able to do things the way I had learned how to teach them. You know, you come out of school with these big ideas and this is how you should do it or shouldn't do it or this is how children learn and, you know. It would have been nice for me to have been able to have a little bit more independence to choose my own activities and do my own ideas and lessons that I wanted to do.

Q: So that your school experience, your education experience, was not the same that you were experiencing?

A: Right. This is not how I learned to teach things.

Q: Okay. So that was causing some of the uneasiness?

A: The conflict between what I've learned and what I'm seeing is there.

Q: I think the last time we talked a little bit about your beliefs in the role of play in a child's development, but tell them to me. You've talked a little bit about how they pretend, but what role do you think play has in a child's overall development?

A: Well, you know, Piaget, or whatever, you know children construct their own knowledge. They need opportunities with a variety of things and a variety of people and a variety of children and I believe that they learn something different each time they do things like that. When they're playing with blocks and they're making a tower and they learn that you can't put a rectangle on top of a triangle and make it balance, that's not a good foundation for a tower. They learn that although, you know, I've always done it this way, Johnny may have always done it this way. Just because I do it this way and Johnny does it this way, they may still work. I mean, both ways work and they both get the same job done, but they learn a different way of doing it and they learn from each other. They learn, well, you know, just by talking to each other and doing things together.

Q: You said they construct their own knowledge. You're talking about cognitive development. They learn cognitive development. Any other role that play has?

A: Social. Huge, huge social development and language development as well. The social development, you know, I think I told you that's the biggest thing for four year olds and pre-school age on the academic goals. The biggest part is getting used to other children. Getting used to sharing and taking turns and waiting your turn to talk and not interrupting people and you know, they learn a lot about how to be friends, how to make friends, how to handle conflicts. Anyway, they learn a lot from each other. If I see something that's fixing to blow, I can step in and help them, you know. "Okay, you see it this way and you see it this way. What can you do together?" And I can help model and show them how to work things out rather than my child who just picks things up and bops people on the head. Yeah, they have a lot of social growth through play and a lot of language growth through play too just because of the different items that are out. And they are so vocal at this age anyway and they are so social. They talk together all the time.

Q: You talked a little bit about the noise level and I think you've mentioned that twice now. So that kind of makes you a little bit uncomfortable because of the noise level. Anything else about that type of environment where you provide the free time that makes you uncomfortable?

A: Just making sure that--I have a lot of children who like to do the same thing every day and all the time and just trying to expand their knowledge and their interests. And, you know, I shoo them out of the home center and try to get them to go do this, that or other. I shoo them away from the blocks or the cars or the coloring or the art center and just try to get them to try new things.

Q: Okay. Any other challenges you experience as you set that type of free play up?

A: The kids who aren't as socially accepted having trouble sometimes finding a center to go to and finding someplace where they'll be accepted and that they can play together with a group. Sometimes during my free choice time I have some groups that get a little cliquey even at this age.

Q: Isn't that amazing?

A: You know, that they don't want to include, you know. Then I had a little bit of the boys only, girls only stuff this year and just, you know, making sure that all the children feel comfortable and welcome and teaching the other kids to include others has been one things we've had to work on.

Q: You know there's a book that's written about that. Vivian Paley. And that kind of goes along with what you're talking about. Okay. Can you give me some examples? I think you have. You've talked about the play, the way that you incorporate play into your curriculum. You talked a little bit about how you have centers and you showed me your room and you've given me examples of playdoh and what are some of the other examples of how you put play into the curriculum.

A: Oh, they play with playdoh, they play in the home center. We sometimes have the home center as a . . . At the beginning of the year they were enthralled with the calendar time and the calendar and they were, you know, kept moving stuff on the calendar, so I put them their own calendar up.

Q: What a good idea.

A: You know, in the home center and then we've had some office things in there. I got an idea alphabook. It said to put the coupons out of the newspaper and let them cut those out and use them like money. And then we've had some play money. We've kind of tried to change the home center around so that it kind of goes along with what we're doing. We talked about transportation and then we kind of went into a thing about your neighborhood and you know, kind of a community, and then it kind of moved into careers and jobs. I mean it was all kind of intertwined and that's kind of when we turned it into more of a store. And then at the beginning of the year it was more like a school, it was like their calendar time and they'd play school.

Q: So when you did transportation, how did you decide? Was that like part of the district's curriculum? Was that you?

A: No, I'm trying to think. I think it was on there. Something about, shoot, I can't remember. I did it last year. One of the reasons I did it was it's something that pretty much engages all the kids and it gave them an opportunity to learn a really good word, transportation.

Q: Yeah.

A: Well, we did it like the heckity, pickity, bungle, bumpy, except we don't do it like that. We just did clap it, stomp it, yell it, whisper it.

Q: Yeah. I love that.

A: And then we drew, you know. How do you get to school? How do you get home? What if you wanted to go here? What if you wanted to go there? We read books about different things and we made pictures. I cut it out with the Allison cutter, like a car, a boat, I can't remember what else, and a train and something else. If I could go anywhere in a car, I would go to? If I could fly anywhere in the world, I would fly to? And you know we just made a little transportation book like that. And then we showed them how shapes are in the transportation vehicles and just little things like that. We let them make a transportation vehicle with Legos and then I let them draw a picture of it, of their creation, and they told about it. And just little things like that.

Q: So how do you decide what you're going to do next?

A: I sat down at the beginning of the year and just kind of went through. In that four-year-old curriculum suggested outcomes they had a really good long-range planning sheet that was set up by nine weeks. And it says, you know, like focus and activities. And they're real small. I mean you don't detail it out or anything. But I just kind of went through and filled out for the four nine weeks and matched it up to holidays or special events that I knew were going on. The Fair, or Earth Day or Dr. Seuss' birthday or, you know, things like that and I just matched it up with that and just kind of see what kind of flow it had. And sometimes I didn't stick with that. A lot of times I would say, "Okay, we're doing well on transportation. We'll make that two weeks instead of just the one." Or there are way too many of these Dr. Seuss books for me to just do one day of it. You know, we'll do it all week. Or, you know, since we're doing so well with Dr. Seuss books, I think I'll work on rhyming words. We just kind of change as we go. Or if after I do assessments, like I kind of went through after the second or third nine weeks and I was like, they still are not getting their numbers well, you know. So we may stop and have a whole week. Go back and take a whole week and really study our numbers intently again. Anyway, we just kind of do it, I've just kind of done it where there was a need or where there was an interest. Sometimes I did an author study. I've done Dr. Seuss, we've done Jan Brett around Christmas. And we've done like Eric Carl, you know, a bunch of the nature books. Anyway, I just kind of plan my own things.

Q: Okay. What do you do when your children are having their free time and play? What are you doing?

A: I do all kinds of things. I get my things ready for the day, put center things out that I might need or get them ready for my assistant. We do things like take the roll. I will usually walk around and just kind of monitor progress and see how they're doing and I may sit down with a group and play with them or I may go over and talk to so and so who is over reading a book by himself and let him read the book to me. Or I may be going, "Playdoh, you're not making very good choices." I do a different variety of monitoring and then interaction with the kids.

Q: Okay. I think we talked last time about what kind of play opportunities you think should be in school, indoor and out.

A: I really wish and one of the things that we're going to do is we need a more age appropriate playground for my size and Kindergarten size. The things that we have out now make me a little nervous because they're a little bit too big for the kids and I banned them off . . . I told them at the beginning of the year, "You cannot go on the big slide," because they shoot off of it and they can't get their feet under them by the time they come down and I'm just, they're getting hurt. And then there's a yellow slide out there too and it is a twirling slide and you can tell where the dirt has eroded. Originally, it was pretty close to the ground and now it's up quite a bit. And it's the same way, it makes them dip up. We tried letting them go on that at the beginning of the year and we had so many get hurt that we said just forget it. We're not going on the yellow slide. And we waited until about a month before school was out and we let them on it. Because Kindergarten does let theirs go on both of them. But anyway, I would just like a different, oh, separate, maybe a little bit of a separate playground for the younger kids because I know that if we let the bigger kids play on it, it will get torn up. And then I'd kind of like to have a sandbox. I say that I would like to have one, but then I think, oh do I really? Outside, not inside. We have a little sand table in here. I think it would be good to have one outside.

Q: So you have a sand table in your room?

A: Yes, I do. Well, I have sand in one side and I have beans in another. But anyway, I'd like for my kids to have PE, but the PE teacher says, "Forget it. There is no way he's taking four-year-olds." This is the first year he's even taken Kindergarten.

Q: Oh, really.

A: So I try to do, I would like to maybe do a PE maybe of my own next year where they have more opportunity to use some maybe structured games or learn how. We gave them basketballs one day and my kids went nuts. Some of them had never touched a basketball. Just give them an opportunity with more of the equipment.

Q: Are you allowed to use the gym at all? Is there a gym?

A: There is a gym, but I don't think that there is a time when we could go in and use it.

Q: Okay. How long do your children play? How long is your play time?

A: Oh, they have between 30 and 45 minutes in their free choice time and their center time takes about an hour, so probably about half of their day, not counting recess. I mean, if you want to call centers play time, which they're about half and half. Half of it is play and half of it is teacher directed. So, maybe an hour, hour and a half.

Q: Okay. About half the time they're here. So, the center time, because they get a free play time that's 30 minutes, but then their center time is about an hour.

A: Right.

Q: In their center time do they have a choice of where they go to?

A: I try to have between four and five centers out, or maybe more than that. I have at least five things out and maybe six. And I might have one teacher directed center. I usually have two teacher directed centers and that's like journals, things that they make that they need help on. The kids that are bridging from one stage to another. And then I usually have maybe a puzzle center or something they can do independently on the floor. I usually have two things they can do independently on the floor and it may be an open center like blocks or legos or something that I don't have a particular goal in mind for them other than just experimentation with different things in there. Or it may be something that's a little more structured like I want you to sort the Teddy Bears and then when you get them sorted then you can play with them. Or I want you to sort them and see which one is more and you can keep the ones that have the most out but I want you to put the rest of them away or, you know, little things like that. Does that answer your question?

Q: Yeah. So there is some educational type play.

A: Right.

Q: Do you see a difference? Is there a difference between the free time and the center time?

A: Yes. The center time is a lot quieter.

Q: Really?

A: It really is. It's a lot quieter. They are more . . . as long as it's something that engages them, they do real well. If it's something that I haven't given . . . or I've found if it's something that I haven't given real clear and strict directions on or

something that's too hard for them or too easy, then if they get finished really fast then I'll lose them. If it's too hard, they won't try. You know, you've got to find that balance where it's just right, you know, like Goldilocks.

Q: Do they ever want to add stuff to it, to the activities?

A: They do real well. They'll ask sometimes. No they really don't, not usually. Probably because, you know, if it's not out they usually don't ask for it. But that's a good idea. Because if I had it set up where I maybe had shelves where they could go more independently and pick out, you know. "Oh, I'd really like to have these blocks with the bears," or "I'd really like to have these." I think I told you I've used milk can lids a lot for different things. I've had them use those for boats and stuff before for the bears. But if I had things out where they could access them easier and they were there to see, they probably would, but right now they don't really.

Q: Is there a reason that it's longer? Sometimes it is longer, like an hour?

A: It may not be that long. It's like 15 minutes per center and that just gives everybody an opportunity to do all the centers they want to.

Q: So how do you get them to go to the other one?

A: I let them do that themselves. When they're through, they move to another center or if I check and see that so and so has never moved from playdoh or the kids will come tell you. "So and so has been there a long time and I haven't had a turn there." And you'll go, "What other centers have you done?" "Well, none." "Well, okay, it's time to go do another center." I think I was telling you about my have-to centers. I try to have at least two centers that they have to do for one reason or another but I haven't come up with a system to make them accountable for that other than just we check their cubbies and see if see if they put that paper in there or not. Because I usually don't have them turn them in because the have-to centers are usually the teacher's centers and I can see what they're doing and see how they're doing so I don't have them turn their papers in. I may just check them there and stamp them there. But you know I was telling you I struggled with how to do centers, you know. Am I letting them have too much to free time? Are all my centers supposed to be structured or are some of them supposed to be free choice? Do I not make a have-to center? Do I just let them chose all the time? How do I do this? Do I tell them where to go? Do I let them chose? I've tried to do it three different ways and I still haven't come up with one that I have found that really works well. Like I said, I've read, you know, a couple of books and I'm going . . . I did a learning log with one, like I did in school, where you go through and as your reading it . . . because I don't have anybody to talk to. It's like okay, "May I ask this question?" I'm going to call Dr. Haller, or whoever, and say, "Okay, I have a question." And I did call her last year and told her, I

said, "You have got to teach us how to do centers. You have got to get that in your class."

Q: Do they talk about them in your classes?

A: Yes

Q: But yet you've never seen them in action.

A: We talked about them and like I told you, I can plan tons of activities for them. I just don't know how to manage them. It's the management of them that kills me. It's the management of them that makes me go, "How?" and "Why?" and I would be one of those learners that really needs to see it. I would just love to go to a classroom and, you know, see how they do it. The Kindergarten teacher, she's been here for five years, and I think she's kind of the same way. She's done it a little different each year.

Q: It's just a growing process.

A: Yeah. You know, I talk to her and she helps me some but her centers are a little different because hers read a little more. And at the beginning of the year mine may or may not recognize their name, depending on whether or not they've been to daycare. If they've been to daycare, they can recognize their names and find their cubbies. I'm just kind of still learning as I go I guess.

Q: I think we all are. We're still learning. We still do that.

A: It's like, "Well, okay, try this."

Q: If there is a child that's not playing, how do you encourage your children to play?

A: I have one who used to always come in at the beginning, when he first came in, he would just stand and watch. I would just leave him alone for a little bit and then, you know, as everybody . . . and they would bring him first thing, I mean as early she could bring him, he would be there. And he would just kind of stand there and it would be like, "Well, how are you so and so? Have you decided on a center yet?" "No, not yet." "Okay, well let me know if you need any help?" And I would just . . . I don't think I ever made him go to a center. I think eventually when he warmed up, he went to one himself. And as long as he was content, you know, I mean he still was watching and I know that an onlooker is a stage of play, you know, before they feel comfortable enough with the situation and with the other kids and everything to jump on in there. And I think that's part of what happened with him is that he got to be better friends with some of the kids.

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Q: You just described onlooker and you said that you knew the definition of play. Did you have a course on play or was it just kind of embedded in all your courses or several of your courses or was there a course?

A: Cognitive Development and probably Language Development were the two classes that we talked about play a lot.

Q: Okay. So it was just kind of embedded in a couple of the courses. You didn't have one course on that.

A: Yes.

Q: I was just wondering because you seem to know a lot of the terms that I don't hear some people . . .

A: Well, you know, I'm trying to think, there was something else that I just read. I do read a lot because I feel like I'm still, since I haven't taught that long, I don't have all the experience and it's like, "Wait a minute, I'm not ready!" But I am. I'm ready but I'm not, you know, so I'm still, you know, reading the magazines and buying the books and trying to get the ideas and I have just looked at something either that I had at school or that was here that was about play.

Q: Yeah, you're like, "Aha, that happened," and you just related it back to an experience that you've had with one of your students. Okay. We talked about what you think has influenced your beliefs regarding play and you talked a little bit about your schooling.

A: Yeah, I think that schooling and growing up. And like I say, I think I really came from an old school type of environment. And I can even remember when I was in class going, "Yeah, right, like that will work." The thing was, I got in here and was with the kids and tried some of the things. You know, I found that it really does work better that way. I'm more comfortable with it and they're more comfortable with it. Because I didn't like trying to make kids do things that they weren't ready for. And that's how I felt last year. You know, on the things that I was trying to make them do. I just felt, you know, this is not, from what I've learned, this is not where they should be. Or they're not ready for this or this is not the best way to approach, you know, making letters, or forming your letters or whatever. And I just think that my education has helped a lot because I came from a school that really, you know, believed in the teacher as the facilitator not as dictator. The teacher as being there to guide and instruct and not just spoon feed. You know, and I think part of my hesitation last year was, you know, that they were trying to teach us to be independent learners and independent teachers and that the teacher's guide is great and wonderful and everything as long as you don't use it as a Bible. It's a resource tool, use it as one of the many resources. You don't have to do just exactly what it says. You have the knowledge and trust your instincts and you can do things that are more creative than that and it's okay.

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And I think that's what has changed my view of play is just my education, my own children. Oh, my gosh, my own children majorly and then just the children that I've had in school, that I've taught. And I've seen two different ways of approaching things. And the kids are more successful and have been more happy and look more forward to coming to class when it is a more developmentally appropriate, more playful in reaching the classroom.

Q: So, when do you think, do you think play should be just in Kindergarten or four-year-old programs or . . .

A: No, I don't. In my experience so far, it's gone through about first grade and then "kerkck" and then second grade is like the transitional year and then they say, "Oh, my gosh, just wait 'til third grade." That's really when, you know, I had somebody tell me at this school that second grade is kind of your last year to have fun, where you get to do any fun activities and I really had a difficult time because my son was not in with the fun classroom. My son was in the structured, by the book, classroom. And that was very difficult. Because I was, you know, I tried to be supportive and I was friends with his teacher and I would make little suggestions here and there and, you know, it was just very difficult because he may have learned things by the book and by the worksheets and all that but it wasn't with any joy.

Q: That goes back to that happiness that you were talking about.

A: Yes. You know, just a have to, drudgery type thing. Okay, now it's time to do your homework.

Q: Do you think there is any time that you learn through playing as an adult. Can you think of a time that you have learned something through playing?

A: You can still learn social skills. I mean, you know, in talking about stages and onlooking. Being a baseball parent, T-ball or coached pitch or whatever, we're into coached pitch, and we have as much fun as they do and we're as stressed out as they are, you know. And sometimes the parents are so much worse than the kids. And you know that I'm sure. And baseball parents are the worst. We play basketball too. My son plays basketball too and my husband is the basketball coach and he's the assistant coach on the baseball team. So, yeah, I think we learn a lot from playing. We learn a lot from playing with our kids and we learn a lot about our parenting and the things that come out of their mouths. Like my four-year-old I have at home when I listen to her play with her babies.

Q: It teaches you a lot about yourself doesn't it?

A: Yes, and you're going, "Oh!!"

Q: I have one three and I'm thinking, "Oh, my goodness!"

A: Yeah. Did I really say that? And you know, a lot of times it's hilarious and it's so funny and we laugh but other times it's like, "Oh, gosh, I wish she hadn't picked that up from me."

Q: So when was the last time you played?

A: I have a four-year-old. Are you kidding?

Q: Last night, right?

A: Yeah. You know, we have to play to get the room cleaned up. Well, actually last night since this is the last day of school and we were all just kind of unwinding, I told my son I was going to show his class how to make God's eyes and then they didn't have time so went we got home, we went out and picked out some sticks and I was showing him. And I don't know if you would even call that play but it was just real relaxing and fun.

Q: Oh, I think that would be classified as play.

A: I do scrapbooks and I think that's fun, you know. And that is the time for me of just reflection and relaxing and unwinding and you can let your mind, you know, you don't have to be so focused and you can just go. Like on those God's eyes you can just go into manual, or autopilot and just kind of feel yourself unwind as you're wrapping the . . . And like I was telling Abe, it's like "I am so impressed. This is the first time you've done that and you did a wonderful job." Then my daughter got her sticks and she's got the scissors and she's having more fun cutting the yarn.

JILL

Interview 3
August 28, 2001

Q: What constraints of play if any have you had?

A: The management of it, space & room, behavior issues. Sometimes they go wild, they change the focus of the center, instead of sorting the do something else with the materials.

      "Play with a purpose is hard for them"

Q: When you taught kindergarten you used play a little differently in the classroom, if you went up to first or second how would you use play then?

A: Less time for play, I would have to have less time for play due to the harder academic restrictions. I would probably just have play in discovery areas like, math science.

Q: Did you review the transcripts from the other interviews?

A: Yes.

Q: Were they accurate?

A: Yes.

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PROTOCOL WRITING
Returned After Third Interview

What does it mean to play?

    Fun.
    To something socially.
    Alone or w/imagine.
    Doing what they want to do.
    Explore things (self or materials).

What are some examples of play in your classroom?

    Outside
    Choice time
    Farm
    Doll house
    Lego's
    Home center
    Blocks
    Arts
    Writing
    Puzzles
    Letters
    Puzzles
    Playdoh
    Teacher centers- you sit there

What was one of your favorite play experiences as a child?

    Rainy day recess time.
    Games.

APPENDIX E

REQUEST FOR TEACHER CONSENT

Dear Teacher:

As a graduate student, I am interested in learning about beginning early childhood teacher's meaning of "Play". In order to carry out this study, I would like to interview you on three separate occasions throughout the current semester. The interviews will be at a time and location convenient to you. During the interviews I will take written notes and make audio tapes of the interviews. The Interviews will be fairly extensive and may require up to an hour of your time.

Your identity and that of any students or other persons you discuss will be protected at all times. All audio tapes and written documents will be kept in a locked area of my home. After the study has been approved documents will be shredded, tapes will be erased and computer files will be deleted.

Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. I intend to conduct my research in such a manner as not to interfere with your teaching in any way.

Attached hereto is a consent form I need you to complete and return before the interviews begin.

For more information, feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

LaDonna Atkins

APPENDIX F

TEACHER CONSENT

I have read and understand this consent form. I have also been informed of the basis and process of the study. By signing this form, I give permission to participate in this research project concerned with my belief of the meaning of "play". A copy of this consent form has been given to me. If I have any questions, I will contact Dr. Kathryn Castle at 405-744-7125, LaDonna Atkins at 405-843-3234 or OSU Research at 405-744-5700.

Date:_____

Teacher's Name: _____

Teacher's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature:_____

APPENDIX G

PRINCIPAL'S CONSENT

I have reviewed the research proposal presented by LaDonna Atkins and have found her research question and the design of the study to be appropriate for beginning early childhood teachers. By signing this form, I give LaDonna Atkins permission to conduct her study at _____ school, a public school in _____, Oklahoma, during the 2001 Spring semester. I understand that the identity of all parties and the name of the school will be kept private and all tapes and computer files are to be destroyed or deleted upon approval of the study. I understand that _____ school may withdraw their participation in the study at any time without penalty.

Date: _____

Principal's Name: _____

Principal's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature _____

APPENDIX H

APPROVAL FROM INSTITUTIONAL

REVIEW BOARD

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 5/18/02

Date: Saturday, May 19, 2001   IRB Application No   ED01120

Proposal Title: THE MEANING OF PLAY TO BEGINNING EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

Principal
Investigator(s):

LaDonna Atkins   Kathryn Castle
1813 Drakeston   235 Willard
Oklahoma City, OK 73120   Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 203 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA 𝒜

LaDonna Long Atkins

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: THE MEANING OF PLAY TO BEGINNING EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

   Personal Data: Born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, March 19, 1969, the daughter
       of Lester and Evelyn Long.

   Education: Graduated from Bartlesville High School, Bartlesville, Oklahoma,
       May, 1987; received Bachelor of Science degree in Family Relations and
       Child Development from the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond,
       Oklahoma, in May, 1991; received a Master of Education degree in Early
       Childhood Education from the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond,
       Oklahoma, in May, 1994; Completed the requirements for the Doctor of
       Education degree at Oklahoma State University in May, 2002.

   Professional Experience: Employed as a referral specialist and parent educator
       for Rainbow Fleet/Child Care Connection , Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,
       1989 through 1991; taught four year old program at Oklahoma State
       University Extension, Oklahoma City, Child Development Center,
       Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1991 through 1993; taught public school
       kindergarten and first grade in Midwest City, Oklahoma, 1993 through
       1996; taught private school fourth grade in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,
       1996 through 1998; Adjunct Instructor, Department of Elementary and
       Early Childhood Education, Oklahoma Christian University, Edmond,
       Oklahoma, 1997 through 1998; Adjunct Instructor, Department of Human
       and Environmental Sciences, Oklahoma City Community College,
       Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1997 through 1999; Instructor, Department of
       Human and Environmental Sciences, University of Central Oklahoma,
       Edmond, Oklahoma, 1998 to the present.