AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ PHILOSOPHY AND PERCEPTIONS ARE INTERRELATED TO THE ACTUAL PRACTICE OF PLAY IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

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AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ PHILOSOPHY AND PERCEPTIONS ARE INTERRELATED TO THE ACTUAL PRACTICE OF PLAY IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership in the Department of Education and Educational Psychology at Western Connecticut State University

2012
AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS’ PHILOSOPHY AND PERCEPTIONS ARE INTERRELATED TO THE ACTUAL PRACTICE OF PLAY IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Children have a right to a childhood as well as an education that respects and supports their learning and growth in developmentally appropriate ways. One way to ensure that education is developmentally appropriate is through the use of play. Research supports the use of play as an educational methodology however as standards and mandates influence education, play is becoming an antiquated tool.

This research study examined the interrelatedness of kindergarten teachers’ philosophy, perceptions, and practices of play in the classroom through the use of a survey, interviews, and classroom observations, as well as a review of key district documents, such as websites, curriculum guides, and parent brochures. Kindergarten teachers (n = 35), from the northeast United States, responded to a researcher-created survey that examined teachers’ philosophy and perceptions of play in their classrooms. After data were collected from those surveys, a purposeful sample of teachers (n = 10) were interviewed to examine teacher philosophy and perception in greater depth. Finally, classroom observations of a purposeful sampling of teachers (n = 6) were conducted to compare teacher philosophy and perceptions about play with the actual practice of play in kindergarten classrooms.
Similar to the research, the teachers’ definitions of play as well as their philosophies were quite varied. Teacher philosophy, however, divided itself into two main categories: child-directed or teacher-directed. Teachers’ self-described philosophies reflected their approach in the classroom; however their actual practice of utilizing play was influenced by number of outside sources. These sources included: increased academic expectations by other teachers, administrators, and parents; their district’s kindergarten curriculum; as well as their personal expectations. These sources were a cause of teacher disconnects: a difference in the teachers’ philosophy compared with their actual practice of play in their classrooms.
AN INVESTIGATION OF HOW KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' PHILOSOPHY AND PERCEPTIONS ARE INTERRELATED TO THE ACTUAL PRACTICE OF PLAY IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

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2012
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has long been a personal goal to achieve a doctoral degree. Thankfully, I have met many inspiring people throughout my life whose influences have helped me. To say that I am grateful is an understatement as without their support and encouragement, I could not have accomplished this goal.

First, I must thank, Dr. Karen Burke who as my primary academic advisor helped me create and develop my topic. She encouraged, supported, and pushed me to grow as a researcher and a writer. With her guidance, I worked through my process from paper towels to chart paper to a thoughtfully written dissertation.

My family has been a constant source of support and encouragement. And while I know they may not have always understood why and what I was working on, they provided the words, hugs, or directives I needed to keep my focus. My parents, Del and Fran, have been my greatest supporters, always letting me know how proud they were of my goals; also giving me words of encouragement which sustained the process on the days when the writing wasn’t flowing. My sister, Kelly was always available for morning chats full of ideas which kept my research in perspective. Professionally I am fortunate to work with a wonderful group of people and I thank my Buchanan-Verplanck Elementary School family: Lynda, Nancy, Lisa, Mary, and especially Lori Ann, for providing encouragement and support as well as suggestions and feedback throughout this process.

I must not forget my friend of many, many years, Mike Duarte, who did not allow distance to impact our friendship. Many thanks for the calls, notes, and texts of encouragement when I needed them the most.
The inspiring professors at Western Connecticut State University have provided many wonderful experiences. I must thank Dr. Marcy Delcourt for her dedication to an incredible program as well as her willingness to share amazing knowledge of statistics and the research process. I am also grateful to Dr. Michael Wilson for providing me with guidance in the qualitative process numerous conversations and e-mails. But most importantly, I need to say, “thank you,” to my Cohort 3 members; without their support, encouragement, and humor this process would have seemed impossible.

I am especially grateful to Deb Mumford who shared her insights not only as an early childhood person, but as a writer and researcher. Our early morning chats were invaluable in so many ways.

I am also grateful to Gail DeBlasio who was always a phone call or e-mail away to answer a question or simply to help me through an unsure moment. Our practice sessions at Starbucks helped immensely!

My dissertation committee, Dr. Laura Shea Doolan and Dr. Pat Cosentino, provided insightful feedback and encouragement from the proposal to the final dissertation defense. Dr. Alice Gottlieb, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for the Hendrick Hudson School District, my reader, graciously accepted this role, eagerly awaiting my finished product.

Finally, I must say, “thank you, thank you, thank you” to Marilyn Tropiano who truly is a VIP in my life! She is a friend, mentor, second mother without whose keen editing skills; my dissertation would not have had concise wording and proper punctuation. We have had numerous insightful conversations for almost 20 years and I look forward to many more and a lot more trips to Bloomies!
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Tom Farbizio, whose presence in my life demonstrates God’s hand at work. I cannot express the gratitude and love I have for him or the assistance he provided throughout this process. He not only encouraged me, but spent countless hours listening as I talked through my thinking and helped to compile data into a spreadsheet synthesizing field notes. He uncomplainingly took care of all the day-to-day things that I had let slide when the writing was flowing. Our countless conversations about play and what it meant for children along with his questions and suggestions always helped me to better understand with what I was struggling. Without his calm love, support, and understanding I truly would not have reached this personal goal. You finally get a wife now!
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Kindergarten, once a classroom where children learned through play focused on developmentally appropriate practice and socialization, has become a place where children are prepared for academic testing administered three to four years later (Hatch, 2002; Elkind, 2001). This shift has caused play to be removed from many programs and forced many early childhood practitioners to abandon from their practice of play in classrooms. “The narrowing of the curriculum, by [No Child Left Behind (NCLB)] and mandated testing tied to sanctions, is reducing the opportunities for the student-centered learning needed to keep the curious child alive in students from kindergarten through graduate school” (Willis, 2007, p. 34). It has been shown that requiring kindergarten children to participate in academic pursuits and programs, once the domain of first graders has the potential to do more harm than good (Hatch, 2002; Willis, 2007). This concentration on academics could undermine children’s enthusiasm for learning, which could in turn negatively affect their academic performance (Stipek, 2006). In addition, some researchers (Hatch, 2002; Stipek, 2006; Willis, 2007) fear that this greater emphasis on academic skills will come at a cost of lack of attention to non-academic areas of development that are crucial for success in life. These skills include “…social competence, behavioral self-regulation, and physical and emotional well-being” (Stipek, 2006, p. 456).

The recognized academic emphasis of today has rendered the use of play, as an instructional tool, almost archaic. Too many educators, parents, and administrators fail to see its worth in the kindergarten classroom; yet according to Vygotsky, “…a child’s greatest achievements are possible in play, achievements that tomorrow will become her basic level of real action and morality” (1978, p. 100). Play allows children the ability to develop, grow,
and make sense of the world around them by creating “…a zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102). Through play, children explore and make sense of their world, they are able to interact and make connections not only with materials and concepts but with peers as well (Elkind, 1987). These connections may not occur through the use of paper and pencil tasks that are favored in more formal or academic programs. Further, while many administrators and parents insist that children receive academic instruction in kindergarten, not every child is developmentally ready. When children are not developmentally ready for the learning they are expected to do, undue stress is created and learning loses its appeal (Elkind, 1987).

**Rationale**

The pressures of high stakes testing, NCLB, and additional state and federal mandates have deemed this study necessary for the sake of young learners. Children have a right to a childhood with an education that respects and supports their learning and growth in developmentally appropriate ways. Kindergarten teachers are in a unique situation as they are housed in elementary schools and they teach the youngest children, whom research proves learn best through play. However, these teachers are challenged to meet curriculum standards placed on them by local districts, states, and even the federal government with an academic curriculum when their educational philosophy is grounded in developmentally appropriate practices such as play.

The pedagogy of education has changed greatly and with the advent of increased technology and information, the expectation is for children to master academic concepts appropriate for much older children at much faster rates. While some children may be able to master academic concepts and skills at an earlier age, most simply are not ready. The
expectation of implementing academic standards in kindergarten has pressured many early childhood teachers to replace play with academic activities; contradictory to their philosophy. Therefore, this study was important to illustrate the disconnect between teachers’ philosophy and the practice of play in kindergarten classrooms.

Statement of the Problem

In today’s standards-driven education, children are exposed to academic curriculum demands much earlier than ever. Educational programs in primary grades today resemble programs previously reserved for upper grades. This may not be a sound educational decision for all children. Although kindergarten teachers’ philosophy of teaching might have been influenced by the theory of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), many now implement district-mandated scripted curricula, which could even be ineffective or detrimental to some children. Thus this research examined how kindergarten teachers’ philosophies and perceptions about play translated into the practice of play in their kindergarten classrooms.

Past research is quite extensive on the use of play as a sound educational tool; unfortunately for many of our kindergarten students, current practice does not reflect these studies (Bennett, Wood, Rodgers, 1997; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1987; Jones & Reynolds, 1992). Therefore, this study endeavored to determine why the research regarding play, as a means of instruction, was being neglected in many public schools’ kindergartens. In addition, it explored the sources to see who and what were influencing educators to utilize developmentally inappropriate curriculum despite their educational philosophies. Kindergarten programs, today, are focused on academics and in doing so utilize methods and schedules not allowing for play. For many primary educators, this is a dichotomy of thought
and practice (Crawford, 2004; Goffin, 1998; Goldstein, 1998; Hatch, 2002). In addition national and state legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act have even dictated the types of materials and the programs many teachers incorporate into their curriculum. Therefore, this study also examined the degree of discrepancy between teachers’ philosophy of play and the actual practice of play in the classroom.

**Potential Benefits of the Research**

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationships among kindergarten teachers’ philosophy of the importance of play, perceptions of their own implementation of play, and the observed practices of play in the classroom. Through this investigation, the discrepancy between perceptions of play as an educational modality and its actual use in kindergarten classrooms was examined. The findings of this research are important for college programs preparing future teachers and administrators. If pre-service teachers understand and are prepared to utilize play and other developmentally appropriate methodologies, then they will be able to meet the needs of young children while meeting the challenges of today’s teaching. Likewise, those seeking administrative credentials will benefit by seeing the potential of play as an instructional methodology. The study will also help to inform future principals as they observe, evaluate, and assist teachers in developing the necessary skills to incorporate play into kindergarten classrooms. This, in turn, would directly impact current kindergarten teachers; encouraging them to utilize play whenever possible. With those implications at the college, teacher, and administrative, levels, this research ultimately impacts kindergarten student learning.
Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were defined for the purpose of this research study:

1. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) is the type of curriculum that recognizes and appreciates children’s levels of development, growth, and interest (Driscoll & Nagel, 2002).

2. Play constitutes activities which are intrinsically motivated and involve active engagement and attention to the means not the ends. There is non-literal behavior, and a freedom from external rules (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2003).

3. Facilitator describes the role a teacher utilizes to help a group achieve (Schwarz, Davidson, Carlson, McKinney, & Contributors, 2005; Thomas, 2010).

4. Zone of proximal development (ZPD) “… is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Overview of Methodology

Research Questions

Research supports that primary children learn best through play and interaction with materials as well as with their peers and adults (Elkind, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978, Willis, 2007). This study examined the interrelatedness between kindergarten teachers’ philosophy, perceptions, and practices of play in the classroom. This research was guided by the following questions:

1. What is the philosophy of kindergarten teachers towards play as an instructional methodology?
2. What are kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of the amount and quality of play implementation in their classroom?

3. How are play practices implemented in kindergarten classrooms?

4. What are the causes of disconnects among a teacher’s philosophy of play, perception of implementation of play, and the actual observed practice of play in classrooms?

**Description of the Setting and the Subjects**

The sample for this study included kindergarten teachers from seven urban and suburban public school districts located in the northeast United States. These districts represented varied socio-economic and culturally diverse populations. This sample was a purposeful sample; school districts were chosen to participate because all kindergarten students were housed in one building within the district. All kindergarten teachers from the identified schools were invited to participate in completing a researcher created survey.

After collecting the initial survey, 10 teachers were selected to be interviewed based on survey results. The interviewed teachers were identified by responses that indicated a strong connection or disconnect between their philosophy and perception of play as an instructional methodology in the classroom. Responses to the open-ended survey questions were also criteria for interview selection.

Based on the data obtained from the interviews, six teachers were then selected for a classroom observation. Again, the criteria for selection was the strong disconnect or connection between philosophy and perception of practice of play in the classroom.
Instrumentation

Qualitative data were collected for this study through the use of a survey, interviews, and classroom observations. The data sources for this study were: kindergarten teachers’ responses to the researcher created survey, *Teachers’ Play Philosophy and Perceptions of Implementation Survey* (see Appendix A), semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B), as well as observations made through the use of the researcher-created *Implementation of Play Observational Scale* (see Appendix C).

**Teachers’ play philosophy and perceptions of implementation survey.** This four-part survey was designed by the researcher to identify teachers’ philosophies and perceptions of play as an instructional tool in the classroom. The first part requested the respondent to provide basic demographic information as: degrees earned, years in teaching, grade levels taught, and years teaching in a kindergarten classroom. Parts two and three required the teachers to utilize a 5-point Likert scale as they responded to statements pertaining to educational philosophy, methodology, and play. Finally, the fourth section comprised of open-ended questions, required teachers to reflect on their philosophy towards play as well as describe the use of play in the classroom.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 teachers. The questions were created after analysis of survey responses and posed to gain a more in-depth insight into the philosophy and perception of play by kindergarten teachers. The teachers selected to be interviewed all responded to the same set of structured questions. When necessary additional individualized follow-up questions were utilized by the researcher to clarify and obtain more specific responses.
Implementation of play observational scale. This researcher created observational scale was used to examine the actual use of play in six kindergarten classrooms selected according to information obtained from the interviews and survey. The observed teachers were those who had illustrated a disconnect as well as a connection between their philosophy and perceptions of play. The scale allowed the researcher to make note of the quantity, quality, and variety of play materials available, as well as the organization of the room. Scheduling and the use of play as instructional methodology were also reviewed.

Description of the Research Design

By utilizing a multiple case study approach, this qualitative research explored kindergarten teachers’ philosophy, perceptions, and practices of play in the classroom. All kindergarten teachers from participating districts were invited to complete a survey regarding their philosophies and practices of play in the classroom. After the survey data were collected, the results were compiled and examined to identify emerging patterns and trends. Based on those responses, 10 teachers were selected to be interviewed. These 10 teachers’ responses had indicated either a strong value of play or that play was not valued strongly. In addition, their comments on the open-ended questions, also reflecting their beliefs, were instrumental in their selection to be interviewed. Finally, if their responses were contradictory between questions 6 through 17 and questions 18-26, further investigation of their beliefs and ideas was needed. Those teachers identified were interviewed utilizing a semi-structured approach. Finally, the researcher visited the classrooms of 6 of the 10 teachers to observe the practice of play in their classroom.
A review of key documents including curriculum maps, parent hand-outs, district and school mission statements, as well as information on district websites were collected and reviewed by the researcher to further understand the philosophy and cultures of the schools. In qualitative research, it is more accurate to use multiple sources of data than to rely on one source. Through the utilization of three sources, survey results, interviews, and observations, the data that were collected were triangulated. Triangulation, according to Bogdan and Biklen, “was first borrowed in the social sciences to convey the idea that to establish a fact you need more than one source of information” (2007, p. 115). This use of multiple sources gives the research more credibility and “…multiple sources lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena you were studying” (pp. 115-116). The following diagram illustrates the triangulation model which was utilized in this study (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Triangulation Model of Data Collection**
Description and Justification of the Analyses

Information gathered from the surveys was analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify teachers’ philosophy and beliefs about play, as well as the practice and use of play materials in their classroom. These data were scrutinized to categorize the responses from the surveys so that trends and hypotheses could be developed. The data from the surveys were also the basis for the interview questions. The collected interviews were transcribed and these data were examined and coded to identify possible similarities and differences in teacher philosophy, perception, and actual practice of play in classrooms. These interview data then created the criteria for the classroom observations. Classroom observations were conducted utilizing the researcher created Implementation of Play Observation Scale.

Play, an elusive concept, is widely accepted in early childhood research as a powerful learning tool; however, it is not widely utilized in kindergarten classrooms (Bennett, Wood, Rogers, 1997; Broadhead, 2004; Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Smidt, 2009). In Chapter two, relevant literature was examined to support the ideas of this research and to establish the constructs which guided the research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

To create a context for this study, the review of literature considered several key constructs: the definition of play; Vygotsky’s theory of child development; and amplification of child development. The constructs of free-play; the value of play in kindergarten classrooms; learning during play; the teachers’ role in play; and the disconnect between teachers’ beliefs and their practice in the classroom were also reviewed. Several key studies were highlighted as well as a great deal of research regarding play.

Definition of Play

The concept of play, while seemingly common and simple, is actually quite complex. It is easy to identify play from work activities, and certainly easily recognized, however play remains difficult to define. Attempts to define play are found in dictionaries as well as educational and psychology textbooks. Researchers generally do not agree on definitions of play as there are a variety of theories from a multitude of disciplines (Pelligrini, 2009). Play can appear quite differently leading to varied definitions. However there are several key characteristics upon which most researchers agree. These characteristics of play include: an activity which is intrinsically motivated, involves active engagement, has an attention to the means or process, not necessarily producing a product, and has a freedom from external rules (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Fromberg, 2002; Garvey, 1977; Van Hoorn, Nouro, Scales, & Alward, 2003; Vickerius & Sandber, 2006). Dr. Stuart Brown, a medical doctor, psychiatrist, clinical researcher, and founder of the National Institute for Play, accepts these characteristics, but illustrates the illusiveness that exists regarding play saying: “I sometimes compare play to oxygen—it’s all around us, yet goes mostly unnoticed or unappreciated until it is missing” (2009, p. 6). Again, while agreeing with the common characteristic of play, he
prefers not “… to define play because it is a thing of beauty best appreciated by experiencing it” (Brown & Vaughan, 2009, p. 15-16).

Researchers do agree that play is universal; everyone has experienced play in his or her life and most adults believe that it is something to do for pleasure. It is not generally viewed or utilized as an educational modality by many educators. It is interesting that early childhood researchers often described play as the work of children because it was something children need to do (Elkind, 1987; Jones & Reynolds, 1997; Paley, 2005). Likewise, it was a commonly held belief among early childhood educators that learning could occur through play (Bennett, Wood, Rogers, 1997). Unfortunately, this belief did not come from empirical data which may be why so many administrators, parents, and even teachers today are unable to accept the use of play as a part of instruction.

Despite the lack of data the field of early childhood education supported the use of play as a learning modality through multiple researchers’ studies, publications, and books (Bennett, et al., 1997; Broadhead, 2004; Paley, 2005). For children, play was a means of learning and processing, “Play is their self-actualization, a holistic exploration of who and what they are and know and of who and what they might become” (Broadhead, 2004, p. 89). Play as an educational modality was not meant to teach children a specific set of skills outlined in an academic curriculum or teaching manual; it was however a means for children to manipulate, risk-free, and to engage with concepts as well as with each other (Bergen, 1998). The use of play also allowed children the opportunity to become self-directed learners, to manipulate concepts and ideas they see and hear in ways that make sense to them and in ways that are less stressful (Goldstein, 1998; Whitebread, Coltman, Jameson, & Lander, 2009). Finally the social engagement inherent in play provided children with
support and guidance from their peers that could never be duplicated by the adults with whom the child worked. It is this social interaction which developed skills a child needed to master within the academic curriculum as well as to be successful in life.

**Theory of Child Development**

Vygotsky was an influential researcher who studied how children’s play impacted their cognitive development (Pelligrini, 2009). He focused on how the social aspects of a child’s life impacted their cognitive development which at the time was contradictory to most Western developmental theorists (Seng, 1997). Vygotsky’s theory of development was centered on the idea that there was an interaction between a child’s world, their cognitive development, and the culture from where they come (Seng, 1997). Within his developmental theory, there are several key constructs which are crucial to this study. These include the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), cultural historical theory, play as an instructional methodology, and the amplification of child development.

Vygotsky distinguished play from other forms of activity by suggesting “…that in play a child creates an imaginary situation” (1978, p. 93). Within these imaginary situations, children were able to make sense of the world and the concepts they were struggling to learn. This imaginative play also involved the creation of rules that developed as the children engaged in play. These rules reflected their experiences within the formal restraints of their society’s culture and were created from the engagement of play (Smidt, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). Young children were better able to accept the rules created in play than they might have accepted the traditional rules in the classroom due to their lack of self-control.

Young children sought instant gratification of their needs or wants and when this gratification was not immediate, a child’s behavior could become negatively influenced and
tantrums could occur (Vygotsky, 1978). Four- and five-year-old children, the age in which children enter kindergarten in the United States, were able to use play as a means of satisfying these desires. Vygotsky stated, “To resolve this tension, the preschool child enters an imaginary, illusory world in which the unrealizable desires can be realized, and this world is what we call play” (1978, p. 93). When children do not have ample opportunities or time for, or are unable to play, they would likely be unable to control their need for instant gratification impacting their ability to interact positively with their peers. Academic aspects of the classroom may be negatively impacted as well. Children also may demonstrate greater frustration or a decreased ability to focus, especially on non-interest activities. Increased behavior issues are the end result of lack of play for some children. For Vygotsky, providing opportunities for children to play especially helped those who were not yet ready for the academic focus of kindergarten as a Zone of Proximal Development was created naturally in a play environment.

**Zone of Proximal Development**

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is defined by Vygotsky as “…the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978, p. 86). By working cooperatively with adults, peers, or older children, a child is able to develop their individual abilities (Seng, 1997; Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000). In this way, play, which by its very nature creates a ZPD, allows a child to be active in a supported learning environment. Play is the ultimate “self-help tool” (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999, p. 10). It is within this ZPD that the “important mechanisms and regularities of mental development in ontogeny are
concentrated” (Sharpe, 2009, p. 9). The theory of ZPD as developed by Vygotsky can be applied to both emotional as well as intellectual processes (Sharpe, 2009). In conjunction with the ZPD, some children may require scaffolding to bridge gaps in their learning. Scaffolding is the assistance that a more capable peer, older child, or adult provides within the ZPD (Mooney, 2000; Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000). It is defined as “…an instructional process by which the teacher adjusts or modifies the amount and type of support offered to the child that is best suited to his level of development” (Seng, 1997, p. 9). With ZPD and scaffolding children are able to learn complex skills. For Vygotsky, the teacher’s role was not only to provide scaffolding, but to keenly observe children so that the areas where a child needed scaffolding would be identified, as well as their eventual mastery (Mooney, 2000). In practice, Vygotsky’s theory required and encouraged teachers to construct the classroom curriculum in ways that stretched a child’s knowledge as they were scaffolded or supported in learning (Mooney, 2000).

**Play and the zone of proximal development.** Play as previously defined naturally created a ZPD for children. Vygotsky succinctly summarized the way play aides children’s development, “In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all the developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development” (1978, p. 102). It followed that through the social interactions of play, children created their own scaffolding which enabled them to become self-directed in their learning (Broadhead, 2006). Play that was self-directed allowed children to stretch and participate in learning in ways they would not with other adult initiated activities (Bennett, Wood, & Rogers, 1997).
As teachers examined play as Vygotsky did, they had the opportunity to see how children rose above their initial developmental levels. Examples of this would include a child pretending to read a story to a group of dolls or writing a list before they were able to actually read or write (Bennett, et al., 1997). Vygotsky stated that, “Though the play-development relationship, can be compared to the instructional-development relationship, play provides a much wider background for changes in needs and consciousness” (1978, p. 102). In play then, children utilized an imaginative world where they were able to work through real situations and create a multitude of solutions to problems (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD thus becomes a dynamic zone that evolves to meet the changing needs of the developing child. “Tasks that children cannot do individually but that they can do with help from others invoke mental functions that are currently in the process of developing, rather than those that have matured” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 26). Vygotsky also chose to focus on the skills the child was in the process of learning; skills needed for the future, not the skills that were mastered by the child (Berk & Winsler, 1995). For Vygotsky, education was to provide children with experiences that were in their ZPD; the classroom teacher had an important role in creating those activities. Play was one way that this can be accomplished in the kindergarten classroom because play as an instructional modality created a ZPD for children.

Unfortunately, there has not been a great deal of research, especially in the United States regarding the concept of ZPD (Sharpe, 2009). According to Sharpe, “…it is as if contemporary psychology has existed…and still exists, not ‘inside’ Vygotsky’s thoughts and ideas but next to them” (2009, p. 10). Since Vygotsky’s view of the holistic child has not been fully realized, the theory of ZPD “…remained essentially unrealized, both in theory and
practice of education…” (Sharpe, 2009, p. 10). However researchers such as Bodrova and Leong have introduced Vygotsky’s theories to the United States and his work is beginning to see a resurgence of interest.

**Cultural Historical Theory**

In addition to ZPD and scaffolding, children also need tasks which are rooted in their culture. According to researchers Bodrova and Leong, Vygotsky’s work centered on three foundational constructs in attempt to describe quality early childhood programs, “cultural historical theory, play as a leading activity, and the concept of amplification” (2005, p. 437). Culturally-based activities combined with scaffolding support via a peer, older child, or adult would enable children to develop skills that they could not do independently (Seng, 1997). These types of activities could all be created through the use of play in kindergarten classrooms. For example, different types of clothing that represented diverse cultures could be utilized in dramatic play or dress up while a variety of kitchen tools and multicultural dolls could be used in a house keeping center or as part of dramatic play too (Rettig, 2002).

Long before formal schooling began, a child would have learned and mastered many self-help skills, such as speaking and dressing. The skills a child learned outside of a school were the verbal and cognitive skills they needed to participate and become active within their culture (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Cultural historical theory examined the interrelatedness of nature and nurture. This was not an either or process, but rather a meshing of the two in conjunction with how the child develops and grows. It was the blending of the biological development with the culture which the child was raised that created the cognitive development of the child (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). It was Vygotsky’s way of clarifying the “nature-nurture issue in child development” (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000, p. 374).
“Vygotsky argued that a child’s development cannot be understood by a study of the individual; one must also examine the external social world in which that individual has developed” (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 18). This meant that in schools educators needed to take into account the social backgrounds of the children as well as allow children the time to be social within the classroom.

Vygotsky’s thoughts regarding cultural historical theory developed through the idea of culture influencing people from “the writings of Franz Boas and his students” (Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2007, p. 197). Vygotsky’s theory arose from being “immersed in an academic and social tradition that assumed a close link between sociocultural evolution and history” (Cole & Gajdamaschko, 2007, p. 198). He assumed that the child’s cognitive development was first influenced by the exposure the child had with the oral traditions and dialogue of their culture. In this way, Vygotsky’s theory of child development valued the cultural and social activities in which a child participated. He also observed how children developed based on these interactions (Berk & Winsler, 1995). The main thought behind Vygotsky’s theory of cultural history is that our actions are governed by our personality as a person realizes that he or she is the source of their own activity (Sharpe, 2009).

Thus, as a child matured, their physical growth combined with their cultural interactions and influenced the skills the child developed. “Children change emotionally and cognitively as a result of their interactions and the use of cultural tools: this is cultural development” (Smidt, 2009, p. 159). Children from different cultures developed different skills based on the needs their cultural experiences dictated (Berk & Winsler, 1995). In addition to developing these skills such as language or role in a group, the child also was able to develop self-regulatory skills based on their interaction with peers and adults. It follows
that social interactions in which a child is involved aides the development of the cultural skills. In summary, Vygotsky considered these cultural skills simple but crucial to provide children with a foundation that in turn provided the scaffolding needed to ultimately learn more complex academic skills demanded in formal education: an important key to a child’s development. Cultural learning leads the way for the formal educating that schools provide (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000).

**Play as Instructional Methodology**

Children utilize play to process what they observe adults doing and saying as well as to incorporate their life experiences. Play allows children to manipulate and rework ideas and concepts in relation to the interactions they have with people and materials; to formulate ideas and grow. Through play, then a child is able to synthesize his or her learning by blending the information presented in the classroom with their life experiences.

While many researchers agree on a number of common characteristics of play as previously noted, Vygotsky identified only two, “… creating an imaginary situation…” and a situation that “…contains rules for behavior…” to define play experiences (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 53-54). These rules reflected the societal norms the child experienced from their cultural upbringing. For Vygotsky, play was truly a social process. The imaginative aspect combined with following rules that have been created by those who are playing; enabled children to develop cognitive as well as self-regulatory skills that direct academic instruction does not. In Vygotsky’s definition of play, a child creates meaning though the course of their play, “In play a child spontaneously makes use of his ability to separate meaning from an object without knowing he is doing it, just as he does not know he is speaking in prose but talks without paying attention to the words.
Thus, through play the child achieves a functional definition of concepts or objects, and words become parts of a thing”, (1978, p. 99). In this sense, play allows the child to make generalizations and to move from concrete concepts to logical and abstract thinking (Smidt, 2009). Again, this development involved the prior cultural and social interactions the child had to act as the scaffolding for the new learning and development (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Broadhead, 2006; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978).

The creation and following of rules in play is an example of a child’s ability to exert self-control, “A child’s greatest self-control occurs in play” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 99). To participate, a child would ignore his impulses and follow the rules that had been established for the play situation. These rules often reflected the norms of the family and culture from which the child had come (Smidt, 2009; Van Hoorn, et al., 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Whitebread, Coltman, Jameson, & Lander, 2009). Children in a kindergarten classroom were highly interested in developing relationships. “Their desires to participate in imaginary worlds shared with others leads them to accept and invent new symbolic meanings, regulate their own impulses, and collaboratively construct pretend realities” (Van Hoorn, et al., 2003, p. 30). This desire to engage with other children in play allowed children to better control their impulses and maintain their focus than when asked to participate in a teacher-directed task (Bennett, et al., 1997; Van Hoorn, et al., 2003; Whitebread, Coltman, Jameson, & Lander, 2009). Importantly, play allowed for the development of many necessary self-monitoring skills that a child needs to access the academics of school (Ashiabi, 2007).

**Amplification of Child Development**

Amplification of child development is a term that was developed by Alexander Zaporozhets, a Russian researcher who was instrumental in implementing
Vygotsky’s ideas (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). Basically the term referred to enriching educational experiences for children while maintaining their developmental levels (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). In essence, children, especially those in the early childhood period, should be exposed to educational practices and experiences that are age appropriate. Early childhood educational experiences should not be considered merely as diluted versions of practices of intermediate classrooms (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). “For preschoolers, amplification of development involves expanding and enriching of the uniquely ‘preschool’ activities, ensuring that in these activities, children are truly functioning at the highest levels of their ZPD” (Bodrova & Leong, 2005, p. 441). These activities encouraged the development of skills which are needed for future learning without forcing children from their developmental levels. Maintaining practices which are appropriate for early childhood means encouraging play opportunities which create the ZPD young children need to succeed (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). To ensure that children truly are functioning within their ZPD, "Zaporozhets put forth a list of essential activities to include “productive activities” (such as drawing, building, and modeling), “creative activities” (e.g., creation of poems and stories, dramatization, etc.), “practical activities” (such as participating in simple chores), and social interactions with peers and adults” (Bodrova & Leong, 2005, p. 441). These activities were in conjunction with the use of dramatic play. Dramatic play in the early childhood classroom was an essential component and a means of incorporating play into the curriculum (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Bredekamp, 1987; Whitebread, Coltman, Jameson, & Lander, 2009).
Free-Play

Within the larger scope and stages of play, comes a term; free-play, that may be even more difficult for many administrators, parents, and teachers to understand and utilize as an instructional methodology. The term free-play invokes a vision of multitudes of children running amuck in a classroom, with little direction or accountability. To the contrary, free-play, when well planned, is a time when children are engaged in a variety of activities of their choosing with minimal distraction, “Such a happy situation comes about only by careful planning” (Cow, 1982, p. 3). By capitalizing on their natural curiosity free-play allows children the opportunity to explore, learn, and engage in self-chosen activities independently or with other children. Through free-play, children “…grow intellectually, emotionally, and socially” (Cow, 1982, p. 3).

Free-play allows children the ability to explore and encourages the use of their imagination (Cow, 1982), something that children today seem to be lacking. Free-play should be initiated by the child; however, educators can organize the environment so that it is related to the curriculum and learning standards (Cow, 1982; Singer, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006). Providing materials as well as modeling free-play are ways educators can incorporate it into their classrooms. Because today’s children engage less in play during non-school hours, it becomes necessary for schools to include it as part of the learning process. Free-play helps children develop their abilities to listen, share, and interact with their peers and adults as well as manage their behavior to engage in learning (Singer, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, play; including free-play needs to be available as a learning modality.
**Value of Play in the Kindergarten Classroom**

It has been noted that the term play is difficult to define; however researchers have agreed that the concept of play is an important one in the field of early childhood because “it is a serious business involving children taking steps to move from dependence to independence” (Smidt, 2009, p. 117). Even so early childhood teachers are often forced to defend their use of play in the classroom, especially in the kindergarten classroom because the significance of play is not universally accepted or even understood (Elkind, 2001).

Additionally, Elkind states that “In a society that prides itself on its preference for facts over hearsay, on its openness to research, and on its respect for ‘expert’ opinion, parents, educators, administrators, and legislators are ignoring the facts, the research, and the expert opinions about how young children learn and how best to teach them” (1987, p. 1).

Researchers have found that children utilize play as a means of creating an understanding of the world around them (Bredekamp, 1987; Fromberg, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Whitebread, Coltman, Jameson, & Lander, 2009).

In addition in the past few years as children have seen an increase in the academic demands placed on them by national, state, and local mandates, play time in school has greatly decreased (Singer, Golinkogg, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006). Research also shows that in addition to play disappearing in classrooms, children are playing together less outside the classroom, and there is a decrease in play with their parents as well (Elkind, 2007; Singer, Golinkogg, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006).

Anything resembling play today is often adult directed and structured or solitary engagement with technology. There is little time for play both at school as well as at home because “children are being increasingly programmed and structured” (Singer, Golinkogg, &
Hirsh-Pasek, 2006, p. 3). Children do not use their imaginations or create, in part because today’s toys are so realistic that a child never needs to construct or substitute. Coupled with increased time watching TV, playing video games, and interacting with other media, children have been stripped of their ability to use their imaginations to develop play themes and problem solving skills (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Now children have limited play abilities, stifled imaginations, and depend on adults for entertainment (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Play in school has become even crucial for the life success of children.

Early childhood educators, researchers, and supporters understand that play is extremely crucial work for children because it offers the opportunities to practice skills, interact with people and objects, develop the ability to sort through concepts and feelings, and relax from the pressures of the current academic atmosphere. There is a “relationship between play and learning” (Fromberg, 2002, p. 3), and when children are encouraged and supported to play, they are better able to make sense of the world around them (Brotherson, 2009; Fromberg, 2002). Furthermore, according to Brotherson, one of the most valuable aspects of play for today’s children is that its use in school can create connections to adults (2009). These connections with adults and peers, help children develop the cognitive as well as emotional skills that will help a child succeed, not only in school, but in life.

Teaching style in the classroom can be described as either teacher-directed, child-centered, or a combination of both. The teacher-directed style utilizes direct instruction which emphasizes paper and pencil tasks (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). In contrast, child-centered learning is characterized by hands-on activities comprising an integration of content areas and interaction of students with each other as well as with the teacher (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). In a study conducted by Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006)
these descriptors were utilized to identify characteristics of teachers who utilized play and developmentally appropriate practices in kindergarten classrooms. In this study data were collected from kindergarten teachers (n = 34) through the use of surveys, interviews, and observations. The teachers in this study had taught from 1 year to 32 years (M = 11.94, SD = 8.86). Similarly, the years they taught in kindergarten were 1 year to 23 years (M = 7.57, SD = 7.13). Utilizing a cross-case approach, data were qualitatively analyzed independently by two researchers who examined how teachers’ self-reported beliefs directed their practice. The researchers discovered that regardless of teaching styles, all 34 teachers believed that kindergarten had become much more academically challenging and there was an observed shift away from developmental practice. These teachers noted an increased pressure to “ready students for the next grade level” (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006, p. 71). This pressure was described as both self-imposed and imposed by others.

**Learning During Play**

As stated earlier, “Learning itself is enhanced by play”, (Brown & Vaughan, 2009, p. 100), was a comment with which most early childhood educators would agree. Children’s play leads to social, cognitive, and physical development. In addition, specific abilities in language, communication, and self-regulation also develop (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Play also allows children of varying developmental levels to communicate during an activity or imaginative scenario. They are able to reenact stories they have heard, role play, and write during play, creating lists, maps, notes, or signs. Communication thus becomes purposeful and meaningful. Through these interactions, they are able to experiment with oral and written language in non-threatening ways. In addition to communication skills, play allows children to develop cognitive, gross, and fine motor skills. When they play, children are
pretending; they move their bodies, create mental pictures, scenes, and needed props from existing and available materials. When children are engaged in play, they are also more likely to follow and learn from the behaviors of other children. This comes from following the rules that have been established by the players as well as controlling their impulses, reactions, disappointments, or conflicts that arise (Ashiabi, 2007; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Schrader, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). It follows that with ample opportunity to play, children will be better equipped to successfully and appropriately handle conflicts that occur in the classroom.

Through play it is also possible to address the areas of mandated. Specific academic skills can easily be incorporated into play to support and scaffold children of diverse abilities. Play as an instructional methodology requires that the teacher be involved in many roles to promote the development of the whole child: the focus of the early childhood educator (Ashiabi, 2007; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Schrader, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978).

**Teachers’ Role in Play**

However, play as an instructional methodology is not widely utilized in today’s standards-based classrooms. To implement play successfully, teachers need to understand the importance of play as well as their role. They also need to understand that play cannot simply occur in the classroom but requires careful teacher planning and implementation (Ashiabi, 2007; Jones & Reynolds, 1992). The early childhood teacher has an important part in structuring the climate of the classroom so that play is supported. The teacher needs to have a clear understanding of children and how they develop to allow them the ability to control and initiate play as well as grow as independent learners (Broadhead, 2009). When utilizing play the teacher must interact with the child because conversations that occur will
aid the child in learning and development (Bennett, Wood, & Rogers, 1997). Thus in utilizing play, kindergarten teachers have several roles: planners, scribes, mediators, observers, and players (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; 1997). However the standards, assessments, and accountability movements of today’s educational system have created new roles of the early childhood teacher, such as assessor and evaluator which in turn, have created less room for play and decreased the active roles of teachers to facilitate play in the classroom.

Because children today have very programmed and scheduled lives outside of school opportunities are limited for open-ended, self-directed, dramatic play (Elkind, 1987; 2001; 2007). Therefore, many children come to school lacking the skills or understanding of play. The teacher’s role in play becomes even more crucial. The teacher’s role can be uninvolved or active, and according to Johnson, Christie, and Yawkey can include, “onlooker, stage manager, co-player, play leader, and director/instructor” (1999, p. 32). The teacher, therefore, needs to provide opportunities as well as materials for play but also needs to actively engage and play until they are able to play spontaneously. An uninvolved teacher can unintentionally hamper play by sending the message that play is not important or valued in the classroom (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999). An active teacher is beneficial to children, however a balance must be established with how and when the adult does becomes involved and when the adult should be an unobtrusive observer. Either role can greatly impact how the child plays and ultimately learns. If the adult is too involved as a director, the child may feel that the play is not theirs and will become disinterested and then learning will not follow. Children’s learning through play is spontaneous and given the opportunity to play, will allow children to discover and
manipulate concepts in ways scripted lesson plans cannot. Teachers also need to develop keen observational skills that enable them to notice the child manipulating concepts, as well as working through issues, both emotional and cognitive, such as how the child interacts with peers (Jones & Reynolds, 1992). If play is the means, then observation is the tool that supports it use. Teachers, parents, and administrators need to be educated as to the importance of observing children at play. Those observations will yield detailed results of children’s learning (Broadhead, 2009), which are just as important data as test scores. Thus the teacher’s role in play needs to be dynamic to allow for change as the child develops and grows. As children play and become more experienced, the teacher’s role will need to evolve to suit the level of the children’s development.

**Onlooker or observer.** These observation skills are crucial when the teacher is in the role of the observer or onlooker. While this role is passive in the actual play, it is active because the teacher is close to the children who are playing and engaged in the situation (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). While the teacher doesn’t interact in the play other than viewing the children she is not otherwise occupied. During this time the teacher should be making notes about individual children as well as the interactions of the group. These notes are necessary for future planning, student assessment, and to record the growth and development of the children. These notes are also the necessary data that will support the use of play in the classroom.

**Stage manager.** As the stage manager, the teacher plans and organizes the room to allow for ample time and materials for children to play. This is an active role because the teacher has planned for play but also engages with the children supplying additional materials based on observations made as the play evolves (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). In
addition, the teacher can interact by commenting or making suggestions which the children can accept or ignore, as the focus of play remains theirs. This is a role where the ZPD can be utilized as the teacher makes suggestions that provide scaffolding to children playing at varying levels of development. This is very common in integrated classes where children have a various learning needs such as speech and language delays or diagnosed with a Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD).

**Parallel player.** Just as parallel play occurs among children, it can occur between the child and an adult. Parallel play refers to the type of play where two children are engaged in a similar activity without interacting with each other (Johnson, Christie, & Yawket, 1987). This role calls for the teacher to be actively engaged in play alongside the child but not directly teaching. During this role, the teacher may comment on their own play, but not that of the child with whom they are parallel playing (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). This role is helpful for several reasons. First, it can benefit a withdrawn or shy child because the teacher is not directing a comment to the child’s play. Therefore that child would not have to engage verbally with anyone. Also, by engaging in their own play, the adult demonstrates that play is valued. Finally, a child may notice a new way to utilize the play material.

**Co-player.** As a co-player, the teacher enters the play situation but allows the children to continue to direct it (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). The teacher interacts with the children by asking for directions or by responding to their actions or comments but does not initiate or direct the play (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). The adult’s comments can be accepted or rejected by the children. This is a role which allows a teacher to enrich the play by engaging the children in conversations which may increase the interest in the play as well as encouraging language use and development through questioning and conversation. The
teacher has the ability to bring more children into the play scene through the conversations and suggestions of additional roles which fit into the play theme. For example, if the children are playing house, the teacher can invite other children to join the play by suggesting other roles such as additional siblings, neighbors, or pets. Again, this role encourages children to engage in play for a longer period of time and also demonstrates the teacher’s interest and value of play.

**Play leader.** According to Heidemann and Hewitt when teachers “become play leaders, they use their observations to more directly influence play experiences” (2010, p. 120). During this role, the teacher is actively engaged in the play with a group or individual goal in mind. The teacher may redirect the play so that she is able to model a behavior or skill. In this role however, if the children choose to ignore the modeling, the teacher will be more emphatic and change the play to allow for more direct instruction. This role also provides a means for introducing new materials, themes, or helping children who are having difficulty entering into a play situation. Prior observation and notes are essential to the success of this role as the teacher then knows the direction the play needs to move or which children need direct modeling of skills or behaviors.

**Play advocate.** The last, yet most important role a teacher has in regard to play is to become an advocate. In today’s standards-based, assessment, and data driven society, play is not always valued by parents, administrators, or policy makers. It is the responsibility of kindergarten teachers to share their research as evidence of the value of play. To do this, teachers need to include play and the research that supports it as they develop and share their educational philosophy or when developing their lesson plans and assessments (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). They also need to share observations with parents, administrators, and
other teachers to illustrate what the children are learning through play. Their data thus reinforces the current research and illustrates the value of play. Just as children need additional scaffolding and assistance to play, parents, administrators, and other teachers need scaffolding in the form of research and practice sharing to understand and accept the use of play as an instructional methodology.

In summary, teachers play many important roles in the use of play in the classroom. Today, children enter kindergarten with more academic than play experiences; therefore the teacher’s role needs to be fluid with first being a keen observer to identify when and how she should act. That observation guides the additional roles and remains a necessary component of each one. Throughout the day, the teacher needs to be able to flow in and out of any and all of these roles to successfully utilize play as an instructional modality.

**Disconnect Between Teacher Beliefs and Practice**

The kindergarten classroom today is an ever-evolving grade, most often housed in an elementary school and while academically quite similar to first grade, continues to share a philosophy to pre-school or nursery school. “Although 5-year-olds are developmentally more like preschoolers than older children, kindergarteners are usually housed institutionally with elementary schools” (Tomlinson, 2009, p. 188). This reflects the present culture where children’s lives are structured, programmed, and often as scheduled as their parents, “…a phenomenon that seems to minimize the importance of play in childhood” (Ranz-Smith, 2007, p. 271). Originally, kindergarten was the stepping stone to formal learning in the elementary school, meant to ease the transition to group learning and provide socialization while supporting a child socially as well as emotionally (Tomlinson, 2009).
The concept of kindergarten is conflicted, as many kindergarten teachers today are torn between their early childhood philosophy, pedagogy, and the practice that is expected of them through state and federal mandates, as well as local practices that have formalized education (Crawford, 2004; Goldstein, 2005; Gronlund, 1995). For kindergarten teachers, it can be a “precarious balancing act” (Ranz-Smith, 2007, p. 271) as they struggle to do what they feel is sound for children while implementing the academic programs as they are instructed. Hatch states “…the standards movement--so pervasive across educational settings today-- is threatening children in early childhood” (2002, p. 458). This struggle is rooted in mandates as well as from parental and administrative pressure. However early childhood teachers are trained to teach the whole child not just academically to the standards (Hatch, 2002). Therefore, for many kindergarten teachers, their early childhood backgrounds and beliefs clash with the expectations of parents and administrators, causing them to feel the need more than ever to justify the use of play as an instructional modality or to minimize its use in the classrooms (Goldstein, 1988; Hatch & Freeman, 1988; McMullen, 1999). The pressure to accelerate achievement gets translated to teachers as “Do a better job of getting your kids up to the standards--or else” (Hatch, 2002, p. 458). This threat is very real when school funding is tied to results. “The public’s sense of urgency in fulfilling the mandate for No Child Left Behind challenges those who believe in child-centered teaching to maintain child-initiated learning experiences among the teacher-initiated lessons” (Ranz-Smith, 2007, p. 272). This leaves many teachers feeling frustrated because there is a disconnect between their philosophy and their practice in kindergarten classrooms.

Researchers Erwin and Delair utilized a multi-year qualitative study which found that teachers who make use of play in the classroom felt a “friction between the ‘direct
instruction’ perspectives” (2004, p. 36) of their colleagues and themselves. Often they were looked at as not preparing children for future assessments or curriculum. In this study, the researchers utilized a “participant inquiry approach” (Erwin & Delair, 2004, p. 37) over two years, collecting data through informal conversations with teachers, interviews, and classroom observations. The participants of the study ($n = 12$) were public-school teachers who taught kindergarten through third grade. All of the teachers in the sample utilized play as an instructional methodology, though usage varied greatly from teacher to teacher. Erwin and Delair noted that these teachers all believed that “play had instructional value as well as recreational and developmental benefits” (2004, p. 41). In addition, they identified behaviors these teachers utilized to preserve their use of play in the classroom which included: “activism, organizing, withdrawal, secrecy, cheating, filing complaints, undermining, and quitting” (2004, pp. 43-46). These behaviors were the coping mechanisms teachers utilized to combat the friction and frustration they felt while trying to maintain their use of play as an instructional methodology.

This difficulty occurred in part because of the differences in primary and elementary educational histories and developments. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) defined early childhood from birth through age 8. The education of children in grades kindergarten through second and even third grade should be guided by NAEYC standards which illustrate the practices developmentally appropriate for young children. Often, kindergarten and first through third grades are thought of as merely extensions of the other grades in an elementary school (Goldstein, 1998). Primary educators often have philosophies, educational experiences, and beliefs that differ from those who teach older children.
The differences between early childhood and upper elementary practices are well documented in the literature. Goffin identified three main areas of difference between early childhood and upper elementary educators, these include: “…amount of flexibility accorded them [early childhood teachers] in the determination of educational objectives and the content of the curriculum, in their reliance on knowledge of child development in curriculum planning, and in their priorities regarding teaching and learning goals” (1998, p. 190). These differences were often exacerbated by the increased utilization of scripted programs and universal standards used to evaluate children. These standards, whether local, state, or federal, were fixed and allow marginal deviation thereby contradicting the philosophy of developmental early childhood educators. Kindergarten teachers need to “strike a balance in meeting the needs of children’s varied capabilities and vertically aligning curriculum with both preschool and first grade” (Tomlinson, 2009, p. 188). The educational backgrounds of teachers could also cause a disconnect, as many kindergarten teachers have a general elementary background lacked a focus not only on play as an instructional methodology, but other developmentally appropriate practices as well.

Researchers Zeng and Zeng (2005) surveyed 3,047 kindergarten teachers as well as 866 administrators from the United States and examined the teachers’ beliefs and use of developmentally appropriate practices as well as their educational backgrounds. They discovered that 34.8% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that preschool children benefited from formal reading and math instruction which is contradictory to NAEYC’s position which stresses the importance of play and exploration for children’s development. Likewise, 53.6% of teachers reported that they utilized two or more hours of whole-group,
teacher-directed activities daily, which again contradicts the guidelines suggested by NAEYC.

Zeng and Zeng also examined teachers’ qualifications and found that “more than 16.2% of the U.S. kindergarten teachers are either not certified or only have emergency certification. For those who do have formal certifications, only 55.3% of them were certified in early childhood education” (2005, p. 714). This finding was significant because developmentally, most kindergarteners are more similar to four-year-olds and 65.8% of the teachers surveyed had no experience with pre-school aged children and therefore may not have fully understood the developmental continuum of children ages four through six (Zeng & Zeng, 2005). Similar results were seen in the principals’ surveys with 24.7% of the principals having no early childhood courses and 77.2% never teaching kindergarten. Again, these individuals lacked the educational background to fully understand the development of young children and therefore not able to suggest developmentally appropriate practices to be utilized in the classrooms of teachers they supervise.

In a study conducted by Stipek and Byler (1997), preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers (n = 60) completed a survey which sought to examine their “beliefs about effective educational practices for young children; their goals for their children; their position on policy issues related to school entry, the use of standardized tests, and retention; and their own perceptions of the degree to which they were able to implement practices that are consistent with their beliefs and goals” (Stipek & Byler, 1997, pp. 309-310). In addition, comprehensive observations were conducted in each teacher’s room “to assess actual practices” (Stipek & Byler, 1997, p. 310). Looking at the teachers’ beliefs, the survey data presented contradictory results. “The two teacher beliefs scales (basic skills and child
centered) were negatively associated with each other, \( r = -0.64, p < 0.0001 \). The more teachers endorsed formal basic-skills practices, the less they endorsed child-centered practices” (Stipek & Byler, 1997, p. 313).

The disconnect between teacher belief and practice can also be attributed to outside pressures from first grade teachers, administrators, and parents. Kindergarten teachers feel that if they do not teach academic skills that first grade teachers require, their students will not be prepared which would reflect poorly on their instruction, “One of the most potent messages that conveys next-grade standards among teachers is to send a child back to the preceding grade” (Sheppard & Smith, 1988, p. 136). This very public statement causes the kindergarten teacher to question her practice, focus on academic skills and “…narrow, linear conceptions of what learning should be…” (Sheppard & Smith, 1988, p. 137), and decrease or eliminate play in the classroom. With little support from their next-grade colleagues kindergarten teachers may disregard their early childhood beliefs in favor of more teacher-directed, academic activities (McMullen, 1999; Sheppard & Smith, 1988). This coupled with the pressure from administrators to ensure that students arrive at the testing grades adequately prepared, causes kindergarten teachers to conform and focus on academics. Research conducted by Hatch and Freeman (1988) and McMullen (1999), suggest that teachers feel unsupported to utilize DAP and pressured to focus on the academics; kindergarten teachers have the “…perception that they must emphasize skill development and prepare students for standardized tests” (McMullen, 1999, p. 217).

Hatch and Freeman conducted an ethnographic interview study with 36 participants including a kindergarten teacher, principal, and a central office administrator from 12 school districts \((n = 36)\). Each participant was interviewed for approximately one-hour with a
researcher interviewer who entered the “interview situation with certain ‘guiding’ questions” (Hatch & Freeman, 1988, p. 154). The findings of this study were generalized into two statements, “(1) kindergartens are increasingly academic and skill oriented, and (2) individuals who implement kindergarten programs may not believe that these programs best serve the needs of young children” (Hatch & Freeman, 1988, p. 154) reflecting the qualitative analysis conducted by the researchers. Overall, the results, similar to current research indicated that kindergartens were academic and focused on skills. Further teachers involved indicated there was a disconnect or conflict between their personal beliefs and what they were expected to implement.

Researcher Mary Benson McMullen posed the idea that some teachers were more “resilient and are able to live out their practices despite the obstacles” (1999, p. 221). In this study, she examined teacher beliefs, practices, and the factors that “may mediate between beliefs and practices (i.e., self-efficacy, locus of control, trait anxiety, and educational and professional experiences)” (McMullen, 1999, p. 221). Data were collected through surveys ($n = 20$) and multiple classroom observations. The sample of teachers averaged 11.5 years of early childhood education. Nine of the teachers were preschool teachers and 11 were kindergarten through third grade teachers in a public school setting. The results of this study supported what the research suggested, that teacher beliefs were predictors of practice and that there was a difference in beliefs and practice about DAP for preschool and primary teachers (McMullen, 1999). Teachers who demonstrated more DAP in the classrooms had early childhood or child development educational backgrounds, in addition, teachers who had early childhood degrees or elementary degrees and had preschool teaching experiences utilized more DAP practices than teachers with similar degrees but no preschool teaching
experience (McMullen, 1999). In addition, the school setting appeared to impact the teachers' ability to execute their DAP beliefs. Preschool teachers had more flexibility and “personal freedom in designing and implementing their curricula than was evident in the public school sites” (McMullen, 1999, p. 226). The public school teachers articulated accountability concerns, mastery of skill requirements, disruptions to instructional time, as well as state requirements as blocks to their utilization of DAP.

Lastly, there is a perceived pressure from parents to teach more academics. This is both a societal as well as a socio-economic pressure. With more working mothers children are placed in daycare at early ages and have spent a majority of their time since birth in structured, school-like settings where parents expected academics. Likewise, there is evidence that today’s society in general values purpose rather than play (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). As once some children reach kindergarten, they may have spent almost five years in a structured daycare facility where play materials were incorporated into their day; many parents feel enough time has already been devoted to play (Elkind, 1987, 2001, 2007; McMullen, 1999). Finally, play is simply not valued by all parents. For some, “…play may be seen as frivolous” (Sluss, 2005, p. 23), as parents may view education as the means of propelling their child into a better life (Fung, 2009) and see play as a threat to learning. The culture from which the parent comes also impacts their view on play and ultimately the pressure they place on teachers to utilize play or focus on academics (Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2004). Many cultures do not value play in the classroom and this belief maybe pervasive in many communities. While some children may be able to accelerate to these skills, the majority of children are not developmentally ready to do so.


**Conclusion**

The theory and research in this review offer a perspective, through qualitative and quantitative analysis, as to the value of play for kindergarten children as well as the possible causes of disconnect between kindergarten teacher beliefs and practices in the classroom. The teacher’s roles in play were also examined. The varied findings in the literature support a need for further investigation and understanding of this disconnect and how teachers can be supported to utilize play as an instructional methodology.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to conduct the investigation including the research questions and description of participants, setting, and instrumentation. A description of the research design, the data collection procedures and timeline, as well as the data analysis of the study is included. Ethical considerations conclude the chapter.

Research Questions

The research questions which guided this study were:

1. What is the philosophy of kindergarten teachers towards play as an instructional methodology?
2. What are kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of the amount and quality of play implementation in their classroom?
3. How are play practices implemented in kindergarten classrooms?
4. What are the causes of disconnects among a teacher’s philosophy of play, perception of implementation of play, and the actual observed practice of play in classrooms?

Description of the Setting and the Participants

This study was conducted in seven urban and suburban public school districts located in the Northeast. The participants in this study were a purposeful sample. School districts which housed their kindergarten classes in only one building were identified to participate in this study. The researcher chose to utilize this criterion to minimize differences which could occur in school philosophy if there were multiple buildings within a district. The districts in the study represented varied socio-economic and culturally diverse populations and varied in size, with a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 15 kindergarten classes per district. All
participating districts maintained a full-time kindergarten program. Two of the seven schools were located in small cities while the remaining schools were located in towns or villages. All seven were within the radius of a large metropolitan area. Tables 1 and 2 describe the specific demographic data for these districts. All classes were heterogeneously grouped. A total of 80 kindergarten teachers from these schools were invited to participate in the study.

Table 1

District Demographic Data for 2010-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Code</th>
<th>K Enrollment</th>
<th>Eligibility For Free Lunch</th>
<th>Eligibility For Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>Limited English Proficiency</th>
<th>AYP in ELA*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *AYP in ELA: 1= all reported student subgroups have made AYP in ELA and 2= subgroup of students with disabilities failed to make AYP in ELA
Table 2

*School District Student Demographic Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Code</th>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Origin</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>Asian or Native Hawaiian /Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample of teachers who completed surveys was 35 (43.75%) and predominately female; only three males participated. The majority of teachers had greater than 10 years of teaching experience; however this experience was not necessarily limited to kindergarten. Figure 2 describes the sample population’s level of education, while Figure 3 describes their years of teaching experience in the classroom, and finally Figure 4 describes their years teaching kindergarten.
The majority of the teachers ($n = 32$) had a Masters degree with additional credits not inclusive of a doctoral level degree, while two of the teachers had Masters level degrees without any additional credits. There were no teachers in the sample who had obtained a Doctoral level degree. In the area where the study was conducted, it is required for teachers to obtain a Masters level degree within five years of beginning to teach and teachers need to take additional courses every five years after obtaining a Masters degree to maintain their certification. One teacher possessed only a Bachelors level degree at the time the study was conducted.

Figure 2. Participating teachers’ educational backgrounds
The majority of this sample of teachers ($n = 26$) had taught for more than 10 years in elementary classrooms; seven teachers taught between five and ten years and two teachers had taught for three to five years. None of the teachers is this sample had less than three years of teaching experience. In addition, almost 75% of this sample of teachers ($n = 26$) began teaching as their first career while 25% entered the field as a second career ($n = 9$), mostly moving from the business sector into teaching after obtaining a Masters degree in Education.
In this sample group 54% of the teachers ($n = 19$) had taught kindergarten for more than 10 years. The remainder of the sample were divided into teachers who taught kindergarten for 5 to 10 years ($n = 7$), 3 to 5 years ($n = 5$) which represented 20% and 14% of the sample respectively. Lastly, 12% of the teachers taught kindergarten for one to three years ($n = 4$).

From the total sample ($n = 35$) 10 teachers were identified to be interviewed based on their responses to the survey. These ten teachers’ responses indicated strong or weak beliefs that play was important in a kindergarten program. To determine if a teacher had strong or weak beliefs regarding play, the researcher summed the scores for the scaled statements of Part II of the survey and organized the sample of teachers in a list from the highest score to the lowest score. A higher score on Part II indicated a stronger belief regarding play, while a lower score on Part II indicated a weaker belief. It was also important to determine which
teachers illustrated a disconnect between their beliefs and their practice of play. To determine this, the researcher summed the scores of the scaled statements of Part III of the survey. This score was listed next to that of the score from Part II for each teacher. A lower score for Part III compared to a higher score for Part II indicated that there could be a disconnect between the teachers’ beliefs and practice. Finally, the researcher examined Part IV of the survey, the open-ended responses. These responses supported and illustrated the teachers’ beliefs and were instrumental in identifying 10 teachers to be interviewed. It is important to note, that all 10 teachers identified did agree to be interviewed. Finally, six of the ten teachers were observed in their classrooms. This identification reflected the teachers’ responses about play from the interviews as well as their survey responses. Table 3 illustrates the demographic data for the teachers who participated in the interviews and observations.
Table 3

*Interviewed Teachers’ Demographic Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Code</th>
<th>Education Background</th>
<th>Grade Levels Taught</th>
<th>Years in Teaching</th>
<th>Years in Kindergarten</th>
<th>Philosophy Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>K, 1, 3</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Child-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D5</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Pre-K, K, 4</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Teacher-directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E10</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>K, 2</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Teacher-directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E13</td>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Child-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F2</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Pre-K, K, 4</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>Teacher-directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F3</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>K, 1, 2</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Teacher-directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F5</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Child-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F8</td>
<td>Special Ed</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Teacher-directed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>Pre-K, K, 2</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Child-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td></td>
<td>K, 3,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Child-centered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Description of Research Design

This study utilized a multiple case study approach to explore kindergarten teachers’ philosophy, perceptions, and practices of play in the classroom. Kindergarten teachers (n = 80), from participating districts, were invited to complete a survey regarding their philosophies and practices of play in the classroom. After the surveys (n = 35) were completed and returned, they were reviewed to identify teachers to be interviewed (n = 10). The survey responses to Parts II and III were summed to create total scores for each teacher. Teachers who evidenced differences between the sets of survey questions were identified as possible candidates to be interviewed. Next, responses to the open-ended survey questions were examined. These comments were instrumental in the identification of teachers who demonstrated a connect or disconnect between their self-reported philosophy and practice of play. Ten teachers were ultimately identified and all responded positively to the request to be interviewed. Upon completion and review of the interviews, six of the interviewed teachers were selected to be observed. The goal of the observations was to examine and compare the actual practice of play to the responses the teachers had provided both on the survey and in the interview.

In addition to the surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, informational data sources including, mission statements, program philosophies, curriculum guides, school brochures, and websites from the seven districts were evaluated by the researcher to understand the cultures and perspectives of the schools and how the teachers related to this perspective. Multiple data sources were utilized to support the accuracy of the study by creating a triangulation of data sources (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).
Instrumentation

Qualitative data were collected through the following sources: responses to a survey, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Kindergarten teachers responded to a researcher created survey: *Teachers’ Play Philosophy and Perceptions of Implementation Survey* (see Appendix A). Also, semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B), as well as data collected through the use of the researcher-created *Implementation of Play Observational Scale* (see Appendix C), generated the qualitative data utilized in this study. In addition, a review of key district documents was conducted by the researcher to better understand the districts’ philosophy towards play.

**Teachers’ Play Philosophy and Perceptions of Implementation Survey**

The researcher-developed teacher survey (see Appendix A) was designed to gather information regarding teachers’ philosophies and perceptions of play as an instructional tool in the classroom. The survey was divided into four parts and contained 32 questions. Part I requested the respondents to provide basic personal background information including level of education, years in teaching, years teaching in a kindergarten classroom, and gender. Parts II and III required the teachers to utilize a 5-point Likert scale as they responded to 26 statements pertaining to educational philosophy, methodology, and play. Finally, Part IV was comprised of six open-ended questions requesting the teachers to reflect and respond about their actual philosophy towards play as well as their use of play in the classroom. The use of open-ended questions provided the teacher with the ability to answer freely about play and was utilized to “collect rich, detailed information from the respondents” (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009, p. 72).
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B) were utilized to gain an in-depth insight into the philosophy and perception of play. These interview questions delved more deeply into the teacher’s philosophy and perception as well as their utilization of play and play materials in the classroom. The semi-structured interview “involves asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply with open-form questions to obtain additional information” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 246). An example of a structured question was, “How do you think children learn through play?” It was then followed with an open-ended question based on the individual’s response, for example, “So, there’s no time during the day where you are involved in the play?” All informants were given the same set of structured questions with additional open-ended questions based on individual responses. Utilizing a semi-structured interview was advantageous to this study in that there was “…reasonably standard data across the respondents…” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 246) while specific details were ascertained from each participant.

Implementation of Play Observational Scale

A researcher created observational scale (see Appendix C) was utilized to examine the actual use of play in kindergarten classrooms. The scale allowed the researcher to observe the organization of the room as well as the variety, quantity, and quality of play materials available. The frequency of play as an instructional methodology was also noted. In addition, the scale was utilized to make note of play behaviors demonstrated, modeled, and encouraged by the teacher.
Review of Key Documents

A review of key district documents was conducted by the researcher. These included documents such as kindergarten curriculum maps, parent handbooks, mission statements, and websites. Bogdan and Biklen suggested the use of “official documents” (2007, p. 137) to provide a perspective of the organization towards the phenomenon being studied. These documents provided a background for the teacher responses from the surveys, interviews, and classroom observations.

Data Collection Procedures and Timeline

The subsequent procedures were followed according to the proposed timeline.

1. Institutional Review Board approval obtained (December 2010).
2. Administrators from northeastern school districts contacted for consent (January/February 2011) (see Appendices D and E).
3. All Kindergarten teachers from participating school districts received letters describing the study and consent forms to participate in the study (February-March 2011) (see Appendix F).
4. All consenting teachers received and completed the survey (March-April 2011) (see Appendix A).
5. Data collection and analysis of teacher surveys conducted (March-April 2011).
6. Teacher interviews conducted (April-May 2011) (See Appendix B).
7. Classroom observations conducted (April-May 2011) (see Appendix C).
8. Surveys, interviews, and classroom observation data were analyzed for patterns, themes, and trends as well as a review of key district documents by the researcher as well (June 2011).
Once approval for the study was obtained by the Institutional Review Board, the superintendents from the identified districts were contacted by phone or e-mail requesting permission to conduct the study. When district level interest and permission were obtained, consent letters were mailed and building level consent sought. When building level permission was secured, all kindergarten teachers from that building were contacted by mail to explain the research, parameters of confidentiality, and encouraged to participate in the study. In three cases, the researcher was invited to attend a meeting to speak with the teachers directly to explain the study requirements. In all cases, teachers received an envelope which contained a cover letter, consent form, survey, return envelope, and a small incentive in the form of chocolates. The incentives were included to improve the return rate of the survey (Dillman et al. 2009). Of the 80 packets distributed, 35 were returned.

Upon receipt of the completed surveys, teachers were contacted via e-mail or phone to request a face-to-face, semi-structured interview. Ten teachers responded to the follow-up e-mail and interviews of approximately 20-30 minutes were conducted. Nine of those interviews took place at the teachers’ schools in their classroom before school, afterschool, or in one case, during a lunch period. One interview was conducted at a mutually agreed upon public site accommodating the teacher’s schedule. All interviews were audio-taped using a SONY IC digital voice recorder and were copied onto a secure computer in the home of the researcher. The digital files were directly uploaded to an on-line transcription company noted for their accuracy within the field of education and were transcribed into a printed document. These printed transcripts were kept in a secure file cabinet in the researcher’s office.
Description and Justification of the Analyses

According to Creswell, “Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data... for analysis” (2007, p. 148), and then determining how the data relates through the use of themes and codes. Compiling the data into tables or a narrative is the final step in the analysis process (Creswell, 2007). Information gathered from the surveys was analyzed to identify teacher philosophy, implementation of play, as well as to determine if there was a disconnect between philosophy and practice of play in the kindergarten classrooms. In addition, the data collected from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Data from the surveys were grouped into three categories: demographic data, teacher philosophy, and play implementation. Teacher philosophy data were obtained from survey questions 6 through 17. These data numbers were summed to create a total number for each participant. A similar process was completed for the data obtained from the play implementation category (survey questions 18-26). Finally, the data from the open-ended questions were charted manually so that trends and patterns could be identified. After the initial manual charting, the responses were identified with open codes. These responses were then compiled into a spreadsheet to facilitate additional axial coding. Axial coding allows the researcher to begin making sense out of the qualitative data that has been collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998,). These final data were then scrutinized to categorize the responses from the surveys so a hypothesis regarding teacher philosophy and teacher self-reported utilization of play could be developed. The coding process for the open-ended questions utilized multiple stages where data were condensed into meaningful segments which were labeled with generalized statements or concepts (Creswell, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
These statements were reviewed, grouped where appropriate, and organized under categorical headings. These headings led to the development of themes that were pertinent to the study. The data from the surveys were influential in the creation of the interview questions.

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, the transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy by the researcher and through the use of member checking. Transcripts were given to the teachers to review and/or correct information that was inaccurate. Initial coding of the transcripts was completed manually following a similar process as the open-ended survey questions, with specific categories initially assigned to sections of the transcripts. Once all transcripts were reviewed, the researcher compiled and recorded the categorized sections into large charts where the data were then grouped by commonalities that developed into emerging themes. Data were manually coded multiple times to ensure accuracy of codes as well as to allow for the emergence of ideas through the qualitative process. Data were aggregated into numerous categories, reviewed, and condensed into themes (Creswell, 2007). Looking across the 10 cases, similar codes were identified allowing themes and patterns to emerge regarding how kindergarten teachers define play, utilize it in the classroom, and identify obstacles they perceive preventing their utilization of play in the classroom. In addition, themes regarding teacher background and preparation began to emerge as the data were reviewed over several weeks of coding and categorical aggregation.

The interview data created the criteria for the classroom observations. Teachers’ responses during the interview helped to identify classrooms in which teachers supported the idea of play as an instructional methodology as well as teachers who demonstrated a limited
use of play. Their interview responses supported the survey data review and coding and aided in the development of themes in the study. Classroom observations were conducted by utilizing the researcher created Implementation of Play Observation Scale (see Appendix C). Observations occurred in the classrooms of six out of the 10 teachers interviewed during one classroom visit. While the observations represent one particular moment of time in these classrooms, the duration of the observations were extensive. The data collected during the observations illustrated the actual practice of play in classrooms. Again, these data were examined to identify how it supported or integrated within the themes that were emerging.

The use of peer debriefing as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) was utilized in the study to ensure the consistency of findings that emerged from the data. Peer debriefing “is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). To accomplish this, two early childhood colleagues were asked to meet and discuss the data collection process with the researcher. Initially, the researcher shared large manual data collection charts and discussed the commonalities that were discovered in the data. The two colleagues were then given a list of codes, samples of the data, and asked to code the data utilizing the list. A review of their coding was completed to determine the accuracy of the researcher’s coding.

Finally key documents from the districts were examined. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the use of documents in qualitative studies as “they are a stable source of information” (p. 276) and “they are a rich source of information, contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent” (p. 277). For this study, the researcher reviewed
documents which included the districts’ mission statements, kindergarten curriculum guidelines, parent handouts, and information posted on the districts’ websites. This review provided the background data needed to understand each district’s philosophy and to examine how it impacted the teachers and their implementation of play.

Limitations of the Study

The nature of qualitative research requires themes and theories to emerge as the research evolves; therefore, “researchers need alternative models appropriate to qualitative designs that ensure rigor without sacrificing the relevance of the qualitative research” (Krefting, 1991, p.174). Guba (1981) identified four key areas of trustworthiness that are relevant to both types of research: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.

Truth Value

Truth value refers to how the researcher established confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects in the context of the study (Krefting, 1991). To ensure truth value in the study findings, the survey and interview data were critically reviewed. Interview data were collected through a digital recorder and then transcribed into text documents. Member checking was incorporated to ensure that the subjects’ voices were correctly represented. In addition, multiple data sources were utilized to allow for triangulation. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) “Multiple data sources lead to a fuller understanding of the phenomena” being studied (pp. 115-116). Through the use of survey, interview, and observational data, a more in-depth picture of play and play use was obtained.

Applicability

Applicability refers to the ability of applying the findings discovered through the qualitative model to other populations. In qualitative research, the responsibility for
applicability lays on other researchers provided the original researcher has established descriptions that can be replicated (Krefting, 1991). To address this, the descriptions of the settings and populations were detailed and accurate so that other researchers may apply the findings to other appropriate populations.

**Consistency**

Consistency in the qualitative paradigm refers to the idea that results or findings that occurred within a sample would likely occur again or in similar ways at a different time. Since this type of research is focused on people, there are many variables that could impact findings. Qualitative research has consistency when variability can be explained (Guba, 1981). For this research, finding consistency was achieved through the triangulation of the data as noted. In addition, the use of peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as previously described in an earlier section, was utilized to ensure the consistency of findings that emerged. To do this, the researcher met with two early childhood colleagues over several meetings. The colleagues reviewed large charts with the data from the survey open-ended questions and the interviews listed under the heading of each of the four research questions. These colleagues then reviewed the collected data and a list of codes which had been used by the researcher. Utilizing this list, the colleagues then recoded samples of the data. A comparison of their coding to the coding system that the original researcher had established was conducted to establish researcher accuracy and to minimize researcher bias. Their recoding supported the researcher’s coding system with a 72.5% of agreement between their coding and that of the researcher.
Neutrality

Neutrality refers to the lack of bias in the process and findings (Krefting, 1991). To establish this, the researcher, while an active participant in the research and process, needed to remain outside the scope of the results and findings. In this case, the researcher had a passion for play as an instructional methodology which needed to remain unobtrusive in this research study. While establishing a relationship with the teachers, the researcher carefully cultivated the relationships so as to minimize influence on the subjects. Collective conversations, sharing stories, and other such practices were carefully monitored as the researcher collected survey, interview, and observational data.

Statement of Ethics and Confidentiality

Permission to participate in this research was obtained from each district’s superintendent, each school principal, and all participating teachers. To assure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a coded identification number; confidentiality of data was maintained at all times. All data were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office and will remain there until findings have been published. The data will be accessible only to researchers for whom it will prove useful in further comparative analyses and/or who are enrolled in Western Connecticut State University’s Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership Program. Lastly, data will be made available to those participants who request it.
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF DATA

Research supports that primary children learn through play and interaction with materials as well as with their peers and adults (Elkind, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978, Willis, 2007). The purpose of this study was to examine the interrelatedness between kindergarten teachers’ philosophy, perceptions, and practices of play in the classroom. This chapter includes the results gathered from responses to the researcher created, *Teachers’ Play Philosophy and Perceptions of Implementation Survey* (see Appendix A), semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B), and classroom observations which utilized the *Implementation of Play Observational Scale* (see Appendix C), a researcher created checklist to aid in the gathering of information from classroom observations. In addition, a review of key documents such as curriculum guides, kindergarten handbooks, and district websites were reviewed by the researcher to more fully understand the districts’ beliefs toward play as well as determine if there were any connections to the teachers’ philosophies, beliefs, or disconnects. This study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. What is the philosophy of kindergarten teachers towards play as an instructional methodology?
2. What are kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of the amount and quality of play implementation in their classrooms?
3. How are play practices implemented in kindergarten classrooms?
4. What are the causes of disconnects among a teacher’s philosophy of play, perception of implementation of play, and the actual observed practice of play in classrooms?

Data from the surveys, including the open-ended questions, were first manually recorded, then electronically organized in order to visually scan the data to identify emerging
trends and patterns. The semi-structured interview data were digitally recorded and electronically transcribed into Word documents. All data sources were then compiled into a spreadsheet to facilitate data analysis and coding. These data were scrutinized to establish organizing categories through open coding. Strauss and Corbin suggested “Open coding is like working on a puzzle” (1998, p. 223). The data were examined so that initial thoughts and categories could be created. To do this data were listed first by teacher on large charts to identify commonalities between subjects and then by research question in categories such as definition of play, teacher philosophy, play practices, and causes of disconnects. Once all data were organized by research question, the next step in organizing the data involved reorganizing the data into more specific categories and in some cases collapsing it into similar categories by utilizing axial coding. By using axial coding “the analyst begins to fit the pieces of the data puzzle together” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 229) and begins to identify emerging patterns or trends. Selective themes did emerge which were utilized to categorized the responses from the surveys as well as the interviews so a hypothesis regarding teacher philosophy and teacher self-reported utilization of play could be developed. According to Strauss and Corbin, “Selective coding denotes the final step in analysis-the integration of concepts around a core category and the filling in of categories in need of further development and refinement” (1998, p. 237). The coding process for the open-ended questions utilized a similar coding process as the interview data. The teachers’ responses were recorded verbatim into a spreadsheet where the data were coded and recoded following the process described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The data were condensed into meaningful segments through open coding and labeled with generalized statements or concepts. These statements were reviewed, grouped where appropriate, and organized under
categorical headings. These headings lead to the development of themes that were pertinent to the study.

Survey Parts II and III utilized a 5-point Likert scale. For Part II, teachers were asked to respond to statements regarding how they felt about play. A response of “1” indicated a strong agreement with the statement while a response of “5” indicated strong disagreement. Part III asked teachers to respond to the frequency of use of a variety of play materials or situations such as blocks or dramatic play. It also utilized a 5-point Likert scale; however, a response of one indicated frequent use of a particular play material or situation while a response of five indicated that the particular play material or activity was never utilized in their classroom. Tables 4 and 5 illustrate the percentage breakdown of the teachers’ responses to Parts II and III of the survey and provide an overview of the statements from the survey. This data will be examined more closely as it pertains to each research questions; the results will be explained as well.
**Table 4**

*Survey Part II Percentage of Teacher Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2 Agree</th>
<th>3 Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>4 Disagree</th>
<th>5 Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Kindergarten children learn best by playing</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>62.86</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Play is an important component of my program</td>
<td>34.29</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I feel it is important to make time to play each day</td>
<td>65.71</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I utilize centers as part of my instructional program</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I utilize play as an instructional modality</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>51.43</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel it is important for children to choose their activities</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I feel it is important to have blocks in the classroom</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I feel it is important to have a dramatic play area</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>34.29</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I feel it is important to have a house keeping</td>
<td>57.14</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Children have plenty of time to play at home</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>17.14</td>
<td>82.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Children’s most important job is playing</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Outdoor play time is important to children’s development</td>
<td>74.29</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5

*Survey Part III Percentages of Teacher Responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>1 Always</th>
<th>2 Often</th>
<th>3 Occasionally</th>
<th>4 Seldom</th>
<th>5 Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18. I utilize blocks in my classroom</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I utilize a housekeeping area in my classroom</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>35.71</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I utilize a dress-up area in my classroom</td>
<td>17.14</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I utilize dramatic play in my classroom</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>54.29</td>
<td>17.14</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I utilize puppets in my classroom</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I utilize music in my classroom</td>
<td>14.79</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I utilize commercial games in my classroom</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>51.43</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I utilize teacher created games in my classroom</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>48.57</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I utilize student created games in my classroom</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kindergarten Teachers’ Philosophy

Research Question One: What is the philosophy of kindergarten teachers towards play as an instructional methodology?

Several characteristics that helped to define the kindergarten teachers’ philosophy emerged in this study from the survey data as well as the semi-structured interviews. Survey Part I provided demographic data for the teachers while Parts II and III provided information regarding the teachers’ philosophy, beliefs, and practice as well as implementation of play. Lastly, Part IV provided more detailed responses to the data collected in Parts II and III. Results from all data sources: survey Parts I, II, III, and IV, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations supported the findings which emerged and allowed for triangulation in this study but will be reported separately to allow the data to be more readily understood. Each data source was examined in relation to a research question as a means of organizing the results.

Survey Results: Scaled Statements

A teacher’s philosophy is very personal and specific to the individual. This research was conducted to examine teachers’ self-described philosophy and to identify common characteristics which did exist for this sample of kindergarten teachers. Results from the surveys did indicate that self-reported philosophy was individualized to each teacher yet some commonalities existed. Survey questions: 6-14, 16, 17, as well as the open-ended questions, numbers 27, 29, and 30 all pertained to teacher philosophy and were instrumental in eliciting the characteristics that defined this sample of kindergarten teachers’ philosophy. Some of the common characteristics which emerged from the data included: children learn
Examining the data reported on the survey indicated that 32% of the teachers \((n = 11)\) in the sample strongly agreed that children learn through play and 63% of the teachers \((n = 22)\) agreed with this statement. Almost all teachers indicated that they make time for play in their classrooms, with 66% of teachers \((n = 23)\) strongly agreeing and 32% \((n = 11)\) agreeing. However, only 34% strongly agreed with the statement that play was an important component of a kindergarten program \((n = 12)\) and 37% of the teachers \((n = 13)\) agreed with the statement. While the importance of play was indicated by a majority of teachers, conversely, only 26% strongly agreed \((n = 9)\) and the same amount of teachers agreed \((26\%, n = 9)\) that play was a child’s most important job. Table 6 illustrates the common characteristics in kindergarten teachers’ philosophy as were indicated by the response in Part II of the survey.
Table 6

Common Characteristics in Kindergarten Teacher Philosophy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. I make time to play each day</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Outdoor play time is important to children’s development</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>74.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Kindergarten children learn best by playing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>62.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel it is important for children to choose their activities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>57.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I utilize play as an instructional modality</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Play is an important component of my program</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Children’s most important job is playing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Results: Open-Ended Questions

The open-ended survey questions 27, 28, and 29 provided a wealth of information concerning teacher philosophy. These data were scrutinized and coded to identify emerging patterns. Similarly to the initial survey data, the open-ended questions revealed individualized results while identifying commonalities. The data were first coded to identify descriptors illustrating teacher philosophy, e.g.: hands-on, multi-sensory, child-centered, or teacher-directed. After completing the initial coding, the researcher reviewed the lengthy list of descriptors to collapse those into more specific codes. The axial codes, which developed from the responses regarding teacher philosophy, were as follows: hands-on, child-centered, teacher-directed, exploration, learning through play, a balance between academics and play.
Finally a descriptor of “does not relate” was applied to group responses and comments that did not pertain to the study. These comments tended to be related to union or political issues in education today. While these comments did not relate to the study at hand, they did provide background and supported other statements the teachers made. Again similar characteristics were found in these codes for self-described teacher philosophy relating to play. There were 126 responses describing an educational philosophy. Table 7 illustrates percentages of teachers’ responses with the axial codes established by the researcher applied.

Table 7

Common Characteristics Describing Philosophy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on</td>
<td>13.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Centered</td>
<td>34.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Directed</td>
<td>9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>4.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through play</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance of academics and play</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Learning</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not relate to study</td>
<td>15.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher responses were varied with some responses relevant to more than one code. Final inspection of the data collapsed the initial axial codes into two categories which encompassed the multiple descriptors and characteristics of teacher philosophy. The final two codes described a teacher’s philosophy as either child-centered or teacher-directed.
(Ahara, 1995; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Stipek & Byler, 1997). These two categories reflect descriptors illustrated in the literature and teachers were sorted into one of the groups based on their survey and interview responses. Examples of teacher-directed philosophy included an academic focus, curriculum and standards driven, and utilization of direct instruction. Conversely, teachers with a child-centered philosophy utilized learning through play, exploration, a focus on social learning and interactions, the use of developmentally appropriate practices, and the use of play directly connected to the curriculum.

Utilizing these two codes, all the question responses were re-coded to reflect these final codes and then percentages were obtained. Based on the teachers’ responses, 42% of the teachers’ philosophies were characterized as child-centered while 43% were characterized as teacher-directed. Looking at philosophy with these two codes, the group of teachers was divided roughly in half. This identification was self-described and based on the responses to the open-ended survey. The following statements provide a sample which illustrated a child-centered philosophy:

Teacher G2: My job is to teach the whole child - to develop their social/emotional, physical, academic skills, - their natural talents and to strengthen their areas of weakness. To share the joy of learning with every child!

Teacher C26: Early childhood education should be fun – for the children and the teacher! Teachers and children are lifelong learners. …Children should love coming to school and love learning!
Teacher B5: I went to Bank St. College and sent my children there—so I guess I believe in a more progressive philosophy of education than most public schools. I am child-centered and use hands-on discovery.

Teachers who were identified to have more of a teacher-directed philosophy said:

Teacher F1: My first goal as a teacher is to instill a love for learning. I believe it is my job to provide a safe and nurturing environment that will help each child develop socially, emotionally, and academically. Every child is unique. My students arrive in September with different strengths and needs. It is my responsibility to help each child gain a love for knowledge as they reach their potential.

Teacher B7: I believe that students rise to their expectations. Students thrive in an environment in which they are challenged academically and have opportunities to grow socially.

Teacher C27: I feel students need a balanced educational experience, i.e. skills, language experiences, authentic experiences, multiple modalities.

Teacher philosophy is personal and individual. The literature review described it as such and this was seen in the responses from the survey. However, the teacher responses, while individual, did describe characteristics which could be used to define this sample of teachers into two different groups. While having characteristics that overlapped, this sample of teachers’ philosophy still could be described utilizing the two codes: teacher-directed or child-centered.

**Semi-Structured Interview Responses**

Ten teachers from the sample were interviewed utilizing a semi-structured format. The interviews were conducted to get a deeper understanding of the kindergarten teachers’
philosophy and perceptions regarding the use of play in the classroom. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed by hand for initial coding. Additional coding was completed by recording all 78 responses into a spreadsheet. Table 8 illustrated the eight initial codes.

Table 8

*Kindergarten Teachers’ Philosophy from Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child-Centered</td>
<td>30.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Directed</td>
<td>30.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Background</td>
<td>5.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Education Background</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education Background</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Focus</td>
<td>8.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory</td>
<td>12.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not relate to study</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon further review, the data regarding teacher’s educational background were deleted from this group and reviewed as a separate category. This allowed for a more specific examination of what shaped a teacher’s philosophy. Data were then recoded to reflect the deletion of these comments and results similar to that of the survey and open-ended questions emerged. Approximately 35% of teachers described their teaching philosophy to be coded as child-centered, while 35% described it to be coded as teacher-directed. In addition to those
responses categorizing their philosophy, there were two additional categories which yielded somewhat surprising results. In addition to the characteristics describing their philosophy, the teachers also described characteristics pertaining to teaching style. Two characteristics which emerged in the coding were instruction with an academic focus or instruction with an exploratory focus. These characteristics each represented almost 15%, of the responses.

Educational background was explored as a possible reason for developing a teacher or child-centered philosophy. Table 9 illustrates the educational backgrounds, specifically the undergraduate degrees of the interviewed teachers. From the interview data, there were 13 responses which related to educational background. Of the responses, almost 31% represented teachers with an early childhood background, 23% a non-educational background such as business, and 46% a general education background. Looking at the interview data, the teachers who had early childhood or non-educational backgrounds \( (n = 6) \) appeared to have a more child-centered philosophy, while the teachers with the general educational backgrounds \( (n = 4) \) tended to have a more teacher-directed philosophy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Code</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Background</td>
<td>30.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education Background</td>
<td>46.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Education Background</td>
<td>23.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

*Kindergarten Teachers’ Educational Backgrounds from Interviews*

Prior teaching experiences, especially the grade levels taught, influenced teacher responses during the interviews. Teachers who voiced a child-centered philosophy \( (n = 5) \)
were those who had primarily taught in the early childhood grades of pre-school through second grade. Teachers with a more teacher-directed philosophy (n = 5) taught in second, third, or fourth grades, or in other areas such as reading or special education. These teachers’ knowledge of the demands of the higher grades was reflected in Teacher F8’s comment, “I just think I am now more aware that the student leaving kindergarten has to do a certain amount to get to first grade.”

Research Question One looked to examine teacher philosophy. Teachers responded in individualized ways which were similar to responses seen in research conducted by Hatch and Freeman (1988); McMullen (1999); Stipek and Byler (1997); and Zeng and Zeng (2005). This philosophy, child-centered or teacher-directed, is translated into how a teacher approaches the classroom and the teaching style or methodology utilized. The teacher’s philosophy can be aligned to that of the school, however, as it will be reviewed later in this chapter, that is not always the case.

**Kindergarten Teacher Perception Towards Play**

Research Question Two: What are kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of the amount and quality of play implementation in their classrooms?

By its nature, a definition of play is individualized but also universal. Each participant defined play as well as explained it quite differently. This was reflected in both the survey data and the interviews. For some teachers, play was a means of learning, for others a non-academic time, and some described it as a combination: playful learning in centers or stations in the classroom. Looking at the data, it is crucial to look first at teacher responses to the importance of play in kindergarten programs before reviewing the data as it
pertains specifically to the teachers’ perceptions of the amount or quality of play implementation in their classrooms.

**Survey Results: Part II**

Several of the questions in part II of the survey addressed the importance of play. These were statements that required the teacher to agree or disagree utilizing a 1-5 point Likert scale. Table 10 describes how teachers responded to these statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10</th>
<th>Responses to Importance of Play Statements- Survey Part II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>1 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten children learn best by playing.</td>
<td>31.43 (n = 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play is an important component of my program.</td>
<td>34.29 (n = 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel it is important to make time to play each day.</td>
<td>65.71 (n = 23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I utilize play as an instructional modality.</td>
<td>25.71 (n = 9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses indicated that teachers felt play was an important component of a kindergarten program. Over 65% felt it was important to make time to play each day.

Although this was a positive response; only 25% of the teachers indicated that they utilized
play as an instructional methodology. From this, it can be drawn that while teachers valued the importance of play in kindergarten, they were not implementing it during class time.

**Survey Results: Open-Ended Questions**

Open-ended survey Questions 29 and 30 asked teachers to further describe how important play was to their program and how important they felt it was in a kindergarten curriculum. For Question 29, there were 96 responses which were visually scanned and coded by hand before being recorded and coded in a spreadsheet. These responses were then reviewed and coded several times by the researcher. Finally, six themes were identified. As the selective themes emerged from the data, it was necessary to add a code for comments that did not relate to the study. Occasionally teachers used the survey as a means of venting frustrations regarding the current educational system. Initial codes were then collapsed and the responses were identified with one of the six themes. Table 11 illustrates percentages of the responses within the selected themes.
Again, teacher responses (38%) indicated that play was viewed as important. In addition, 25% of the responses indicated that play led to learning, another positive finding from this research. Less than 10% of the comments reflected an academic focus while only 4% reflected the social benefits play provides.

Similar to Question 29, the responses for Question 30 were also visually scanned, manually charted, and finally entered into a spreadsheet to facilitate coding. Question 30, required the teachers to reflect on their beliefs of play in a kindergarten program. While similar results were obtained, the outcomes were more definitive. There were a total of 80 responses collected for question 30 with a much stronger message: 45% of the responses indicated that teachers believed play was important in a kindergarten program. Likewise, when responding to a belief about kindergarten programs in general, more teachers indicated a belief in an academic focus. For Question 30, 17.50% of the responses were focused on academics compared with only 8.33% from question 29. The social aspects of play were also

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Theme</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play Importance</td>
<td>37.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Usage</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Leads to Learning</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Focus</td>
<td>8.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Aspects of Play</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does Not Relate to Study</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
more strongly supported with less than a 10% response for question 29 to 11.25% for question 30. Play leading to learning did not have as strong a focus for this sample of teachers discussing kindergarten programs in general. Their responses to Question 30 regarding this were 18.75% instead of 25% for Question 29. These discrepancies could be attributed to the similar nature of the questions or the lack of personalization of question 30 as it was asking about kindergarten curriculum in general. Table 12 illustrates the final themes which developed from the responses to question 30.

Table 12

*Responses to Survey Open-ended Question 30*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Theme</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play is important</td>
<td>45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Leads to Learning</td>
<td>18.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Focus</td>
<td>17.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Aspects of Play</td>
<td>11.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Semi-Structured Interview Responses**

Interview data collected in response to this research question yielded many more specifics as to the kinds of play that were utilized in the teachers’ classrooms. The responses, after being manually and electronically reviewed and coded several times, were distributed into three selective themes: child-directed play, teacher-directed play, and play that was incorporated into the curriculum (Ahara, 1995; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). The teacher responses to this question totaled 56 and were heavily weighted towards child-
directed as 60% of the responses fell into this theme while almost 29% were identified as responses incorporating play into the curriculum. Finally, about 11% of the responses specified that play was teacher-directed. These responses indicated a positive perception of the use of play in kindergarten classrooms. The teachers seemed to value the child during the use of play and the responses indicated that when play is utilized, it was most often child-directed. While none of the responses indicated the quality of play, based on the interviews, it was apparent that the variety of play definitions would impact this. The sample of teachers provided very different views and defined play differently; therefore, it is plausible to think that their value of quality play would also be varied. Each respondent may have felt that the quality of play in their classroom was positive based on their personal definition of play, however, other researchers who have more specific definitions may have viewed their play differently. Teacher F2 illustrates this best as she tried to describe and almost defend what she considered play in her classroom:

Teacher F2: Yeah, I guess they do have a substantial amount of time to play, but when it comes to the readers’ and writers’ workshop I don’t know if a play person would see that as play. It’s more of an independent time, it’s more of a navigate the room time, and it is socialization but I don’t know if you would consider it- we use puppets, we use manipulatives.

The amount of play time in these kindergarten classrooms varied as much as the definitions. One teacher in particular felt she incorporated play throughout the day and was able to do so because she had the luxury of being a kindergarten teacher. Her early childhood background beliefs supported play as a means of delivering the curriculum to her
students. Her ability to incorporate play into her day was illustrated through her comments below:

   Teacher B1: So in those ways it just naturally ties into what we’re doing. But usually, hopefully, if I’ve done it right, they’re going to put the play and the learning kind of mixed together.

   For most of the teachers, play was seen in three ways: centers which were teacher-directed; free-play where children chose what they were playing from materials available in the room or from a teacher-directed choice; and outdoor recess. Every teacher surveyed and interviewed utilized literacy and/or math centers as part of his/her kindergarten program. While the teachers referred to centers as play, they were quick to add that there was some other time during the day, ranging from 15 to 30 minutes where the children could engage in free-play. This free-play might have been teacher-directed due to the teacher organizing materials that could be used. The children were able to make choices within limits set by the teacher including playmates.

   Similar to teacher philosophy, the perception of play was varied based on the teachers responding. For some teachers play was viewed as a method for student learning. Others felt that while play was important for children it was certainly utilized to provide relaxation from the structure of the kindergarten program. Most of the teachers valued play and made time for it; however only a quarter of the responding teachers utilized it as an instructional method. Play was part of all teachers’ day in some way. The means for using play will be further explored in the following section relating to Research Question Three.
Implementation of Play Practices

Research Question Three: How are play practices implemented in kindergarten classrooms?

Survey Results: Parts II and III

Play practices varied among teachers; however, all participants utilized some form of centers or stations for both free time and instructional play. Several questions from the survey illustrated the use of centers in teachers’ classrooms. Question 9 specifically focused on center use and 43% the respondents \( n = 15 \) answered that they strongly agreed that centers were a vital component of a kindergarten program. In addition, 29% of the teachers \( n = 10 \) agreed with the statement. Conversely, 14% of the teachers \( n = 5 \) did not agree with the statement that centers were a vital component of a kindergarten program. Similarly, 57% of teachers strongly agreed, and 40% agreed that it was important to have a block and a housekeeping area in the classroom. Further results showed that 60% strongly agreed and 34% agreed it was important to have a dramatic play area in the classroom. It is important to note that these results reflected statements that the teachers agreed with, not necessarily what was practiced in their classrooms.

Table 13 illustrates the actual utilization of these materials according to the sample of kindergarten teachers surveyed. These results revealed that teachers still value blocks, the housekeeping area, and dramatic play. While the percentages of usage were not as high as their belief in their importance in a kindergarten classroom, almost all of the teachers responding utilized these materials to some degree. Dress-up is the one area that appeared to have less usage compared with the others as 20% of the responses indicated that they never offered that center in their classroom. Dress-up referred to a common center in early childhood classrooms where the children were able to put on hats and other articles of
clothing to help develop play themes. For example, there could be police or fire fighter uniform components or lab coats and toy medical items which allowed children to pretend to be law enforcement personnel, fire fighters, or doctors and nurses. Interestingly, one respondent offered a one- word comment as to why dress up was not part of the classroom: “LICE.” This center was not used because the teacher did not want to spread lice in the classroom by having children share clothing, hats, and other costume props that would be a part of a dress up center.

Table 13

*Teacher Utilization of Play Materials*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play Material</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blocks</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>37.14</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress Up</td>
<td>17.14</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic Play</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>54.29</td>
<td>17.14</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puppets</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Games</td>
<td>11.43</td>
<td>51.43</td>
<td>28.57</td>
<td>8.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Created Games</td>
<td>31.43</td>
<td>48.57</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Created Games</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>22.86</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>25.71</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Survey Results: Open-ended Questions**

The open-ended question part of the survey showed a great variety in the implementation of play in classrooms. Question 31 of the survey asked teachers to describe
how they implemented play in their classrooms. There were 122 responses for this question. The responses were manually and electronically examined and coded several times to establish eight axial codes: approaches to play (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), child-directed (Ahara, 1995) play, teacher roles (Jones & Reynolds, 1992, 1997), play connected to the curriculum (Crawford, 2004; Ranz-Smith, 2007), technology, academic focus (Hatch, 2002; Ranz-Smith, 2007) and no response/not related to this study. Selective themes were established to better describe the responses.

Implementing play through the use of learning centers linked to the kindergarten curriculum represented 47% of the teachers’ responses. This was almost double that of any other theme. Interestingly, the child and teacher-directed themes were both 13% while play centers represented 27% of the 122 responses. Figure 5 illustrates the selective themes for Survey Question 31.

![Play Implementation Diagram](image)

*Figure 5. Selective Themes for Implementation of Play*
Survey Question 32 also asked teachers to comment on how they utilized play materials to meet the varied needs of their students. The 143 responses were examined manually and electronically to identify commonalities to determine open and then axial codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Table 14 displays the axial codes with the percentage of responses received for each code.

Table 14

*Responses to Survey Open-ended Question 32*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Axial Code</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Directed Play</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play as Learning</td>
<td>11.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play as Academics</td>
<td>46.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Aspects of Play</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Directly Connected to Curriculum</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centers</td>
<td>22.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Play</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response/Does Not Relate to Study</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the axial codes were established, the data were re-examined to identify emerging themes. Finally codes were collapsed into established selective themes. Three selective themes: curriculum focused centers, social learning, and play focused centers were identified and data were organized and coded accordingly. Centers were greatly utilized by this sample of teachers to incorporate play materials in the classroom. Utilizing curriculum-
focused centers represented 60% of the responses, while 20% referred to play-focused centers. Almost 15% of the remaining responses reported utilizing centers for social learning, an important component of kindergarten children’s development.

**Semi-Structured Interview Responses**

The responses shared during interviews regarding implementation of play were as varied as the responses received from the open-ended survey questions. In addition to describing what types of play and play materials were utilized, the role of the teacher in implementing play also was discussed by all the teachers interviewed. The 56 responses recorded from the interviews were manually and then electronically inspected to develop codes that would help to organize the data and frame the emerging themes. A software spreadsheet was utilized in the coding process as axial codes were established and percentages were tabulated. Table 15 depicts this process.

Table 15

*Implementation of Play*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Axial Code</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play Incorporated into Curriculum</td>
<td>21.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free-play</td>
<td>8.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Materials</td>
<td>51.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recess</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centers</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-Directed</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Directed</td>
<td>5.36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Play materials, with almost 52% of the responses, was by far the greatest category. The responses were reviewed to collapse the codes into broader categories that were more meaningful to the study. The survey data and transcripts were reread once again to ascertain how the play materials were utilized. After these reviews, the themes of learning centers and free-play emerged as all the responses fit into either of these categories. Free-play was the larger category with nearly 68% of the responses. Learning centers represented only 32% of the responses. Teachers appeared to equate play materials with free-play centers rather than with learning centers when responding. Those responses referred to centers as a way of incorporating play into the classroom; however they spoke specifically about play when describing the materials. For some of the respondents, play only occurred when play materials such as blocks, costumes, puppets, or kitchen toys were being used by children.

The last data corresponding to research question 3 related to the role of the teacher during the implementation of play. As was stated earlier in the review of the literature section by researchers Johnson, Christie, and Yawkey (1999) a teacher could be an active or passive participant; the responses did support both roles. Almost 47% of teacher responses reflected the more passive role of observer when utilizing play in the classroom. While passive or apart from the play, teachers were engaged in formative assessments as observers (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010; Johnson, et. al., 1999). Observing children during play provided teachers with valuable insights as illustrated by Teachers F2 and G3:

Teacher F2: I love listening to what they are saying and how they imagine. You learn a lot about how they learn that way.

Teacher G3: As an observer, it tells me a lot about where they are socially and cognitively, how they are constructing knowledge through their play.
Almost 36% of the responses described the teacher’s role as a more active facilitator (Schwarz, Davidson, Carlson, McKinney, & Contributors, 2005; Thomas, 2010). Facilitating play could involve setting up materials and/or actively engaging with children helping them work through problems, pointing them in different directions, or helping them extend the play by providing additional roles or conversation. Many of the teachers responded that due to children coming to school with less play experiences, the facilitator role was becoming more important because more children needed guidance. They facilitated the play by perhaps providing materials, giving children verbal cues to extend play themes, or simply preparing the classroom for play. Depending on the teacher, the class, or even the time of year, facilitating was more or less involved (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). How teachers facilitated play was illustrated through the following teacher comments:

Teacher B1: I kind of let them go and then see if there’s something I can do to help whatever their building, grow a little bit more. Sometimes if I walk over and see someone who has many things going on we have a conversation that might lead to them coming up with that idea.

Teacher G3: I set the stage- I provide the materials, props, the environment, maintaining noise level, changing the materials.

Teacher F2: I would hope that those things that I have taught them and I’ve modeled, the language that I use and the words that I use, trickles down to them during that play time, so I really try to hold back. I say big problem, little problem, can you solve it, can you use your words? And if you can’t then you need to find an adult and an adult will facilitate and navigate the situation for you.
Another active play role the teacher might need to fill was to be a play model (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010; Johnson, et al., 1999). As previously stated, some interviewed teachers commented that the children in their classes did not come to school able to play. Three of the teachers surmised that parents lacked the time to play with their children and furthermore, any play children did was very adult structured or organized. This created a need to actually teach and model play behaviors in the classroom. Almost 15% of the teachers interviewed felt they took on this role in the classroom. This entailed engaging in play as well as actually modeling play in a center such as in the housekeeping area or outside on the playground during recess. Modeling play was a role that the teachers interviewed felt was necessary with their children. The following comments demonstrated how these teachers utilized modeling of play in their classrooms:

Teacher F8: I think some kids just aren’t exposed to play before they come to kindergarten. I think it’s more of a modeling of play. I think it’s, “This is how you use the blocks; you know you have to share the blocks. This is the art center-what are some things that you can do with a friend?” I think more needs to be modeled- how to play.

Teacher G8: I think a long time ago a lot more was being addressed at home, for whatever the reason is, than it is now. So, children are coming to school now needing more teaching and more skills with play.

Finally, about 4% of the responses reflected that teachers were not at all involved in the play. When the children were playing, they were otherwise engaged. Perhaps they were not in the room or they used the time for other responsibilities such as completing individual assessments, running a reading group, or preparing for the next lesson or activity. These
teachers realized they were not taking advantage of opportunities to observe or engage with the children; however, they were unable to find needed time in any other way. They also felt they had to be engaged in another task to provide an instructional rationale or valid excuse to allow play to occur. Utilizing play in some capacity felt like a success for some teachers and the following statements describe this:

Teacher G8: So I’m happy the children have play and I definitely make time for it in my schedule but I’m unhappy because I’m unable to facilitate or just be an observer, because I’m always with children, working with small groups of children.

Teacher E13: Progress monitoring (part of AIMSweb assessment program) - that’s when I have to do it. It turns out that that’s what I’m doing at the time their having free choice: just trying to grab kids and catch up. Or catch up work- from independent work during the day or this afternoon, we had tub toys (blocks, inter-locking blocks, dry-erase boards, and puzzles) from one thirty to about ten of. I have accelerated readers, and don’t always have time to read with them or hear them read, so I was doing that today. So those are the things I am doing, really catch-up.

Classroom Observations

Six classroom observations were conducted to examine play implementation in kindergarten classrooms. All of the teachers interviewed and observed indicated that play was valued and utilized to varying degrees in their classrooms. Each classroom was observed once for a minimum of 45 minutes with the time of day and activities dependent on the teacher’s invitation. Most of the teachers scheduled the time when they were having free-play or centers to accommodate the researcher’s focus. The reporting of the observations was organized in a narrative form to illustrate the activities and learning which occurred
during the time of the observation. All data coding and theme development reflected that the observations were a one-time event. Conclusions regarding teacher implementation of play could not be made for more than this time frame.

During the observations the children were engaged in a variety of groupings. Whole group instruction, small group instruction, as well as self-selected play groups were observed. Different types of teacher play roles, such as facilitator and observer, were demonstrated, and different types of play, such as cooperative and parallel play were observed with the children. During literacy centers all teachers, regardless of their philosophy, utilized structure, instructionally based activities, and limited the choices available to children. Some examples of the instructionally based activities that were observed during the classroom visits were: “Crack the Code”, stamping words, dice games, “Chip Flip”, various Internet-based computer games, SmartBoard games, as well as commercial and teacher created games.

“Crack the Code” was a worksheet that utilized an alpha-numeric code where all the letters of the alphabet had a corresponding number such as A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, and so forth which the children used to decipher common sight words they were learning: see, the, my, me, and, look. “Crack the Code” was utilized in Teacher D5’s classroom. “Chip Flip” and the dice games were two math games which illustrated addition algorithms utilized in the classroom of Teacher G8. In “Chip Flip”, the children shook a cup of two-sided colored chips: one side of the chip was red and the other yellow. The children spilled the chips onto the table, separated the red chips from the yellow chips, and then wrote a number sentence. For example if there were three red chips and four yellow chips, the child wrote, 3 + 4 = 7.
**F8 classroom observation.** This observation took place in the morning for approximately 75 minutes. This was a collaborative kindergarten class with 18 children: nine boys, nine girls; a full-time general education teacher, and a full-time special education teacher. In addition, there were two full-time paraprofessionals at the time of the observation; an English Language Learner (ELL) teacher was also present. The classroom was colorfully, well-organized with an equal amount of commercial and student created materials displayed. The layout of the classroom included areas organized to support a variety of learning. The children sat at rectangular tables with materials such as crayons, pencils, and scissors shared in communal bins. A large calendar with a variety of place value materials such as a hundreds chart, coin counter, and counting bins was located to the left of the student tables. To the left of the classroom door; behind the student tables was a horse-shoe shaped table contained writing materials complete with a word wall. An art center with two easels and a listening center with a tape recorder and four pairs of earphones were located to the right of the student tables. A kitchen set was in the left corner of the classroom, bordered by two bookshelves. In addition, there were bookshelves with children’s books near the calendar area as well as a chart stand which contained a pocket chart. A variety of play materials such as commercial games, a large bin of wooden blocks, dramatic/dress up materials, and containers of soft molding dough were located throughout the classroom. There was also an exploration table set up with materials focused on a butterfly theme including: a butterfly house with caterpillars and pupa/chrysalis expected to hatch in the near future, magnifying glasses, pictures of caterpillars and butterflies, and both fiction and non-fiction books about caterpillars and butterflies.
During the observation time, the class completed daily calendar activities, a writing activity, and practice for a grade level theatrical play/show. There were no play behaviors or use of play material observed during this observation. The teacher who was facilitating the writing lesson did begin with a game-like anticipatory set and this was the most play-like behavior observed. The writing lesson was called *Star Student* writing and involved interviewing one of the children. The child’s name for that day’s writing was on letter tiles scrambled in a baggie. The teacher put the scrambled letter tiles on the easel and asked the children to decipher the name. The child whose name it was unscrambled it. The other students then asked the child a series of questions including favorite color, food, season, and activity while the teacher wrote the responses on the chart. Once the interview was complete, each child created a drawing of the *Star Student* which was compiled into a book for that child to take home. The final portion of the observation included watching the class practice for a kindergarten theatrical show. During this time, children were participating in whole group instruction and there was little interaction between children. Children did whisper to each other during the calendar activities; however they were engaged in what the teachers were doing.

**E10 classroom observation.** This observation took place in the afternoon for approximately 60 minutes during free-play time. There was one teacher and a high school volunteer with 22 children in the class: 12 boys and 10 girls. The classroom was sparsely decorated with commercially made materials and limited child created materials. Four large rectangular tables had six chairs each. The room was well organized with a good use of space as this room was small for a kindergarten classroom. The teacher shared that the district had recently reorganized their schools and this teacher had been assigned to a
classroom previously housing upper elementary school children. Half of the classroom was carpeted and half was tiled. There was a plastic kitchen set in one corner, a listening center in another, and against one wall were three computers. There was a large bin of wooden blocks, smaller tubs of linking blocks, puppets, cars, and numerous puzzles. The traffic flow of the classroom was very good, especially with the lack of space. There were also two bookcases set up on opposite sides of the room; one housed books, the other a variety of toys and games. A large calendar was located in the middle of the space flanked between these bookcases.

Following snack, the children packed their backpacks in preparation for dismissal. The teacher then asked each child to choose a center area. The play was child-directed with the teacher allowing the children a choice; however, the teacher monitored the number of children in each area thus some children were unable to participate in their initial option. The play materials utilized by the children were: blocks, linking blocks, a kitchen set with play food and cooking tools, dolls, action figures, puppets, puzzles, and three computers with Internet-based games.

Once the children were in the play areas, they had approximately 30 minutes of actual play time. During this time, they were free to move around the room as long as no more than four children were in a particular area. Children in most of the areas were engaged in cooperative play where they conversed and shared materials. The exception to this were the children who were utilizing the computers as these were all individualized games so no interaction occurred. As the children played, the teacher monitored the noise level and behaviors but rarely interacted with the children. In addition, the teacher tried to engage the researcher in a conversation about the state of teaching, union issues, and the new teacher.
evaluation process. The researcher had to actively disengage and move on several occasions in an attempt to remain an unobtrusive observer. The children continued to play until the teacher signaled it was time to clean-up and prepare to dismiss for the day.

**G8 classroom observation.** This was a 45-minute morning observation. During this daily time block, the children and teacher were engaged in “Choice Time” and “Math Games”, followed by a 15-minute writing mini-lesson. The class was composed of 22 children, 12 boys and 10 girls. The adults present on the day of the observation included: one regular education teacher, one full-time regular teaching assistant, a full-time one-to-one teaching assistant, and a parent volunteer.

The bright and colorful classroom had a great deal of natural light as well as an open feeling as two of the four walls were mainly windows. The room was well organized with a variety of tables and there was an equal representation of student created materials and commercial materials hanging on the walls. Many other materials such as books, games, manipulatives, and toys were well organized throughout the classroom within the reach of the children. The room was tiled with a large rug located in the rear of the classroom in front of a large calendar. To the right of the large calendar were a SmartBoard and three computers.

During the choice time, the children were able to utilize any materials in the classroom such as: blocks, computers, linking blocks, and a variety of commercial games. While a kitchen set and dramatic materials including puppets, dolls, and dress-up clothes were available, none of the children chose to play there. As the children engaged in choice time, the teacher and one teaching assistant conducted two separate math game groups and the parent volunteer supervised an art project. Each adult in the room called children from their play area to complete a math game or art project. The math game involved creating
number sentences by using a pair of dice, while the assistant called the children to play a
game called “Chip Flip”. This game involved the children dumping over a cup with two-
sided chips and then coloring the results and writing a number sentence. For example if the
child tipped the cup over and there were three red chips and two yellow chips showing, they
would color in three circles on the recording sheet red and two circles yellow. Finally, they
would write $3 + 2 = 5$ on the recording sheet. An alphabet crown was created in the art
center. Then the children used letter stamps to decorate their pre-cut crowns. Actual time
engaged in play was approximately 10 minutes per child. Some children who spent less time
on the art project by doing a minimal amount of stamping or who completed the teacher
assistant’s math game recording sheet quickly had more time to play. The teacher’s game
took about 15 minutes to play and was much more structured than the teacher assistance’s
game.

The teacher did not engage in the play as she was involved in the math game with
four to five students. Since many children were involved with the adults on other projects,
there was little need for supervising the children playing and the noise level was always
manageable. The classroom buzzed with activity during this time, with children interacting
as they played and also there was child-to-child and child-to-adult conversation as they
completed the art project. Regardless of which area they were in, the children were engaged
and appeared happy. After approximately 30- minutes the students cleaned up all materials
and met on a rug in front of the SmartBoard for a writing mini-lesson about using details and
adjectives in sentences. Upon completion of the lesson, the children went to their tables,
which had been set up for writing by the teaching assistant to write in their journals.
**G3 classroom observation.** This was also a 45-minute morning observation. During this time the children were engaged in free-play. There were 23 children in the class, 12 boys and 10 girls as well as one regular education teacher, one full-time teaching assistant, and one part-time special education teaching assistant. The classroom was located on the western side of the building with only one wall of windows. The natural light was more diffused but still the classroom had a bright, warm feel. The room was well organized with good traffic flow patterns, and a variety of table shapes and sizes. It was tiled with a large rug located in the rear of the classroom facing a calendar area and SmartBoard. There were three computers located to the left of the SmartBoard, and a listening center containing a tape recorder/CD player and four pairs of headphones was to the right. A kitchen set was near the windows and contained dolls, plastic dishes and cups, flatware, and other kitchen tools as well as a highchair and child sized table and chairs. Dress-up clothes were also located in this area and included aprons and accessories such as bracelets and necklaces. A large bin of wooden blocks was in the back corner of the classroom. Bins of linking blocks and cars were on a shelf along with bins of soft molding dough and cookie cutters, and numerous commercial board games. Finally, there were two tables set up across from each other located near a sink. One was an art area with a large easel which could accommodate four children painting at a time, the other was a sensory/exploration table which displayed a variety of materials organized around a plant theme. These materials included various types of seeds, small potted plants, pictures, magnifying glasses, and non-fiction books.

All areas of the classroom were available for the children to choose for free-play. The only teacher input for choosing centers was that there was a maximum of five children at any center with the exception of the SmartBoard which was a two-person center. The
materials and areas the children choose were: blocks, housekeeping, using the molding dough, painting at the easel, listening center, sensory table, SmartBoard, and computers which were utilizing Internet based programs. Children could switch areas as long as the five child limit was followed.

As they played, the children interacted with each other as well as the adults in the room. Cooperative play was observed in all areas including the computers as children played the games together; numerous conversations were heard. During this time the teacher moved about the room engaging with children by asking questions; encouraging the themes in housekeeping, and making positive comments. While the teacher did not actually participate in play, the teacher facilitated. It was apparent that this teacher valued play and often utilized it as the flow of the room was very smooth. In addition, a teaching assistant sat at a table calling children over to read a four page mini-newspaper geared for kindergarten children. She called groups of four children at a time and the children moved in and out of their play areas with little difficulty transitioning.

**D5 classroom observation.** This was a 75- minute observation with 18 students which took place in the morning in a collaborative class. In this district, a collaborative class was heterogeneously grouped with both regular education and special education students and two teachers. There were 10 boys and 8 girls as well as a regular education teacher, special education teacher and two full-time teaching assistances. The room was very bright and colorful with a great deal of materials. There were eight trapezoid shaped tables which were combined to create four hexagon tables with six chairs at each. Each table contained a bin with materials such as pencils, glue sticks, scissors, markers, and mini-letter charts. There was a large calendar on the right side wall with a large area rug and several baskets in front
containing large-sized versions of games such as checkers. Adjacent to the calendar area was a shelf containing wooden blocks. Behind this shelf was a long rectangular table with three computers. Across from the computers was a shelf containing commercial and teacher created games. There were several bookcases located around the room containing picture books. Finally, a puppet theater, easel, and kitchen set located near the back wall of the classroom. These three areas were very close together with no real separation between them.

The observation was scheduled during the class’s literacy block and involved two different components of the school’s mandated literacy programs. First, the teachers split the class in half and each utilized a multi-sensory phonics lesson with the SmartBoard. One teacher moved with her group to another room so each small group had access to a SmartBoard. In addition, the children had their own dry-erase boards and markers which they used to practice writing sentences after creating them on the together on the SmartBoard. The lesson focused on tapping out words which involved the children using their fingers to sound out words. After about 15 minutes, the one teacher and group returned to their classroom and the entire class prepared for literacy centers.

During literacy centers, the teacher utilized a large pocket chart to assign children to a center. The centers included: choice, A-B-C, and writing. For the choice center, children could choose anything in the classroom to use. This included using pointers to “read the room”- where children walked around reading any words they could find such as: labels, charts, book titles; using computers; using a flannel board to retell a story; or playing a teacher created card game to practice math facts. The A-B-C center involved the children stamping pictures such as a can or bug on a recording sheet. The children then tried to spell the word by sounding out the letters and finally wrote name of the picture on the recording
sheet. The last center, the writing center, was called, “Crack the Code”, and involved the children deciphering an alpha-numeric code where each letter was assigned a number with A=1 to Z=26. This was a way of practicing sight words. While the children were in these centers, one teacher pulled a group of students out of the room for small group instruction and the other teacher called children from their centers for guided reading lessons. A teacher aide was monitoring one of the centers and all children appeared to know the routine of the activities. After about 15 minutes, one teacher rang a bell and the children rotated to different center. The children were not engaged in play activities of their choosing; however most of the children were on task. “Crack the Code” was a center the children really enjoyed as was the computer center, which was part of the choice centers.

After rotating three times, literacy centers were finished and the children had a snack and play time. During this 20-minute span, the children had the option of eating a snack, playing, or both. Approximately a third of the class opted to forgo their snack to play right away. These children chose to color or play with linking blocks, cars, or molding dough. One child opted to finish her “Crack the Code” page. After eating snack three children moved to the housekeeping area where they pretended to be superheroes and the only group to play cooperatively. The rest of the class appeared to be engaged mainly in parallel play where they sat next to each other utilizing the same materials, but not interacting. During this time, the adults did not engage with any of the children except to remind them of their noise level. Each adult used this time to complete paperwork or to prepare for the next activity. The play time lasted about 15 minutes; when it was finished the class left the room to go to music class.
B1 classroom observation. This observation took place in the afternoon following recess. The classroom was a large open room with two walls of windows allowing a great deal of natural light and provided a beautiful view of a wooded area which backed up to a river. The room was decorated with children and teacher created materials: there were very few commercial materials in this classroom. The class was comprised of 17 children, 8 boys and 9 girls, 1 teacher and 1 full-time teaching assistant. There were three rectangular tables with six chairs each. Interestingly, there was no teacher desk in the room as the teacher had decided to move it out allowing more space for the children to engage in play. All materials were stored in child friendly ways as no container was difficult to reach or open. The teacher’s materials such as a plan book and note binder were kept on top of a bookcase which housed reference materials and books utilized for lessons.

The room was tiled and had a large area rug located in front center of the room near a calendar and SmartBoard. To the right of the SmartBoard were three computers and close to that area but against the side wall was a listening center comprised of a tape recorder and four pairs of headphones. The block area took up the entire back corner of the room and was organized so that four groups of children could build simultaneously. Bookcases lined the perimeter of the block area making it seem like a separate room within the classroom, while being easily visible from anywhere in the classroom. Adjacent to the block area was an art area which contained two easels, paints, and other materials such as yarn, tissue paper, and clay. In the corner opposite of the blocks was a mirror and baskets with hats, clothes, puppets, and other materials to be used for dramatic play. Finally there was a sand/water table which was a discovery area. It was filled with water and a variety of containers and buckets to explore the concepts of volume.
This was the longest observation, lasting two hours, as the entire afternoon was dedicated to play. The children moved freely about the room choosing activities and materials. For the first 20 minutes, as the children engaged in play, the teacher called groups of two or three children to a table to review a math graph. Once this was complete, the teacher moved around the room speaking with the children about their play. The materials and areas that the children used were: blocks—the most popular area, puppets, cars, modeling dough, sand/water table, art table, and “drawing-rest time”, which was an approach the teacher utilized to accommodate the requirement of having a rest period during the full-day kindergarten program. The children all had their own drawing notebooks kept with a towel in their cubbies. Throughout the afternoon, children would take out these items and take a self-initiated rest. The teacher assistant oversaw the art table and assisted children as needed. She too, engaged the children in conversation about what they were making; there was a very relaxed atmosphere in the room.

The block area was organized to accommodate many children. Paper and markers were in easy reach and the children labeled their creations. Based on those labels, the building theme for this day appeared to be New York City as some of the labels were Grand Central Station, Empire State Building, and Museum of Natural History. The teacher spent about 10 minutes at this area discussing the buildings and labels with the children. She commented on their buildings by asking them questions and encouraging them to elaborate on what they were building by asking what other objects they might see in New York City. Soon, the children at the art center were creating objects needed by the builders, which included signs, people, and vehicles such as trucks, cars, busses, and taxis. This block creation was truly a work in progress as it remained intact for the entire school week. The
teacher did not allow the custodial staff to move any of the children’s buildings during the week.

The afternoon ended with music signaling time to clean-up. The children put away materials and packed their backpacks and gathered on the rug in front of the SmartBoard spending the last 15 minutes engaged in an activity the teacher called “News Reporter.” This involved the children creating a list of the day’s activities. This list would be saved and each afternoon, additional activities added. On Friday, a “newspaper” created from this list would be sent home.

Research Question Three was used to examine how play practices were implemented in the classrooms of the participants. All of the teachers interviewed and observed indicated that play was valued and utilized in a variety of ways in their classrooms. The observations reflected this belief. While survey data suggested that the teachers valued play, the observations illustrated how the different beliefs and definitions of play by the teachers impacted play implementation in classrooms. The variety of activities occurring in the classrooms during these observations illustrated the academic climate of kindergarten. Children while engaged in play behaviors and utilizing play materials were also engaged in academic reading, writing, and math activities. While these observations represent only one time period for each teacher, they did illustrate and support comments the teachers made both on the survey and during the semi-structured interviews regarding their implementation of play practices.
Causes of Disconnect for Kindergarten Teachers

Research Question Four: What are the causes of disconnect among a teacher’s philosophy of play, perception of implementation of play, and the actual observed practice of play in classrooms?

Teacher disconnect can be described as the difference between a teacher’s philosophy and their practice in the classroom. Teachers have a set of beliefs and a philosophy which may or may not be visible within their classroom practice. When their philosophy was not practiced in the classroom, a disconnect occurred which could be caused by internal as well as external sources. Research Question Four examined the causes of disconnect among teacher’s philosophy of play, perception of implementation of play, and the actual practice of play in classrooms. To answer this research question, interview \((n = 10)\) and observation \((n = 6)\) data were utilized.

Semi-Structured Interview Responses

A review of the interview transcript data as well as the classroom observation data were required to answer the fourth research question. During those interviews \((n = 10)\), the kindergarten teachers’ responses were all quite candid as to the obstacles they perceived preventing the use of play. However many seemed unsure about the exact causes. The data collected from the interviews were organized by the research questions. This enabled the researcher to utilize the interview question \((n = 12)\), holistically as responses to specific questions were often supported or answered more than one question. For example, there were 63 responses to interview question 10 which reflected the teachers’ feelings about kindergarten curriculum and how teaching in general had changed; views based on their individual experiences. While this question’s responses were utilized for research question 1
data, those responses also influenced how teachers described kindergarten curriculum. To answer Research Question 4, it was necessary to examine the teachers’ perspectives about kindergarten programs, their educational backgrounds, as well as what they perceived to be blocks to the utilization of play in the classroom.

To examine the teacher perspective changes, the 63 responses to Interview Question 10 were manually reviewed utilizing large charts to identify commonalities and then coded utilizing a spreadsheet. Axial codes were established and after several examinations, selective codes were determined. Table 16 describes the axial coding utilized.

Table 16

Teacher Identified Perspective Changes from Teacher Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Axial Code</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Push</td>
<td>19.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Entering School with Fewer Skills</td>
<td>7.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Life Changes</td>
<td>12.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Expectations for Children</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally Appropriate Practices</td>
<td>22.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Desires</td>
<td>15.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>7.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 is a diagram of the final selective themes established for teacher perspectives. These themes represented the collapsing of the axial codes into themes which emerged from the study and were also identified during the review of literature conducted.
This pie chart illustrated changes teachers identified that they saw as a shift in the expectations placed on children as well as changes in the social and academic abilities of the children entering their classrooms. The increased expectations were seen as academic in nature and were from several sources including other grade level teachers, administrators, parents, as well as state and federal departments of education mandates and standards. These teachers felt some of the expectations were not always visible or tangible. Further they also admitted to creating some of the pressure of expectations themselves as they tried to balance developmentally appropriate teaching while meeting the curricular goals or mandates.

Figure 6. Selective themes for teacher identified changes

All of the teachers felt that they were putting forth a good effort to maintain a developmentally appropriate program while balancing the curriculum, assessments, and other responsibilities placed on them by their districts as well as state and federal mandates. While
several admitted to not utilizing play to the same extent as they had in the past, all currently tried to incorporate some play into the curriculum to maintain an atmosphere of playfulness amid the increased academic expectations. While acknowledging the changes in curriculum and expectations, the teachers had maintained their beliefs. The following comments illustrate the teachers’ feelings:

Teacher F5: I mean we’ve definitely changed the curriculum, and I’ve tried to keep the play in there as much as I can—because I believe it belongs there. And so I don’t think my philosophy has changed, but I think I’ve had to change.

Teacher G3: Play is incorporated—pretty much [in] everything we do, I try to be playful. That’s how they make discoveries, it’s how they socialize, it’s how they use their language, how they negotiate problem solving. At this age it’s key.

More than one teacher commented on what kindergarten looked like when they were in school and felt the added academics and increased expectations of today were not necessarily a good thing.

Teacher E10: I related a story to one of my parents during our conferences, how I made a Mother’s Day card for my mother when I was in kindergarten, and I spelled my name CTTO. In May—it hit me that now, if a child can’t write their name in May of kindergarten, you know the alarm goes off. Back then, I was normally developing—I always did well in school, so it’s just indicative of how the times have changed.

Teacher D5: When I went to kindergarten, we finger-painted and we didn’t do half the stuff we’re doing now and you know, I still learned a lot. I think there is more frustration now with the expectations on these kids because we have the technology to do, we just don’t always stop and ask should we do?
In addition to the increased academic expectations, teachers also commented that children were coming to school less able to handle both the academic and the social aspects of the kindergarten classroom (Ranz-Smith, 2007). Without pointing fingers or laying blame, the teachers mused about the role parents were playing in their children’s lives (Elkind, 1987, 2001, 2007; McMullen, 1999). Those who had taught kindergarten for more than 10 years noticed that their students were more deficient in social and academic areas. The teachers concluded that this deficiency was a lack of exposure to parent guided play which led to a lack of student understanding concepts because of gaps in prior knowledge. The teachers felt these deficiencies, combined with the increased academic push and higher expectations, created a great deal of pressure (Hatch & Freeman, 1988; McMullen 1999; Ranz-Smith, 2007; Sheppard & Smith, 1988). The following teacher comments express why teachers felt children needed more play in kindergarten:

Teacher B1: I think home life is a lot different, and more parents working, both parents working, at least in this community, and just less and less time to be with their children to help with these values.

Teacher D5: I don’t think kids are coming to school with the same amount of experience in self-play. And so it’s almost teaching them how to play. I think before they come to school they’re not playing the way they used to, you know, 15-20 years ago, so therefore it impacts how they play when they come here.

A topic which generated many responses \((n = 91)\) concerned the obstacles of utilizing play in the kindergarten classroom. To answer this question, responses to Interview Question 9 were examined. Often these responses, all reflecting frustration, were part of a conversation about play. Eternal optimism was also present as teachers were very excited to
talk about play and hoped their input would encourage future outcome of its use. The 91 responses were reviewed several times manually to ensure accuracy of coding as well as to accommodate patterns which emerged during the data gathering process. This data were then compiled into electronic spreadsheet to assist in the organization and retrieval of data. Table 17 illustrates the axial codes that were established with percentages of responses of each code calculated.

Table 17

*Teachers' Perceptions of Obstacles of Play*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Axial Code</th>
<th>Percentage of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>39.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Expectations</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Expectations</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Teacher Expectations</td>
<td>6.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>7.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency of Play Knowledge</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency of Play Skills</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>9.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next step was to collapse these codes into themes which more accurately categorized the obstacles teachers perceived that prevented play from being utilized in their classrooms. Responses which referred to expectations of parents, other teachers, administrative personnel, or self were grouped into one category. Another category included
deficiency of play knowledge and deficiency of play skills. The last two categories were curriculum and time. The final selective themes which emerged from the responses are illustrated in Figure 7.

![Teacher Perceptions of Obstacles of Play](image)

*Figure 7. Selective themes for teacher perceptions of obstacles of play*

Of the 91 responses, 40% referred to increased academic expectations. These expectations were from parents, other teachers, administrators, as well as the teachers themselves. The responding teachers felt those expectations in most cases were much too high for most kindergarten children. By performing more academic tasks the children to achieve more. Interestingly, the teachers’ responses were not pointing blame at any specific group; in fact, they admitted that much of the pressure they felt was self-imposed. Thus internalizing the expectations created a pressure as well as the disconnect for them which was illustrated in the following teacher comments:
Teacher G8: And I think parents, too, they want them—they’re in school all day and they want them academically engaged.

Teacher F2: I have to get them ready for first grade, I have to. The curriculum has changed, the standards have changed, and the expectations of what they’re suppose to know. I have expectations; I have a job to perform. And these children—I’m responsible for them.

Teacher G3: The academic expectations. To me it feels like a top down curriculum. I think in our community there’s a lot of pressure academically.

The increased academic expectation from the changing curriculum seen in kindergarten classrooms was reflected in 40% of the responses. The word curriculum came up nine times as an obstacle for using play by eight of the teachers interviewed. Curriculum, state mandates, state standards, as well as academic programs endorsed by districts were all reported in these responses. The teachers felt that with so many mandated content curriculum areas to address, it was difficult to include play and if they did manage to fit it in, they needed to connect it to that curriculum. Many teachers’ responses described their struggle to meet all the requirements placed on them as they worked very hard to deliver the curriculum in fun, child-friendly, developmentally appropriate ways. This appeared to be a means of maintaining their philosophies within the realities of kindergarten. The following teachers’ comments illustrate the frustration the teachers felt as they tried to adapt the increasing academic curriculum:

Teacher F8: I think the curriculum really impedes our ability to do more play in the classroom. There’s a lot of demands. I remember when I first started, we were only
doing writers workshop two to three days a week, now we’re expected to do it five days a week.

Teacher E10: Well, it’s definitely top down. It’s, you know, our district doesn’t have very successful test scores, so they feel the more academics at the earlier age, the more the children will succeed as they go through their schooling. So it definitely comes down from the administration building, to the administrators, to the teachers, and ultimately it’s on the shoulders of the little four and five-year-olds under our care.

Teacher G8: The curriculum. Definitely the curriculum. We’ve voiced this to our administration. There’s so much we’re being asked to do. It’s the curriculum that’s getting in the way. Part of it’s like; they’re going to get the curriculum. They’re going to get those skills. They need me to help with those social things now.

With 9% of the responses, another obstacle to utilizing play was time. Time is a universal issue and it appeared the lack of time for playing tied into the expectations of the curriculum. There are six hours in a school day, and time for lunch, recess, special classes such as physical education, art, and music must be subtracted. A common use of the rest of the day included 90-minute literacy blocks and 60-minute math blocks. Due to those pressures of the curriculum and the expectations of parents, administrators, other teachers, as well as the self-imposed ones, teachers tended to cut time from play. Often the teachers commented that they were happy to give the children 15 minutes of free-play at the end of the day. This time was also spent by the teacher to provide individual instruction, meet with a reading group, or to administer individual assessments. Even though it was only 9% of the responses, time weighed quite heavily on the teachers. Below are two teacher comments which reflect how they felt about time’s impact on play:
Teacher E13: (In response to Interview Question 6) Really for curriculum areas? Not much anymore. We used to do a lot of playing- but it’s really gone by the wayside. So basically it’s free time if we can get it.

Teacher B1: I think I get a little more luxury with that being a kindergarten teacher than the other grades might. But that time definitely is a factor. When you have to cut them off and you don’t want to, something really good is going on.

Lack of play experiences and skills represented 9% of the responses and again reflected the increased academic focus of kindergarten. In addition to the added academics, teachers were seeing children coming to school without being able to socialize and play or having a base knowledge upon which they can build. Children needed as much explicit instruction in how to be a member of a community as they did in reading and writing. Without the home experiences, the teachers felt the children were unable to access the increased curriculum.

Finally, deficiency of play knowledge, while a small percentage of responses, represented a larger issue in education. This lack of knowledge about play and the benefits it can have in the classroom came from multiple sources. Teachers, parents, and administrative personnel were mentioned in the few comments regarding this. It is difficult to utilize play if there is an overall lack of understanding of it. The following comments illustrate the lack of play knowledge by other teachers, administrators, and parents:

Teacher F8: I think, speaking from my own experience in my undergraduate and graduate experience, there [were] no courses, no information about play. It was very, you know, this is how you teach a student to read.
Teacher G8: (parents) Of course they want them to have that free-play time and choice time but I don’t think they see that as that could be a learning time as well.

Teacher G3: I think if you look at NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and their perspective on it I think play is important and I don’t think that teachers nor parents really- and some administrators- if you don’t understand the young child, you don’t understand how important play is.

Classroom Observations

The demands caused by increased academic expectations, in an already very full curriculum, along with children coming to school with less play and life experiences constitutes a cause of the disconnect that was observed during the classroom visits as well as noted during the interviews. This section illustrates classroom observations which were conducted to examine the actual play practices of six of the teachers who had been interviewed. The results which follow reflect one classroom visit by the researcher.

F8 classroom observation. A disconnect was not evident in the observation of classroom F8. The teacher’s interview as well as responses to the survey suggested that while the concept of play was something of value, the teacher readily shared that play was not utilized in the classroom. A lack of education in play coupled with a very teacher-directed philosophy seemed to explain why the teacher did not feel disconnected. Play was not observed but this was not unexpected based on the survey and interview data. This comment succinctly illustrates Teacher F8’s philosophy:

Teacher F8: I believe that all the children need to have modeling. I’m very explicit in how I teach and how I present my material.
**E10 classroom observation.** Teacher E10 appeared to value play as well as its use in the classroom through responses to the survey as well as the interview. Data gathered from the interview and the classroom observation indicated that for this teacher there was a disconnect among philosophy, perception of implementation, and the actual practice of play observed in the classroom. During the interview, the teacher commented on the benefits of observing play to gain insight into the children’s thinking. While play occurred during the classroom observation, little adult interaction was observed and there was not adequate time for the children to meaningfully engage. The teacher was attempting to keep play in the program by utilizing it for the last half hour of the day. The following comment describes the way Teacher E10 felt about play however analysis of the observation confirmed that this belief was not necessarily practiced during the observed day.

Teacher E10: I think we need to change our expectations. We need to understand that play is not just down time; it’s also how children learn and how they achieve certain things.

**G8 classroom observation.** Teacher G8 showed a great disconnect among philosophy, perception, and practice of play based on interview responses and one classroom observation. Teacher G8 responded that play was valued and understood the positive impacts it could have on kindergarten children yet when it came to the actual practice, the increased academics as well as the greater expectations by other teachers, administrators, and parents prevented full implementation. Some play was utilized as well as developmentally appropriate practices but there was a disconnect from the philosophy and the perception as to the play practices that were actually utilized. The following comments illustrate this teacher’s struggle which led to the disconnect.
Teacher G8: But I know for myself I had such different expectations when I went into kindergarten— I thought oh they’re just playing, they’re just doing this, they’re just doing that. But I’ve really changed, in my thoughts, in my philosophies, you know, not really realizing what young children need.

**D5 classroom observation.** There was a great disconnect between this teacher’s philosophy and perceptions as reported by the survey and interview and what was observed in the classroom. The teacher acknowledged the importance of play, however little play as was described was seen during the observation. In addition, the teacher recognized the assessment value of play, yet during the observation, the teacher almost ignored the children. The following two comments illustrate this disconnect.

Teacher D5: I’ve been teaching here for 15 years in kindergarten. We try to make it developmental but again we follow the … State standards so it gets less and less developmental as the years go on.

Conversely, Teacher D5 also state: Sometimes, I’m actually the learner, and watch them do whatever they’re doing and figuring out. Whoa, I didn’t know that! or Really? That’s a different way to look at it, and you can figure out things about the children that way.

**G3 classroom observation.** While Teacher G3 illustrated a slight disconnect among philosophy, perception, and practice of play, it appeared that for this teacher, it was more a frustration with the academic direction kindergarten education was taking than a disconnect among philosophy, perception, and practice. This teacher possessed a strong understanding of children ages four to six having an early childhood educational background. In addition, the teacher had only taught grades pre-k to second. This teacher implemented play as often
as possible with developmentally appropriate practices. The increased academic expectations combined with the increased academic programs in the district conflicted with this teacher’s philosophy. This teacher struggled to maintain an early childhood philosophy and also maintain the standards and expectations that were required by the district.

Teacher G3: I’m trying to meet a balance with my philosophy and what I feel comfortable with and what the children need. Probably a little bit more play, more toward the beginning of the year, and then I have to help them transition to first grade where play is not a focus of the curriculum.

**B1 classroom observation.** Similar to Teacher G3, this teacher also demonstrated a frustration and slight disconnect between philosophy, perception, and practice of play. Teachers G3 and B1 had very similar backgrounds and experiences which helped them to develop very child-centered philosophies reflecting a value of play as a means for learning. Both teachers put forth great effort to incorporate play into their kindergarten programs yet the increased academics coupled with the higher expectations created an environment which did not allow them to utilize play as often as they believed they should. Teacher B1 was the one teacher who was able to implement play most closely reflecting its definition in the survey and interview. While this teacher would like to have utilized play even more, the actual disconnect observed was less than any other teacher. The following comment demonstrates how this teacher had evolved as the kindergarten programs and how children had changed.

Teacher B1: I always knew it was important but I think now I’ve changed and that I really feel it’s even more important. I feel a lot more is getting pushed down into preschool… I think that shift happened for me because I just keep seeing classes come
that just don’t know how to work through problems and how to compromise and things like that.

**Review of Key Documents**

A review of key documents provided a background and context for the districts where the responding teachers taught. These seven districts represented diverse communities both socio-economically and culturally. The documents available from the districts varied, with only three of the seven districts providing printed materials for parents. Of the remaining four districts, one only provided a mission statement on their website; curriculum materials or parent handbooks were not available. One teacher from this district commented that many years ago there was a kindergarten handbook, but it had not been used in a very long time. The other three districts provided most of these documents electronically. While very different in style and format, the documents highlighted developmental practices however, all focusing heavily on academic skills. Only one, District G, mentioned the use of play as a means of instruction as a component of the program principles.

Excerpt from District G Parent Handbook:

- Meaningful play supports learning. The kindergarten program utilizes play as a method of instruction.
- A balance between structured learning and ‘work/play’ is desirable. The teacher may work with the whole class or a smaller group in a directed learning activity followed by time for the child to ‘play with’ or ‘rehearse’ the ideas in a ‘work/play situation.

It was understandable as to why the teachers illustrated a disconnect and why they felt there were increased expectations for the children. The message given by the districts was that kindergarten has an academic focus. Even suggestions for parent activities were
academic in nature. Playing at home in any capacity was not suggested in any of these district documents.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, the results of the surveys, interviews, and classroom observations were investigated and shared. Research questions were addressed utilizing several levels of coding which were applied to the survey, interview, and observation data as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Core categories were verified using the interpretative analysis technique (Gall, et al., 2007) and the themes that emerged were identified and discussed. Descriptive statistics were offered to support the qualitative nature of this study and were helpful in determining codes and establishing themes. Several key themes were raised in this chapter. Just as there were multiple definitions of play, there were multiple teacher philosophies; however, there were similar characteristics for both that were identified across the sample. In addition, kindergarten teachers in this sample also had a myriad of perceptions regarding play which were formed in part by the teachers’ educational background and their teaching experiences. Finally, the disconnect that existed between teacher philosophy, both teacher-directed and the child-centered, perception, and the actual practice of play were identified and examined. Several causes of this disconnect, such as increased academics in the kindergarten program, lack of time, and increased academic expectations held by parents, administrators, and other grade level teachers were identified. Teacher self-imposed expectations were also identified as a cause of disconnect for the interviewed teachers.

The following chapter will discuss the findings in greater detail, as well as the educational implications the findings have for teachers, instructional leaders and schools of
education. Future research opportunities that have emerged from this study also will be presented. Finally, the limitations of this study will be discussed.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter Five contains a review of the findings as well as their relationship to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The relationship of the findings with the literature is presented for the following categories: teacher philosophy, perception, and practice of play in kindergarten classrooms. The relationship between the literature and disconnect of teacher philosophy and practice are also discussed.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the interrelatedness of kindergarten teachers’ philosophy, perception, and practice of play in classrooms as well as the causes of the disconnect that occurred between teachers’ philosophy and their practice of play. As stated in Chapter Two, play is a concept that many researchers find difficult to define, however they do agree upon several characteristics (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Fromberg, 2002; Garvey, 1977; Van Hoorn, Nouri, Scales, & Alward, 2003; Vickerius & Sandber, 2006) which can be helpful when observing play in kindergarten classrooms. The characteristics of play included: an activity which is intrinsically motivated, involves active participation by the children, focuses on the process rather than an end product, and utilizes rules which the players have established (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Fromberg, 2002; Garvey, 1977; Van Hoorn, Nouri, Scales, & Alward, 2003; Vickerius & Sandber, 2006). The questions which guided the study were:

1. What is the philosophy of kindergarten teachers towards play as an instructional methodology?

2. What are kindergarten teachers’ perceptions of the amount and quality of play implementation in their classrooms?
3. How are play practices implemented in kindergarten classrooms?
4. What are the causes of disconnects among a teacher’s philosophy of play, perception of implementation of play, and the actual observed practice of play in classrooms?

Kindergarten teachers from suburban \( (n = 21) \) and urban \( (n = 14) \) school districts located in the northeastern part of the United States were the target population of this study. These districts represented diverse socio-economic and ethnic student populations. This was a purposeful sample because the selected schools based on criteria that kindergarten classes be housed in one building within the school district. This criterion was utilized to minimize multiple school philosophies within the same district. Administrators from six school districts agreed to participate and 80 kindergarten teachers were individually invited to take part in the study through mailed invitations. The invitations contained a cover letter describing the study and a confidentiality statement. Also contained were an additional letter of consent, the 4-part survey, and a return envelope. Follow-up phone calls and e-mails answered specific study-related questions, and facilitated teacher interviews and observations. The return rate for the surveys was 43.75%. The final sample of teachers \( (n = 35) \) included 3 male and 32 female teachers, each of whom had varied educational and teaching backgrounds. Surveys were completed independent of the researcher, and were returned via United States Postal Mail directly to the researcher.

The researcher reviewed the survey data to identify teachers to be interviewed. An examination of Part II and Part III of the survey was conducted. The researcher summed the scores for the scaled statements of Part II of the survey and organized the sample of teachers in a list from the highest score to the lowest score. Based on responses to the survey, ten teachers were selected to be interviewed. These ten teachers’ responses indicated stronger or
weaker beliefs that play were important in a kindergarten program. A higher score on Part II and a lower score on Part III indicated a strong belief regarding play, while a low score on Part II and a high score on Part III indicated a weak belief regarding play. The responses to the open-ended questions in Part IV of the survey yielded a deeper understanding of the teachers’ philosophy as well as their perceptions of the amount and types of play utilized in their classrooms. Selection of the interview candidates was based on the results of all parts of the survey; however, the open-ended questions provided a great deal of insight and were more meaningful for identifying candidates.

All ten teachers agreed to be interviewed. Nine interviews occurred in the teachers’ classrooms during non-teaching times such as before school, after school, or during lunch. One teacher requested to be interviewed at a mutually agreed upon public place to accommodate the afterschool schedule of their family; the interview was conducted at a local bookstore. Finally, six of the ten teachers were identified to be observed in their classrooms. These observations were 30-120 minutes in duration scheduled at the convenience of the teacher.

This qualitative study utilized a multiple case study approach to explore the interrelatedness of kindergarten teachers’ philosophy, perceptions, and practices of play in the classroom. Data were collected in three forms: survey data which used the Teachers’ Play Philosophy and Perceptions of Implementation Survey (see Appendix A); interview data which utilized a semi-structured format (see Appendix B); and observational data collected through the use of the Implementation of Play Observational Scale (see Appendix C). These instruments were researcher created for the purpose of this study. The semi-structured interviews utilized questions which were generated from the results of the surveys.
Due to the qualitative nature of the study, the data gathered from the three sources were analyzed manually and then coded utilizing three levels of coding as suggested by Creswell (2007), open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. According to Creswell (2007), open coding is the beginning analysis process of qualitative research, and involves taking data such as interview transcriptions and organizing it into categories. Once open coding has been established, axial coding, which involves “The process of relating categories to their subcategories…” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123) occurred. Finally, selective coding was done to identify themes that emerged from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

According to Strauss and Corbin, selective coding was “The process integrating and refining the theory” (1998, p. 143). Data were stored electronically in a database program to assist in the retrieval and organization of coded data.

**Results and Findings**

**Research Question One: Teacher Philosophy Toward Play**

Research Question One examined kindergarten teachers’ philosophy towards play as instructional methodology using survey questions: 6-14, 16, 17, open-ended questions 27, 29, and 30, data gathered from semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation notes. Due to the highly individualized nature of this question, the three data sources were reviewed independently as well together to determine if similar characteristics could be identified for this sample of kindergarten teachers. While a teacher’s philosophy is a personal statement reflecting their beliefs, several common key characteristics did emerge from the collected data. First, for this group of kindergarten teachers, teaching philosophies could be described as either child-centered or teacher-directed (Ahara, 1995). All of the teachers in the study acknowledged the importance of play for children and that learning could occur while
children were engaged in play behaviors. Just as researchers found it difficult to define play as an instructional tool (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Fromberg, 2002; Garvey, 1977; VanHoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2003; Vickerius & Sandber, 2006) so did these teachers. Their responses to the survey and interview questions illustrated that while they saw the importance of play for children they did not necessarily see how it could be utilized as an instructional methodology in the classroom. These kindergarten teachers shared that they did not often use play as an instructional methodology. It was used instead as a way for children to relax and/or when the teacher needed time to complete other tasks such as individualized assessments or reading groups.

Teachers who indicated a more teacher-directed philosophy, while acknowledging the importance of play for kindergarten children, had more of an academic focus with less play utilized in the classroom. In addition, they tended to organize that play in their classrooms. These teachers also defined play experiences more loosely than those teachers who described their philosophy as child-centered. For example, one interviewed teacher defined a play experience as movement around the classroom or working in an area other than a table. The teachers with a more teacher-directed philosophy described more structured, adult organized activities during their interviews, and these types of activities were also seen during the classroom observation. These teachers also tended to utilize literacy and math games as play experiences, incorporating these activities during literacy block times to engage the children as they worked with small groups. In contrast, the teachers who had a child-centered philosophy balanced the academics with play giving the children more opportunity for choice and independence. These teachers not only voiced their beliefs about play, they incorporated play actively into their classrooms. Child-centered teachers used literacy and math centers in
many of the same ways as the teachers with the teacher-directed philosophy but also actively incorporated a second play time during the day which utilized more child-centered, free-play opportunities. The child-centered teachers also reported philosophies that were as individualized and varied as was seen in the literature review, and it was evident through further examination by the interviews and observations that teacher philosophy was definitely not the only indicator of how a teacher utilized play in a classroom.

Teacher role in play was examined as well. The teachers saw their role in play in a myriad of ways. Reflecting on changes in family dynamics and society as a whole, most of the teachers who completed the survey and were interviewed, acknowledged that children were not playing enough at home and school needed to teach children how to play. The teacher’s role varied from an observer/onlooker, facilitator/mediator, and stage manager to an actual model for play behaviors (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999), which reflected the roles seen in the research reviewed in Chapter Two. Creating an environment that supported play as well as encouraging children to engage in play was an important role teachers described during the interviews. This role was evident during the observations. The teachers’ beliefs regarding play were reflected in their classroom and the observed child-directed choices. The children engaged in play behaviors and their interactions with their teachers demonstrated the teachers’ value of play (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010; Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999).

Research Question Two: Teachers’ Perceptions of Amount and Quality of Play

Research Question Two examined teachers’ perceptions about the amount and quality of play implemented in their classrooms. Survey questions 18-26 and the semi-structured interviews examined the implementation of play through the teachers’ perspectives. The
quality of play was a subjective reflection, with all teachers responding positively to the
survey statements. Overall, teachers in this sample utilized blocks, housekeeping, and dress-
up most often in their classrooms; however the quality of this play was not reported through
the survey questions or in the interviews. The teachers did report on the amount of play
utilized each day. However, this play time was discussed in broad terms. Most teachers
interviewed implemented play for at least 15 minutes each day. This play included the areas
previously mentioned; teachers’ responses did not reflect a quality judgment. While the
group of teachers was almost equally divided between teacher-directed \((n = 5)\) and child-
centered \((n = 5)\) philosophy, there was a disparity regarding their perception of amount of
play in the classroom. Those teachers who were more teacher-directed perceived that
children had ample play time in the classroom. Their definition of play was also not as clear
or specific as the teachers who described their philosophy as child-centered. The child-
centered teachers, while feeling pressured by the academic programs in place in their
buildings, tried to incorporate play whenever possible, even if the time they allotted was not
as much as they would have preferred. This pressure to focus on academics was repeatedly
reflected in all of the interviews and is supported by current research regarding early
childhood education (Erwin & Delair, 2004; Hatch, 2002; Ranz-Smith, 2007). This pressure
was a cause of disconnect and will be further examined in Research Question Four.

**Research Question Three: Play Implementation**

Research Question Three utilized survey, interview, and observational data to more
fully understand how play was being implemented in the classrooms. Survey responses
indicated that teachers most often implemented play through the use of centers. While this
was somewhat universal, the manner in which play was implemented was subjective, very
individualized, and related to the teachers’ philosophy. Teachers who described their philosophy as teacher-directed implemented play in different ways compared to teachers who described their philosophy as child-centered. The amount of play as well as the kinds of play was different for these teachers.

Teachers who self-reported a teacher-directed philosophy offered less student choice when implementing play while the teachers with self-described child-centered philosophies allowed children to choose not only the materials but also the peers with whom they interacted. During teacher interviews, all teachers described the types of play activities as well as the amount of time normally allotted daily. In all the classrooms, teachers indicated that play was most often implemented in centers. In most of the classrooms there were two types of play centers utilized: literacy and free-play.

During free-play centers there was more child choice, however, the teachers interviewed were split as to the amount of teacher direction that should be employed. In three of the classes, the teachers structured and limited the activities available while in the other three cases, the children were free to choose any classroom material. Three of the ten teachers allowed the children to not only direct the play but to also weave in and out of activities as they chose. Utilizing observational data, only one teacher utilized the free-play time as a major component of the day. While other teachers included free-play time, Teacher B1 implemented it for the greatest duration.

**Research Question Four: Teacher Disconnect**

The semi-structured interview data and classroom observation data were examined to determine the causes of disconnect among a teacher’s philosophy of play, perception of implementation of play, and the actual observed practice of play in classrooms. Interestingly,
teachers were very forthcoming with thoughts as to why play was not utilized more fully in
their classrooms. Based on 44% of the responses, the category labeled expectations, was
viewed as the greatest cause of disconnect between philosophy and practice. The
expectations stemmed from a variety of sources including other teachers, administrators,
parents, and the teachers themselves. It was perceived that first grade teachers expected the
kindergarten children to arrive with strong academic skills in reading, writing, and math.
The first grade expectation was that the children entering in September would be able to read.
This meant that every child leaving kindergarten must know the letters of the alphabet and
their sounds. They must also be able to decode words and have a solid foundation of sight
words. McMullen (1999) and Sheppard and Smith (1988) illustrated the fact that many six-
year-old children could be successful in this area; however, there are others who were not yet
developmentally ready to read. The expectation was that the kindergarten teachers prepared
the children for the academics of first grade. Administrators have similar expectations as
they look to prepare children for high stakes testing, which occurs in third or fourth grade.
Again, many children are able to perform at this level of higher expectations; unfortunately
there others cannot due to their development levels (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Heidemann &
Hewitt, 2010). Most of the kindergarten teachers in this study felt more pressure from their
first grade colleagues than they did from administrators. While the administrators did
support developmental programs, they did not advocate for play in the classroom.

Parental expectations were also indicated as a source of pressure for this sample of
teachers. All of the schools in the study offered full-day kindergarten and because the
children attended school for six hours, parents expected that they were engaged in more than
just play. Again, these expectations stemmed from a desire for the children to achieve more;
however, the parents had difficulty understanding that all children were not ready for this. Pressure caused by the expectations of others was seen in a study reported in Chapter Two. Ranz-Smith (2007) illustrated that the changes in society, specifically the over programming of children by parents are one reason play has lost its importance. This loss of play importance especially in the kindergarten classroom has impacted how children are instructed. While not placing blame, the interviewed teachers responded that since play, even in the home, was not valued by parents, children entering the classroom needed to be taught how to play. This lack of play behavior impacted the social learning that was critical in kindergarten and future academic success.

With the adoption of state and national standards, teachers have a difficult time utilizing play because of the lack of knowledge by colleagues and administrators as to its use as an instructional methodology. Trying to balance the academic pressures while maintaining developmentally appropriate practices created a disconnect for these teachers. While there were real pressures created by the expectations of others (parents, first grade teachers, administrators), for many of the teachers interviewed, the disconnect was mostly caused by a self-imposed, internal struggle. This made sense since “teachers’ views of play are shaped by their knowledge, beliefs, and experiences” (Monighan-Nourot, 1997, p. 128).

These expectations reflected another area that caused disconnect for these teachers, an increased academic curriculum in kindergarten. These two categories combined, represented almost 75% of the teachers’ responses and were discussed in depth by the teachers. This increased academic curriculum reflects the political climate established with the No Child Left Behind legislation (Zeng & Zeng, 2005). For many teachers a disconnect was created due to the “…tension between their desires to offer students developmentally appropriate
learning experiences and their obligation to teach the academic knowledge and skills
mandated by their states” (Goldstein, 2008, p. 253). All 10 teachers interviewed voiced
concern about the academic climate of kindergarten. While their districts promoted
kindergarten programs which were developmental, the reality was that there was a large
amount of curriculum and skills which the teachers were expected to teach and have the
children master prior to their arrival in first grade. While it was apparent that the teachers
cared about the children in their classes, they felt the pressure of being accountable to
parents, the school district administration, and the community (Gronlund, 1995). Teachers
felt a disconnect because their districts required the use of scripted programs and stringent
schedules within 90-minute literacy blocks, and 60-minute math blocks. This allowed little
flexibility in their schedules and for several teachers; it pushed play to the last 15-30 minutes
of the day. Even when they were able to allot time to play, they were neither able to engage
in conversations with the children nor spend time observing the play behaviors because
individualized assessments or reading groups took precedent.

The teachers who had the greatest disconnect seemed to lack a true understanding of
both play and early childhood. The three teachers who had the greatest early childhood
experiences as well as an early childhood educational background actually had less of a
disconnect than the other seven teachers. Even though they were not utilizing play as much
as they would like, they were able to better balance the increased academic expectations
while maintaining their use of play as an instructional methodology, which reflecting their
philosophical beliefs. The other seven teachers had a more difficult time balancing the
prescribed academics with what they felt was good for children, thus disconnect was much
more apparent through their verbal responses. In addition, the lack of an early childhood
background influenced the use of a more academic program. While they spoke about
developmentally appropriate methods, they utilized more academic tasks as well as more
whole group instruction and paper and pencil tasks.

**Comparison and Contrast of Findings**

Much of the review of literature in Chapter Two suggested that play was an important
compONENT of an early childhood program (Bennett, et al, 1997; Broadhead, 2004; Elkind,
1987; Jones & Reynolds, 1997; Paley, 2005). Vygotsky’s theories about child development
and play (1978) supported the use of play in classrooms; however, few teachers in the initial
survey conducted at the beginning of this study shared any knowledge of theories that
supported using or not using play. Similar to the research reviewed in Chapter Two, these
teachers did not articulate a common definition for play. It is an elusive concept to define
and the teachers in the study tended to describe more than define it. Through their
descriptions, similar to the research (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Fromberg, 2002; Garvey,
1988; VanHoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2003; Vickerius & Sandber, 2006), teachers
shared common characteristics. This also reflected how researchers described play; however,
while this sample of teachers described characteristics, they did not seem to have a clear
understanding of play.

A common theme which emerged from the teachers’ responses for why play should
be used and what children learn through play appeared to be social aspects and skills.
Vygotsky’s theory that through play children are naturally supported and scaffolded (1978)
was illustrated in the teachers’ comments. While not specifically referring to Vygotsky’s
theory, all 10 of the teachers commented on how children entering kindergarten now needed
play experiences as well as adult guidance and support to enable them to move forward and
be able to engage in play activities successfully with their peers. The conversations during the researcher’s interviews were relaxed; specific theorists did not come up as part of the conversation from the interviewees. In an effort to minimize researcher bias, questions did not specifically ask about any theorists such as Vygotsky. Research (Smidt, 2009; Whitebread, Coltman, Jameson, & Lander, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978) supported the use of play as a means for children to develop the social skills needed in school and life; however, teachers appeared to be unaware of this documented research or were unsure about how to communicate it to peers, administrators, and parents.

Increased academic expectations created by state and federal mandates and standards are a reality (Elkind, 2007; Singer, Golinkogg, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006) and are reflected in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. These expectations have caused teachers to move away from what they know to be sound, developmentally appropriate practices, moving to scripted programs, paper and pencil tasks, and other passive learning experiences to fulfill state and federal requirements. Almost all of the teachers interviewed, expressed frustration with the current kindergarten curriculum stating that there were more academics to cover and in doing so, their use of play decreased. When they did manage to include play, it was done without much adult interaction with the children and it was rarely child directed or open-ended. In further examination of teacher disconnect, the findings indicated that the majority of the interviewed teachers demonstrated a disconnect between their practice of play and their philosophy.
Limitations of the Study

The nature of a qualitative research study necessitates that themes and theories emerge as the research evolves and various data are collected. Krefting suggested that “researchers need alternative models appropriate to qualitative designs that ensure rigor without sacrificing the relevance of the qualitative research” (1991, p. 174). In this study, multiple data sources were utilized in data collection thereby triangulating the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Utilizing multiple sources ensured that there was rich, descriptive data as well as accuracy in the collection of the data. McMillan and Schumacher suggest that using multiple sources “may yield different insights in the topic and increase the credibility of the findings” (2006, p. 325) as well as support the themes that emerged from the data. For example, the survey data results were similar to the semi-structured interview results while the observational data supported and illustrated the findings of both the surveys and the interviews. This method was utilized to establish the trustworthiness of the study. According to Guba (1981) there are four areas of trustworthiness that are applicable to both quantitative and qualitative research. These include: neutrality, applicability, truth value, and consistency. Limitations are expected in all research and it is important that these be identified and acknowledged as part of the process so that the research credibility and rigor can be maintained.

Neutrality

Due to the nature of this study, researcher bias had the potential to be a major limitation (Gall, et al. 2007). Neutrality refers to the lack of bias in the process and findings (Krefting, 1991) of a study. While a significant element of the qualitative research process, the researcher needs to remain outside the scope of the results and findings. This was
especially crucial to this study as the data collection required the researcher to interact with all participants. Play as an instructional methodology was an important element of the researcher’s teaching and personal philosophy. While the researcher needed to make connections with the participants to ensure their comfort level in answering questions, the researcher’s beliefs about play and education in general could not be evident in any discussions to avoid response bias. From the introduction letter, e-mail correspondence, and conversations, the teachers knew the focus of the study was play; however, the researcher was careful to refrain from elaborating about study details and made an effort during conversations, interviews, and classroom observations to remain as neutral as possible and to respond in a nonjudgmental manner in an effort to minimize any influence on the subjects. Responses on the survey appeared to be very detailed and personal, and most of the interviewees shared readily and were quite open with their remarks.

When coding data from both the open-ended responses and the interviews, researcher bias was acknowledged, and the use of key words to develop codes was utilized to minimize this. In addition, the researcher coded the data multiple times over multiple time frames to ensure the coding was consistent. In addition, a “peer debriefer” as suggested by McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p. 328) was utilized. This provided the researcher with a non-biased peer to discuss the coding process and the development of preliminary theories. The peers responded to coding development and posed questions which assisted the researcher in identifying and acknowledging bias as well as clarifying questions that arose.

Another possible limitation was the limited number of subjects responding to the survey. The survey was distributed to 80 kindergarten teachers located in the Northeast via mail with a response rate of 43% (n = 35). While appropriate for qualitative research, this
sample was a small, specific population with a limited response, and the findings reflected this particular population and may not be generalized to a larger group of kindergarten teachers. Therefore, additional research with a larger population may be warranted.

**Applicability**

In qualitative research, it is the responsibility of other researchers to determine the applicability of the results; therefore it is crucial that the researcher provided specific descriptions that can be replicated (Krefting, 1991). To ensure the applicability of this study, the descriptions of the settings and populations were detailed so that other researchers could apply the findings to other appropriate populations. The coding process was also described. The findings of this study represented the purposeful sample that was utilized and since observations occurred only once, the teachers’ use of play could only be reflected on that particular day.

**Truth Value**

Another limitation to this study reflected how the researcher established confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects in the context of the study (Krefting, 1991). To ensure truth value in the study findings, the survey and interview data were critically reviewed. During review, it became apparent that while the survey was a good preliminary source of data, it did not allow teachers to respond to the quality of play they utilized in their classrooms. Nor did the semi-structured interviews elaborate on this area, therefore it was difficult to quantify from the teachers’ perspectives if the play that was occurring in their classrooms is quality or not.

In addition, all interviews were conducted by the researcher with data collected through a digital recorder. These recordings were transcribed into text documents by a
reputable transcription service. The transcripts were reviewed for accuracy by the researcher and each interviewee received a copy of his or her text document to review for accuracy. In doing so, member checking was incorporated to ensure that the voices of the teachers were correctly represented (Creswell, 2007). In addition, during the interviews, the researcher spoke carefully to reduce research bias as well as to ensure that the responses were the teacher’s actual thoughts and feelings.

**Consistency**

Finally, it is important to reflect on the consistency of the findings of this study. Consistency in the qualitative paradigm refers to the idea that results or findings that occur within a sample would likely occur again or in similar ways at a different time. Since this type of research is focused on people, there are many variables that could impact findings. Qualitative research has consistency when variability can be explained (Guba, 1981). For this study, finding consistency was achieved in several ways. First, by utilizing multiple data sources: surveys, interviews, observations, and a researcher review of key district documents, a deeper understanding of the themes were achieved. The data method collections were varied with survey, transcripts, and observation notes utilized. These data supported the themes that emerged and allowed the researcher to formulate theory regarding the sample population. In addition a data coding check as suggested by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) was utilized to ensure the accuracy of the research.
Implications

The research and data from this study offered an interesting examination of the use of play in kindergarten classrooms as well as the perceptions kindergarten teachers had regarding play. While teachers in this study held various views regarding play, they shared descriptive examples and vague definitions. Therefore, the first implication of this research was that play in schools needed to be further defined. Since teachers were unable to articulate how play should look they had great difficulty defending its use in the classroom. From this group of teacher responses it could be concluded that there was a lack of knowledge about play as a successful educational methodology. Teachers, while acknowledging children’s need to play, seemed uncomfortable with utilizing play for instructional purposes.

To understand play, and its crucial role, teacher training is needed to incorporate it into the changing climate of schools. This training is needed in college preparatory courses as well as for continuing professional development of current teachers. Teaching programs need to add specific courses about play as well as a greater focus on early childhood methodologies. The teachers who did not have a specialized early childhood undergraduate experience had less knowledge of the impact play could have on a child’s development. Theorists such as Vygotsky need to be incorporated more deeply into early childhood courses. While becoming more apparent in education, Vygotsky’s ideas are still not mainstreamed, especially in the northeastern area where this research occurred. In addition to incorporating play and early childhood developmental courses into teacher training programs, it is crucial that play information is available for staff development purposes in school districts. As the academic expectations increase on kindergarteners, it is also
necessary for teachers, administrators, and parents to understand that play can and should be utilized as an instructional tool. They also need to understand the specialized development of children ages four through six. While some children are able to adapt to the increased academic climate and pressures of today’s elementary schools, many are not and the adults in these children’s lives (e.g., teachers, parents, administrators), need to understand and respect their individual developmental progress.

Increased accountability has dictated the use of more formalized assessments. Adults, specifically administrators and parents, need to understand that one size does not fit all when speaking about young children. Therefore in addition to learning about play and child development, there needs to be flexibility built into assessment data and protocols. Data drives instruction in many ways, therefore the kindergarten teachers need to be able to access data regarding the use of play as an instructional methodology. Children whose development is not at the same pace, need to be given opportunities to develop through the use of play activities.

As today’s children have less opportunity to play outside of the classroom, so kindergarten teachers need to be able to incorporate play into their programs. Again, courses, workshops, and information should be readily available to support the use of that play. The adults in kindergarteners’ lives need to remember that many skills necessary for school and life, such as communication and self-regulation, are learned through play (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Training not only allows teachers to understand the benefits of play, it also will encourage them to become active in the process and help teachers develop their various roles such as, “…onlooker, stage manager, co-player, and director/instructor” (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999, p. 32).
Suggestions for Future Research

A great deal of research has already been conducted on play (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Fromberg, 2002; Garvey, 1977; Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2003; Vickerius & Sandber, 2006). This study provided answers to the posed research questions, but it also suggested opportunities for further research. While the quantity of play was addressed in this study, the small sample size required a more in-depth study be conducted to gain better insight into how much time is devoted to play in kindergarten classrooms.

While there is a tremendous amount of research regarding the use of play (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Fromberg, 2002; Garvey, 1977; Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2003; Vickerius & Sandber, 2006), it is still an underutilized practice. This current study, illustrated many of the reasons play should be implemented, however additional research should be conducted to determine why play is not accepted as a methodology in schools when it is well documented as a means for young children to successfully learn. Many of the teachers in this study felt that the expectations of other adults (teachers, administrators, and parents) prohibited their use of play more consistently. Additional research to assess play as a means of learning would provide support for teachers to utilize play in the classroom to help address the accountability issues that are being seen in education today.

Summary

Chapter Five provided a summary and reflection of the findings as well as the limitations of the study and areas that need further research. This study examined the philosophy, perceptions, and practices of play of a specific group of kindergarten teachers from the Northeast. The findings were related to the review of research that was conducted prior to and during the study, and reflected the ideas of a specific group of kindergarten
teachers. A study with a larger sample size would be beneficial. The results of this study indicated that these teachers’ responses were supported by the literature that is currently available. Increased awareness and knowledge of play are needed for pre-service as well as current teachers. In addition, play as an instructional methodology should be better defined for parents, community members, administrators, and first grade teachers so that kindergarten teachers have the flexibility and support to utilize it with their students. Teachers also need to be able to articulate the educationally sound rationale as to why they utilize play in the classroom. To say that it is fun is not sufficient in this age of accountability. Without having knowledge of research documented use of play, kindergarten teachers have been forced to forgo play as a developmentally appropriate practice.
References


Appendix A: Teachers’ Play Philosophy and Perceptions of Implementation Survey
Teachers’ Play, Philosophy and Perceptions of Implementation Survey

Part 1
Please circle the choice that best describes you and your teaching experience.

1. How would you describe your highest level of education?  
   - BS  
   - MS  
   - MS +  
   - PhD/EdD

2. How long have you been teaching?  
   - 1-3 yrs  
   - 3-5 yrs  
   - 5-10 yrs  
   - 10+ yrs

3. How long have you been teaching kindergarten?  
   - 1-3 yrs  
   - 3-5 yrs  
   - 5-10 yrs  
   - 10+ yrs

4. Is teaching your first career?  
   - YES  
   - NO

5. Gender  
   - Male  
   - Female
**Part 2**
Please respond to the following statements by indicating your agreement. The number 1 indicates a strong agreement and 5 a strong disagreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2 Agree</th>
<th>3 Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>4 Disagree</th>
<th>5 Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Kindergarten children learn best by playing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Play is an important component of my program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I feel it is important to make time to play each day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I utilize centers as a vital part of my instructional program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I utilize play as an instructional modality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I feel it is important for children to choose their activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I feel it is important to have blocks in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I feel it is important to have a dramatic play area in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I feel it is important to have a housekeeping area in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Children have plenty of time to play at home so they do not need to play at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Children’s most important job is playing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Outdoor play time is important to children’s development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 3
Please respond to the following statements by indicating the frequency of use in your classroom. The number 1 indicates more frequent use and 5 less frequent use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Always</th>
<th>2 Often</th>
<th>3 Occasionally</th>
<th>4 Seldom</th>
<th>5 Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18. I utilize blocks in my classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I utilize a housekeeping area in my classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20. I utilize a dress-up area in my classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21. I utilize dramatic play in my classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>22. I utilize puppets in my classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I utilize music in my classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I utilize commercial games in my classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I utilize teacher created games in my classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I utilize student created games in my classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 4
Please answer the following questions. If you need additional space, please feel free to expand the lines.

27. Describe your educational philosophy?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

28. Describe your school’s educational philosophy?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________

29. How important is play in your program?

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
30. How important do you feel play is in a kindergarten curriculum?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

31. Please describe how you implement play in your classroom.

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

32. How do you utilize play materials to meet the instructional needs of your students?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions
Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please describe your teaching background for me.

2. How would you describe your teaching style?

3. How would you define learning?

4. Do you know the term, “scaffolding”? How would you utilize it in kindergarten?

5. How do you describe play?

6. How do you incorporate play in the classroom?

7. How do you think children learn through play?

8. How do you see your role in play?

9. What do you think are the obstacles in using play in kindergarten?

10. Have your perspectives or beliefs changed regarding play or young children?

11. Anything else that you would like to share about teaching kindergarten? Anything you feel that would be important?

12. If you could change anything, what would it be?
Appendix C: Implementation of Play Observation Scale
Implementation of Play Observation Scale

School ID #_____________________________________

Date: _________________________  Time: _________________________

Number of Students: _________  Boys: ____________  Girls: ___________

Description of classroom: (sketch room on reverse)

___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Description of staff: (assistance/aides/volunteers/etc.)

___________________________________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Environment</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Created</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials/Student Work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Materials</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>visible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Patterns of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children &amp; Adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recess/Outdoor play</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Materials Available to Children</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic Materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen/housekeeping center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music &amp;/or instruments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puppets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Motor (balance materials/balls/etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Motor (clay/Play Dough/ etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sand/Water Table</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas of exploration (shells, leaves, paper, wood pieces, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play Practice</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play is teacher directed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play is child directed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate time for playing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are encouraged to engage in play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults and children interact during play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children engage in free-play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple play activities occur simultaneously</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity of materials reflects number of children in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Consent Letter to Superintendent
January 15, 2011

__________________________, Superintendent

______________ School District

Dear ____________________:

I am an elementary school teacher in the Buchanan-Verplanck Elementary School as well as a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. I have completed the three years of required course work for the doctoral program and I am preparing to conduct research as part of my dissertation study. I am seeking your permission to carry out my study in your school district.

This study is designed to examine the interrelatedness of kindergarten teachers’ philosophies, perceptions, and practices of play in the classroom. I will be seeking volunteers from your kindergarten teaching staff to participate in a survey as well as a possible interview and classroom observation. This research will not interfere with any teacher’s classroom practice and completion of the survey and interview will be conducted outside of the school day. Once complete, I am willing to share my observations, results, and implications for kindergarten practice with your teachers. Thank you in advance for your participation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jennifer LeFevre
jennifer.lefevre@henhudschools.org

I agree that the study described above can be conducted in _________________ School District.

____________________________________________
(Please Print Name)

____________________________________________
(Signature) (Date)
Appendix E: Consent Letter to Principal
February, 2011

______________, Principal
______________ Elementary School

Dear ____________:
I am an elementary school teacher in the Buchanan-Verplanck Elementary School as well as a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. I have completed the three years of required course work for the doctoral program and I am preparing to conduct research as part of my dissertation study. I am seeking your permission to carry out my study in your school district.

This study is designed to examine the interrelatedness of kindergarten teachers’ philosophies, perceptions, and practices of play in the classroom. I will be seeking volunteers from your kindergarten teaching staff to participate in a survey as well as a possible interview and classroom observation. This research will not interfere with any teacher’s classroom practice and completion of the survey and interview will be conducted outside of the school day. Once complete, I am willing to share my observations, results, and implications for kindergarten practice with your teachers. Thank you in advance for your participation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jennifer LeFevre
jennifer.lefevre@henhudschools.org

I agree that the study described above can be conducted in the ________________ School.

__________________________  ________________________________  __________________________
(Please Print Name)  (Signature)  (Date)
Appendix F: Consent Letter to Teachers
February, 2011

______________, Teacher

_______________ Elementary School

Dear ____________:
I am an elementary school teacher in the Buchanan-Verplanck Elementary School as well as a doctoral candidate at Western Connecticut State University. I have completed the three years of required course work for the doctoral program and I am preparing to conduct research as part of my dissertation study.

This study is designed to examine the interrelatedness of kindergarten teachers’ philosophies, perceptions, and practices of play in the classroom. I will be seeking volunteer kindergarten teachers to participate in a survey. In addition, you may be asked to participate in an interview or classroom observation.

This research will not interfere with your classroom practice. The survey and interview will be conducted outside of the school day. Once complete, I am willing to share my observations, results, and implications for kindergarten practice with you and your kindergarten colleagues. Thank you in advance for your participation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jennifer LeFevre
jennifer.lefevre@henhudschools.org

I agree to participate in the study described above.

__________________________________________
(Please Print Name)

__________________________________________
(Signature) ____________________________
(Date)