

**OUTDOOR PLAY: THE IMPORTANCE AND LACK THEREOF**

by

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## OUTDOOR PLAY: THE IMPORTANCE AND LACK THEREOF

### ABSTRACT

This study examined teacher's perceptions on the importance of outdoor play in early childhood classrooms. The purpose of the study was to investigate how local Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten educators felt about the amount of outdoor play available within their classroom as well as how they feel outdoor play affected their classrooms. This study aimed to answer the question what are preschool and kindergarten teacher's perspectives on the impact of outdoor play or lack thereof in early childhood settings? Fifteen Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers from five local elementary schools participated in this qualitative phenomenology study. Data was collected through a survey and a semi-structured interview. Findings revealed that educators were frustrated by the lack of outdoor play in the curriculum and the new emphasis placed on Common Core Standards. These educators felt that outdoor play offered numerous benefits and learning opportunities for young children; however, they could not provide such learning experiences due to the implementation of the Common Core Standards. Furthermore, educators believed a mixture of developmentally appropriate didactic teaching and outdoor play would best benefit children. Thus future research should investigate how the use of a mixture of didactic style teaching and outdoor play would impact young children's learning.

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## OUTDOOR PLAY: THE IMPORTANCE AND LACK THEREOF

### **Introduction**

Education is one of the most crucial components of a young child's life. Throughout the past couple decades, educators have been encouraged and prompted to teach young children with the mindset of play within the classroom. "Play can provide a context for the child's expression of the contents of her inner world. It can also provide a means to comprehend the world outside herself" (Torrence, 2001, p. 21). Play has been seen as one of the most influential and developmentally appropriate forms of educating young children. However, as we proceed into a more advanced and demanding world, how to educate young children has become a hot topic. New standards and curricula have been put into place that require young children, even preschoolers and kindergarteners, to perform at a higher level. Although the Common Core Standards are not without merit, the requirements that children must meet have nearly eliminated the opportunity for play within the curriculum.

In many industrialized countries where rationalist views are dominating national and local imperatives for greater productivity, we are finding that Kindergarten teachers are regularly faced with new demands for delivering increased cognitive outcomes for very young children. However, this new political imperative has not been matched with pedagogical support to help early childhood professionals' deal with the changes that are needed to meet these new societal goals for kindergarten education. (Fleer, 2011, p. 246)

Research shows that instructors are facing more and more demands when it comes to educating their students. Therefore educators are forced to pursue teaching methods that do not support research, such as didactic forms of teaching versus the use of play as a method of teaching.

Research has shown the importance of play and the positive role it plays in educating and providing children with experience. However, the lack of play is becoming more and more prominent, despite the influx of research. Play can be defined as “a minimally-scripted, open-ended exploration in which the participant is absorbed in the spontaneity of the experience” (Ortlieb, 2010, p. 241). One area that research has focused on is the amount of time spent on outdoor play. Outdoor play allows children to explore and learn using the natural world, as well as learn through experience. The problem is children are not being given opportunities to play outdoors; instead they are required to do more desk work, and therefore are deprived of such experimental and experiential learning experiences.

The research has supported the benefits of play. The different components of play allow children to develop in numerous ways, physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively.

An analysis of early childhood foundation texts reveal a view of play that is constituted as, “... a rich and varied medium for learning” (Gonzales-Mena, 2008), or as being the only vehicle to develop ‘... the cognitive, social, emotional and physical domains’ (Justus Suss, 2005) (Yelland, 2011, p. 4).

The research supporting play, especially outdoor play, is abundant and easily accessible to educators and researchers alike. Researchers, such as Vygotsky and Piaget, supported play due to the many benefits it can provide for children as well as the experiences it provides. The research also supports the use of outdoor play as a natural way to learn through the environment.

Although the research on the importance of play, what play is, and how it affects children is plentiful and easily accessible to all, there is still a lot of information that is lacking in research. Research has not been conducted on the thoughts and ideas of the educators that are being forced to partake in the lack of play within their classrooms. The majority of the research

is focused on the lack of play and the new standards being put into position. However, the feelings of the educators and what they would prefer within their classrooms is limited to an extreme extent. The deficits in literature are present because teacher's views have not been taken into consideration. In order to effectively teach their students, educators need to feel comfortable and content with their curriculum. It has been said that students learn best when they are interested in the content. The same applies to the educators. They must feel comfortable with the material in order to effectively administer it. Once the research has been conducted on the topic, I will publish my work in hopes of advocating for more outdoor play. Promoting more time for outdoor play and flexibility within the curriculum based upon teacher preference are two of the goals stemming from this research.

The question this study sought to answer is: what are preschool and kindergarten teacher's perspectives on the impact of outdoor play or lack thereof in early childhood settings? This study aimed to inform not only policy makers but educators and non-educators as well. It is important that families of students, educators, policy makers, and everyone involved in the education of young children know and understand the importance of outdoor play as well as why it should be incorporated into the classroom. The thoughts and ideas of educators are especially important. Teachers have been educated on the theories, strategies, and concepts that have been proven to work through research. Educators also know not only their student's needs but what works and what does not. It is important that outdoor play is not lost in the new standards.

This study is significant for a number of reasons. First of all, outdoor play is under used within the classroom. It offers a number of educational experiences and learning styles for children. Not only is it educational but the learning opportunities stemming from play are endless, therefore students can pursue the area that they are intrigued by and learn through

interest. The study is important because educators should be an important part in the decision-making process when it comes to curriculum design. If educators are not comfortable with the material or feel as if it is not reaching the students within their classroom, changes should be made to include more play and outdoor play time. Educators know their students and they know what will and will not work for said students. This study aimed to improve policy because research has shown the importance of outdoor play within the classroom and that should be taken into consideration when constructing a curriculum. The purpose of this study was to focus on teachers' perception of outdoor play and the lack thereof in early childhood curriculums. The significance of outdoor play cannot be overlooked and neither should educator's views on outdoor play. Although research suggests that play and outdoor play are important for early childhood classrooms and for young children to learn, the teachers perceptions and beliefs are not always consistent with what research supports. Teachers may agree or disagree with the influence of outdoor play on early childhood classrooms. However, the lack of research to support the use of outdoor play is evident. This study is significant because it investigates local teacher's perspectives on the importance or lack of outdoor play within their classrooms.

## **Literature Review**

### **An Introduction to Play**

As children grow up, one of the most important things is the education that they receive. Throughout history there have been many debates as to the correct way to educate children in the early stages of learning. Theorists such as Lev Vygotsky have suggested play as the main source of childhood learning. Research and experiments have proved the importance of play within early childhood classrooms as a means to promote learning and experience within the children. Play is significant because "it gives young children opportunities to learn and grow in fun,

healthy, and meaningful ways across multiple domains of development” (McDermott, 2012, p. 85).

Although research has proven play to be a crucial way of learning for young children, play has become second to the Common Core Standards in recent years. Outdoor play has fallen the most, being eliminated in some school systems almost completely. Both play and outdoor play have shown positive effects on children’s learning. However, the Common Core Standards are focusing more on strict, materialistic desk work and testing versus the experimentation format that play encompasses.

This literature review focused on the importance of play, specifically outdoor play as well as the positive effects it can bring to the table. Educator’s opinions and ideas about play and whether or not it should be incorporated into the classroom have been considered slim to none when constructing a curriculum that works. “Teachers’ beliefs about play remain largely unaddressed despite the intricate role of play in early childhood education” (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010, p. 322). This literature review aimed to examine the benefits of using outdoor play as a means of not just recess but as a form of learning and experimentation as well, focusing on early childhood education, preschool and kindergarten specifically. Through my research I aimed to determine what teachers perspectives on the effect of outdoor play on early childhood learning are and if there is a lack of outdoor play and play in general within the early childhood setting, regardless of prior research.

### **Play and Its Importance in the Classroom**

When a visitor enters an early childhood classroom, one of the first things that he or she sees is children playing in different areas among the classroom. It may seem like utter chaos

when in fact it is the exact opposite. Children are not just “playing.” They are learning through experiences and experimentation. They are pursuing their interests and engaging with their peers to advance their skills and knowledge. The classroom is not chaotic but more so a routine where the children are partaking in different centers, based upon their interest that day. Play is much more than a toy and a child. Play goes much deeper into the thought processes children are conducting, their imagination and creativity, their language skills, and even their physical development. For those reasons, play has been seen as the single most important aspect of learning within the early childhood education field. It is more than just play to children, it is a strategy for teaching and learning within the classroom. (Warner, 2008)

Throughout history, researchers have placed a large emphasis on the use of play within early childhood classrooms. For educators, play has been seen as more than simply “playing” as others view it. It is a means of learning that can reach all children as well as impact numerous domains such as their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional domains in the process. Play can be looked at as giving

children opportunities to be in control of what is happening and what they know. Play, together with friends, allows children to exercise self-control and develop what they already know, take turns, cooperate and socialize with others. In children’s play there are unsuspected opportunities to symbolize and use objects in a way that is meaningful and thrilling to them (Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008, p. 627).

Play addresses numerous aspects of learning, whether it is physical development, cognitive development such as fostering problem solving skills, language and literacy by pretending to have a family discussion while playing house, and so on. The opportunities to learn are endless when children can experience the world around them as well as engage themselves in

ideas that interest them and explore through play. A few examples of learning opportunities provided by play include it helps children develop new forms of thinking, form a sense of self-regulation, develop literacy skills as well as oral language skills, and help children develop a sense of imagination which in return boosts their creativity. Play has also been seen as having specific attributes such as being motivating, interest driven, pleasurable, and engaging. When these attributes are enhanced, play becomes purposeful and provides children with an educational experience. (Gilbert, Harte, & Patrick, 2011; Bodrova, 2008; Robson & Rowe, 2012; Thomas, Warren, & deVries, 2011)

There are numerous theorists who have devoted their lives to play theories and the importance of play within the early childhood education. Piaget was one of the leading theorists when it came to the discussion of play. Piaget “envisioned play as ‘leading from activity to representation, in so far as it evolves from its initial stage of sensory motor activity to its second stage of symbolic or imaginary play’” (Casby, 2003, p. 164). Piaget was a believer in using play as a means for children to build on their cognitive skills, and language skills. Play was seen as an avenue for learning to Piaget, an avenue that should not be disrupted in the young years. (Warner, 2008)

Vygotsky was one of the main theorists who believed in the importance of play in early childhood classrooms and play in general. Vygotsky was a firm believer that children became a “head taller than themselves” when participating within play, especially make-believe play. He was a firm believer that make-believe play allowed children to create imaginary situations, boosting their imagination and creativity, act out roles and situations, using problem solving skills and language and social skills to fulfill this piece, and finally follow a set of predetermined rules which focused on cognitive abilities. These pieces may not seem like much but this set of

skills set a child up for a sound academic future. (Bodrova, Germeroth, & Leong, 2013; Freeman, 2011)

Montessori was a third and equally important theorist who focused her work on the importance of the early childhood classroom and child directed activities within it. Montessori's work closely resembles playful learning, or learning in which the objects and actions used within play help children to learn different skill sets.

In contrast, playful learning typically involves objects with which children play to learn. Children learning shapes, for example, handle objects of different forms, perhaps tracing the forms with their fingers in addition to seeing them. In this way, playful learning embodies cognition (Lillard, 2013, p. 159).

Montessori believed that play should be child centered and child directed, meaning the child can choose the path of learning based upon their specific interests or areas in which they desire to play within. Montessori believed in a child friendly classroom where children can conduct their own learning, independently. Child interest has been seen as what makes an early childhood curriculum effective.

Working materials, kept on shelves and freely available to the children, are organized into topics such as language, math, and so on. The materials are designed so that if children make mistakes, they can see and correct them without close teacher supervision or intervention" (Lillard, 2013, p. 159).

Playful learning was a crucial component of Montessori's vision of play within the classroom and is a commonly shared view among educators today. (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011)

Play itself offers children multiple avenues for learning, whether it be the drama center or the block area. Outdoor play has been considered to be an important and influential component of play. It offers numerous benefits to young children's learning such as "richer imaginative play; increased physical activity; calmer, more focused play; and positive social interactions" (Nedovic & Morrissey, 2013, p. 281). The importance and benefits of outdoor play should not be overlooked especially within the education of young children.

The merits of the outdoors apply equally to young children, with the natural play environment providing a variety of opportunities for development. Studies of different outside play spaces found that a mixture of manufactured materials and natural materials made children more active. Outside, children can run, be noisy, and jump, which is often not allowed inside. While providing exercise and enhancing children's fitness levels, noisy rough-and-tumble play also offers opportunities to vary social relationships by interacting with peers in ways that contribute to children's social skills. It is significant that nature provides unlimited opportunities for learning that are compatible with children's interests and skills (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011, p. 759).

The opportunities that outdoor play provides for young children help to enhance development and provide educational experiences for young children who learn through exploring and engaging their senses. The most important aspect however is that children learn best when they are interested in the material or activity. Using the outdoor environment as an educational tool can help to provide children with the opportunities to see the world in new and interesting ways. It can challenge children in cognitive and physical ways as well as provide children with multiple educational experiences. An example is the development as problem solving skills, where children work together to solve a problem that has arisen through their play.

“The ability to solve problems is a fundamental life skill and develops naturally through experiences, conversations and imagination” (Lee, 2012, p. 35). In outdoor play, children can use unique and creative ways to solve their problems, enhancing cognitive ability and problem solving strategies. (Canning, 2010; Einarsdottir, 2011; Massey, 2013)

Research has suggested that outdoor play works as an avenue for learning for many reasons. First of all, within an outdoor setting the activities can be either teacher-directed or student-directed. The educator can direct children to specific aspects or the children can maneuver the environment based upon their interests and in return the educators can enhance the learning. An ideal outdoor setting allows doing, thinking, being, feeling, and creating all simultaneously.

The value of varied, natural, environmental elements and, specifically, flexible loose parts should not be underestimated in the context of children’s outdoor learning and activity and the potential this offers for teachers to recognize and build on children’s interests in and out of the classroom. The outdoor area therefore offers rich potential for children’s cognitive engagement as well as their physical, health and social development. (Waters & Maynard, 2010, p. 481)

An important aspect of outdoor play is the fact that it does not necessarily need to be a structured play area. The area can be an open field or a patch of woodland area. The opportunities presented vary upon the environment in front of them, which can fall in the advantage of the teacher as they plan their studies. Outdoor play is an aspect of early childhood education that should not be overlooked when planning the curriculum or deciding what areas to pursue within the classroom. Researchers believe that the desire for outdoor play is actually more

of a need than a want, as it offers numerous learning experiences for children across all domains. (Fjortoft, 2001; Kernan & Devine, 2010)

Play is not unique to the early childhood education in the United States. The importance of play and outdoor play within early childhood learning environments is a known worldwide. Educators around the world understand the importance of using multiple forms of play within the classroom. However, the lack of play is not just affecting the United States, but the global educational society as well, as all nations gear up to face the ever challenging educational race. Although the importance and use of play varies depending on the culture, there are factors that remain the same in each country. Play is considered to be a process of learning worldwide. It is seen as a learning style especially for young children. The encouragement of learning through playing and experiencing the world around a child is a popular view internationally. It is also seen as an avenue for endless learning possibilities. (Izumi-Taylor, Samuelsson, & Rogers, 2010; Lillemyr, Sobstad, Marder, & Flowerday, 2011)

### **Challenges Early Childhood Educators Face**

In today's society, the lack of play is partially due to the importance being placed on academic skills. Educators face pressure to

start teaching academic skills at a progressively young age at the expense of traditional early childhood activities. This pressure is largely caused by the concerns about children not being ready for school as well as concerns about children falling behind in their later academic learning. (Bodrova, 2008, p. 358)

Another factor that is affecting the amount of outdoor play within school is the influx of technology being incorporated into children's lives, even at the earliest of ages. Children have

access to smart phones, tablets, and computers at an increasingly early age. Also, a good portion of children's days are dedicated to watching television or playing video games. Technology forms like these were not as easily attainable decades ago.

With increasing pressure of academic readiness, outdoor play has been nearly eliminated from early childhood education. Not only is outdoor play being affected but general learning through play is being taken away from children as a learning tool. "The pressures of accountability have dramatically increased in recent years and resulted in more direct instruction, which can be developmentally inappropriate for young children" (Nitecki & Chung, 2013, p. 47). The focus is now on meeting standards through a more single-minded, desk work orientated approach. The focus is now on academic skills and achieving and mastering them at a younger level rather than allowing children to experience the world around them and learn through interest and experimentation. "With goals and objectives identified through ends-sought test outcomes, there have emerged defined curricula cultivating the practice of direct instruction as the efficient means to achieve the goals, to the neglect of children's propensity for play-based learning and child-initiated thought" (Ranz-Smith, 2007, p. 272). Research-based play strategies are being pushed to the back burner in order to promote the new and demanding standards, regardless of the previous literature supporting the use of play within early childhood classrooms. The Common Core Standards is the new path which educators must follow.

The pressure is not only felt by the students but by the educators and administration personal as well and that is presenting a problem within our classrooms. The problem that is coming about is the process of

implementing curricular goals and objectives while attempting to maintain an environment that allows for child-sponsored activity. Within the contexts of our schools, and indeed all

of American society, we seem to be experiencing a disregard for the child's perspective and need for play (Ranz-Smith, 2007, p. 273).

Teachers are having a rough time implementing the ideas and strategies that were taught to them within their educational backgrounds into the curriculum and instruction while fulfilling the demands of the new standards. These strategies include child directed activities and allowing children to learn through exploration and experimentation within their play.

Through the completion of an educator's teaching degree, the number one thing early childhood educators are taught is the importance of play within the classroom. However, like mentioned above, play is being set aside to focus on the learning standards. This is bring about a problem because

Play has long had a central role in early childhood education, where it has been viewed as an effective means for promoting all aspects of child development. Many early childhood teachers are concerned that the standards movement and its narrowing of educational goals are pushing aside classroom learning through play in favor of more didactic forms of instruction (Drew, Christie, Johnson, Meckley, & Nell, 2008, p. 39).

By focusing on didactic forms of learning, the element of experience and child focused learning is being left behind. Educators are not the only individuals who are feeling pressure by these new standards and the push to leave play behind. Aside from children experiencing pressure, principles and administration are also feeling the pressure as well. (Rose & Rodgers, 2012)

Another component that needs to be addressed is what is not defined within the standards. "While the Standards address what could be most essential to teach, they do not define

how teachers should teach” (Nitecki & Chung, 2013, p. 46). As educators plan to implement the new standards, what is not clear is how to form an effective classroom and environment and curriculum within the school setting. Educators are being forced into a more direct form of instruction in order to meet the new preschool and kindergarten standards even if they are not developmentally appropriate for the children. Teachers are being forced to push children into learning styles and environments that they are not comfortable with. The experimentation and developmentally appropriate environment has been lost in favor of a more direct form of teaching. Educators are losing the ability to change and manipulate their teaching strategies to best benefit their students. (Nitecki & Chung, 2013)

“The aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals...not to set out an exhaustive list or a set of restrictions that limits what can be taught what is specified herein” (Nitecki & Chung, 2013, p. 46). A developmentally appropriate setting is key when working with both the standards and educating young children. Promoting an environment where play is valued is crucial for the effective education of young individuals.

Although extensive research has been conducted promoting the positive use of outdoor play and play in general within the classroom, today’s education reform emphasizing standardized tests present challenges and conflicts with the theory of play. Educators and administration are being forced to focus their teaching styles more so on didactic teaching rather than using play, experimentation, and experience to promote learning. It is crucial for educators to realize the importance of using outdoor play within their curriculum as it is the natural form of learning for young children.

### **Deficits in the Literature**

Although research has been conducted in favor of play and its impacts within the classroom, there are still areas in which literature and research has been lacking. Educators are one of the most important aspects of a classroom, yet their position on the lack of outdoor play and the ever changing standards has not been researched to the same extent. Educators are required to teach specific material and curriculums to their students, however if educators are not comfortable with, well prepared for, or in favor of the new requirements, it may not be as easily to accomplish said task.

The deficits within the literature were mainly lacking in the area of the educators and their thoughts and ideas concerning the implementation of outdoor play in the curriculum or lack thereof. There is also deficits concerning the thoughts and ideas of educators on the lack of outdoor play within the classroom and educational settings. There was little to no research conducted on the thoughts and concerns educators have about the new standards as well as research proving that the new standards are a more effective learning strategy than outdoor play within early childhood curriculums.

### **Contributions to the Field**

Through my research I focused on two main components. The first component was the positive effects of outdoor play on early childhood education. By focusing my attention on this element it allowed me to present the important aspects of outdoor play and present facts as to why the implementation of outdoor play should be a major component in an early childhood classroom.

Secondly, I conducted research that focused on preschool and kindergarten teachers within surrounding schools. I conducted research to determine their thoughts and views on

outdoor play and its role in the classroom and the standards and effects on student learning. I also conducted interviews with the teachers, asking questions such as whether they prefer using outdoor play as a form of learning and whether or not they received enough time to implement play within their curriculum or not or if they were content with the use of the standards. By conducting this research, I was able to gauge the thoughts and views of educators as well as how it affected them and their students within the classroom. It is important that educators feel comfortable and educated on the methods in which they must teach. It was crucial to determine the strategies that educators feel most comfortable teaching with and incorporate those strategies into the curriculum. Students learn best when they are interested in the material and feel comfortable with the learning styles. The same goes for educators and the ways in which they must teach. The views of the people participating in the new standards are a rather crucial component to the effectiveness of the learning styles yet it is an understudied aspect, and therefore I focused my research on this topic. By doing this, I was able to determine the differences between the benefits of outdoor play and the affected it had on teachers and how they both effect learning within an early childhood classroom.

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction To Methodology**

Outdoor play is an important part of early childhood curriculum. However, due to the new standards, outdoor play has been put on the back burner. One aspect that has not been explored is what the educators think about the lack of outdoor play. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology research study was to explore the thoughts and ideas held towards outdoor play in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms in elementary schools in rural

Western New York. Phenomenology is a study that focuses on experience or concepts that the participants have lived through. The purpose of phenomenology is to explain what the participants have experienced as well as how and why they have experienced said practice. It is important to understand the thoughts and experiences that the participants have experienced. This design is appropriate for this research study because it focused on the educator's opinions on the importance of outdoor play, its effects on young children, and whether or not they believe more time should be dedicated to outdoor play. (Creswell, 2014)

### **Researcher's Role**

The researcher's role in this study was to gather information about the educator's views on outdoor play in the early childhood curriculum. As the primary investigator in this research, I have had experience with this problem throughout my schooling. Outdoor play is one focus of early childhood education; however, within school settings, the amount of instructional time dedicated to outdoor play is dwindling to an all-time low due to the standardized tests. Within my student teaching placements and current employment, I have seen the amount of outdoor play being cut in order to make room for more academic skill based learning.

Throughout my education, I was always taught that play is the best avenue for young children to learn. Research stated that outdoor play allowed children to learn the way in which they do best and that is through experimentation and the using their senses to explore their environment.

In each classroom I have taught in, play had always been a crucial component of the curriculum and it seemed to work well. Therefore, when I see classrooms having to lower or eliminate their free play and outdoor play, it deeply saddens me due to the fact that I have always

been taught to embrace and use play as a medium for teaching and learning. Due to these feelings, my analysis and interpretation may bend towards the side of positive outdoor play.

### **Procedures**

The participants were randomly chosen based upon their grade level in which they are teaching. There was no prior contact and interactions between the participants and me before the study. The views towards outdoor play that each educator had may have been influenced by the school district in which they worked. Each educator's amount of outdoor play can be attributed to the district in which they worked.

In order to obtain permission from the participants, I began by compiling a list of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers, 18 and older, in the surrounding area schools. In order to do this, I assembled a list of local elementary schools. Once the list had been compiled, I visited each school's website. On the website, using the elementary tab, I located the e-mails of the Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers. I then sent these individuals a consent form, requesting their participating in the study. I myself then completed the Human Subjects review form. My goal was to have between 15 and 20 participants. In the end, I had 15 participants complete the study.

As a way to gain entry into the setting, which is the designated school of the educators involved, I had e-mailed the selected schools in order to inform them of who I am, what my research project was, and what I would be doing with their educators. Once permission had been given from the administrators, I e-mailed the nominated educators from each school, requesting their help in my research project. Once permission had been obtained from the educators and the consent form had been signed, a survey was sent to the teachers. The survey and interview

questions allowed me to gage the amount of time these teachers set aside for outdoor play and whether or not they felt that outdoor play was being underrepresented in the early childhood curriculum. The survey and interview questions were the same for each participant, regardless of their responses. I then set up and conducted interviews with each educator upon arrival of their completed survey.

The site for the interview was either through e-mail or at their place of employment. The site being their own school helped to keep the educators safe and relieved them of any pressure they might have been experiencing. It also made it easier and quick to complete and therefore not taking too much time away from the educators. The timing of the interview was after school hours, and thus there are no disruptions to the curriculum and lessons plans as well as no added disruptions from students or other personal. The interview was also be done over e-mail in order to reach busy or not easily available educators. The results of the study were being reported through an initial survey that all the educators had to complete as well as an interview that was conducted with each educator. The interview consisted of ten questions long and I conducted, one interview with each participant.

### **Data Collection**

The purposefully selected fifteen individuals were either pre-kindergarten or kindergarten educators in surrounding schools located throughout numerous schools within Western New York. The educators themselves are aged 18 and above. The setting of the research was the educator's place of employment. The data that was collected from the participants was their views on the importance of outdoor play, how much time they spent devoted to outdoor play as a form of education, and whether they wished they could extend that time or not. The data was collected through a survey and through the completion of an interview.

The research study took over two months to complete. The first month was dedicated to obtaining a consent form from each participant as well as each applicant completing a survey. The second month focused on completing an interview with each participant. Altogether, I completed 18 surveys and 15 interviews. Therefore, I could only use the 15 participants who completed both data collection instruments.

Throughout the study, each interview took place at the educator's place of employment. The interview consisted of ten questions. With those ten questions, each interview ranged from 15 minutes to half an hour. The interviews were audio taped and then later transcribed. Throughout the interviews, to ensure confidentiality names of all kinds, teacher, students, and places, were not mentioned nor used. The remaining participants were also not mentioned. Also, when transcribing, I used pseudonyms for the educators instead of their real names.

### **Data Analysis**

The survey and interview data were analyzed by transcribing the interviews and coding interviews based upon possible themes and patterns presented in the data.

First, the data were organized and prepared using transcribing. The data were then sorted based upon the type of source, survey or interview. Next, the data were read through, answering general questions and ideas that may be present, as well as allowing me to reflect upon the surveys and interviews. Coding was the next step. I then organized the material based upon topics or similarities within the data gathered. I used coding to help generate the predominant themes within the data. Five themes were generated from the data. Next, the themes were compiled into a narrative passage, explaining the themes and their importance to the study. This passage aimed to explain the findings and the analysis of these outcomes. Finally, an

interpretation was able to be formed. I was able to determine what lessons were learned through the completion of the study, how the research compares to other theories and previous research, and may also help other researchers call for reform or change (Creswell, 2014, p. 197-200).

### **Reliability**

The reliability of this study focused on factors such as the consistent approaches that were used throughout the study. Before sending out both the survey and the interviews, I had three colleagues examine the questions to make sure no bias was prevalent within the questions. Two colleagues have careers outside of education and one colleague is within high school education. These colleagues read and helped to eliminate any bias within the questions as well as alter the wording of the questions so certain answers were not expected. All educators, settings, and data were approached, conducted, and analyzed in the exact same manner regardless of the participant or setting. The focus of the study was to gauge the individual's specific thoughts and ideas on outdoor play in early childhood classrooms. I also had to have the participants check to see whether the data that they presented has been accurately portrayed within the research.

## **Results and Interpretation**

### **Results**

Early childhood education is a constantly growing field and is simultaneously under scrutiny. A big question surrounding early childhood education is the effectiveness of the use of play, specifically outdoor play as a learning method. Some parents, administrators, and even educators may feel that play is not an essential component of an early childhood classroom. They do not realize the learning opportunities and experiences that play can offer for children, and the doors that it can open to all children. This study focused on local teachers' perspective on the use

of outdoor play as a means of teaching and learning. Throughout the study, interviews were conducted, asking these teachers about their thoughts, views, and wishes concerning outdoor play within their classrooms. This study aimed to answer the question: what are preschool and kindergarten teacher's perspectives on the impact of outdoor play or lack thereof in early childhood settings?

The study focused on 15 Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten teachers in local area elementary schools. These educators were chosen based upon their grade level and their location. Nearly 30 educators were contacted about completing the research study. Eighteen of those educators responded and 15 actually completed both the survey and the interview. These 15 teachers hailed from five different local districts throughout Western New York. Among the 15 participants, nine were Pre-Kindergarten teachers and the remaining six were Kindergarten educators. Four of the five districts qualified as schools in need of assistance where over half the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The ethnic backgrounds of the participants ranged from Native American, to Caucasian, to African American.

To begin the research study, educators were sent a survey to complete once they had returned their consent form. The survey focused on quick and simple questions geared towards determining their view on outdoor play versus didactic teaching. The data collected from the survey showed that educators have 15-30 minutes set aside for outdoor play within their curriculum and of that 15-30 minutes, half is dedicated to outdoor play as a means of direct instruction. This number is due to the fact that educators spend 3 or more hours on didactic teaching throughout the day, according to the survey. Based upon the survey it was calculated that out of the 15 participants, 13 preferred outdoor play as a potent form of teaching within their classroom. The remaining two focused more on a didactic teaching strategy. However, those two

explained that their didactic teaching method was preferred because it made it easier to achieve the standards and requirements set by the state.

Moreover, a main focus of the survey was dedicated to the amount of outdoor play that was allowed within the classrooms. Out of all 15 educators who answered this questions, all 15 stated that they wanted more outdoor play incorporated into their classroom. Zero educators indicated that they were happy with the amount of time devoted to outdoor play within their classrooms. All 15 did, however, indicated that not enough time was left for outdoor play and all agreed they focused more on desk work and trying to meet the requirements and fulfill the standards.

The second portion of the research was an interview with each of the 15 educators. The interview aimed to delve deeper into the educator's thoughts on outdoor play. Questions focused on why they preferred outdoor play, the benefits they saw through outdoor play, and whether or not they feel the new Common Core standards provide enough time for children to be children and play outdoors or play in general.

Once the interviews were conducted, the data were collected and coded in order to effectively determine whether or not these 15 educators believed outdoor play was needed but not achieved. Going into the study, I believed that educators were struggling when it came outdoor play within their classrooms. I also believed that outdoor play could provide children with ample opportunity to learn and experiment while still being educational and entertaining. The coding allowed me to determine whether or not my general thoughts were correct, and indeed those thoughts were accurate based upon the information I had collected.

After reading and re-reading through the interviews, the codes were separated into four major categories. Those categories included, the importance of play, the lack of play, the lack of the arts and sciences, and the standards.

The first category, the importance of play, was the most prevalent and appeared heavily in all 15 interviews. Within the category of importance of play, educators made the point that outdoor play addressed all the domains, such as cognitive, physical, and social emotional, when children were playing outdoors. One participant stated,

“Outdoor play allows young children to practice emerging physical skills, while impacting cognitive and social/emotional development. Children are able to expel energy, as the walls of the classroom are no longer limiting them. I also find it important for children to learn to appreciate the outdoors. The outdoors is filled with endless sights, sounds, and textures, which young children use often in their learning.”

Also within the first category, it came to my attention that these educators believed that outdoor play allowed the children to learn through their senses, interacting, engaging, and experimenting with their environment. It allows the children to become aware and learn about their surroundings through interactions. One educator stated,

“Outdoor play offers children a chance to learn about their environment, to appreciate nature and to learn social rules that come with playing with peers. Outdoor play allows children to move about and explore using all their senses. It improves gross motor skills, social skills, concentration and overall health.”

The second category, the lack of play these educators felt, was prevailing within their classrooms. This category was also prominent in every single one of the 15 participants survey. One educator went as far as claiming that they are simply teaching to the test. She stated that “I

believe that in my practice outdoor play is not given enough priority, even with the numerous benefits. Instead, teachers have to teach toward the test and outdoor play, art and science are being replaced with more academic subjects.” The educators claimed that their classroom consisted of mostly desk work. The desk work was mandatory in order to effectively complete the required work and achieve the designated standards. Outdoor play is essential in a successful early childhood curriculum. One educator felt that, “While table work may be necessary and effective in some lessons during the day, I believe outdoor play can help expand on lessons and learning experiences.”

Moreover, educators made it clear that they were not teaching in the way they wish they could, but they were teaching to the tests and standards set for them. One educator made it clear that she wished “there was ‘less’ to accomplish during the day to not feel the pressure of rushing right back in to ‘hit the books’ so to speak,” while another made it clear she was not content by stating, “We have to get our kids ready for TESTS, according to Cuomo or else it will affect teachers scores!”

The third category that came about through coding was the lack of arts and sciences within the classroom. This was not a category that I had thought about when creating and conducting the interview, but it was a category that was prevalent in nearly every one of the 15 participants interview. Within this category, the participants made it clear that the outdoor play offered the children access to nature and in return educational experiences. The exploration of nature and its surroundings and the use of creativity, such as using natural material and objects in order to play and imagine had been lost. One instructor stated that

“When outdoors, children participate in activities that involve using their five senses.

Children learn best in an environment that allows them to explore, develop and play.

Young children learn to interact with others, use their imaginations, explore and become more adventurous. They learn to follow rules, learn to take turns and share. A lot is learned during play.”

The final category was the standards. This category showed up in the previous three categories but was a big topic in each of the participant’s interviews. All participants were facing the pressures that the new standards and requirements were putting on the educational field. It became clear that these educators believed the standards were what was driving the didactic teaching within the classroom and eliminating the time for outdoor play. It was also clear that the standards were not well liked by the majority of the participants. One educator described the standards as “on target but I feel the curriculum developed to get them across is terrible, the testing terrible and I wish they had aligned them to the new science and social studies standards as they went along.” Another educator claimed that the ELA topics were great however, “I don’t believe they are a great fit for three and four year olds. I feel they aren’t hands on enough and not enough creative activities are provided. My students are mainly sitting and listening.” However, the educators are required to perform and teach to these standards in the form provided to them, which is not outdoor play. The standards were quite possibly the biggest, and most talked about category throughout the interviews. The educators made the point that the standards are not allowing the children to be children. Instead the children are losing the ability and time to explore and interact because they were forced to complete desk work and paper work. Children work best when they can be hands on and engaged. However, one educator felt that was not the case. When talking about the standards, she claimed

“Some of it is good, but much of it is developmentally inappropriate for grade level and below achievement. Much of it is way above children’s ways of thinking for their age. It

doesn't mean the children are low achievers. They are progressing normally for their age. The Common Core confuses many kids and most of the time is not developmentally appropriate!"

Also when coding the interviews, there were a few things that stuck out to me. Those were the fact that two educators did prefer didactic teaching over outdoor play and the fact that all educators encouraged outdoor play and wished for more outdoor play but were severely lacking the time to do so. Thirteen educators checked outdoor play as their preferred form of teaching, while two educators checked didactic teaching on their surveys. Looking at the first point, those two teachers did indicate that they preferred didactic teaching. However, the reasoning behind it stood out to me. Those teachers made it clear that while they did prefer didactic teaching it was because didactic teaching made it easier for the educators to reach the standards and grueling requirements set by the state.

“As an educator, you have to embrace what is given to you and find a way to make it work, whether easy or not. The goal is to find a way to ensure all aspects are easily obtainable and right now, in order to meet the standards, that is through didactic teaching/desk work.”

They did not necessarily believe in didactic teaching as the best method but it was the method that is most aligned with the standards and requirements.

Secondly, the amount of time educators are provided for outdoor play is slim to none. The time restraint is the biggest component hindering educator's ability to go outside and/or teach outside. Due to the grueling standards, less and less time is available for free play, outdoor play, and play in general, even in the youngest of classrooms. One educator stated “We must be

realistic about the time set aside for outdoor play or play in general in any given classroom.”

Another claimed,

“I wish we could spend more time outdoors. The curriculum just doesn’t incorporate it within the modules and domains. There is so much to cover that even during the months we can be outside, we don’t have as much time as the children really need.”

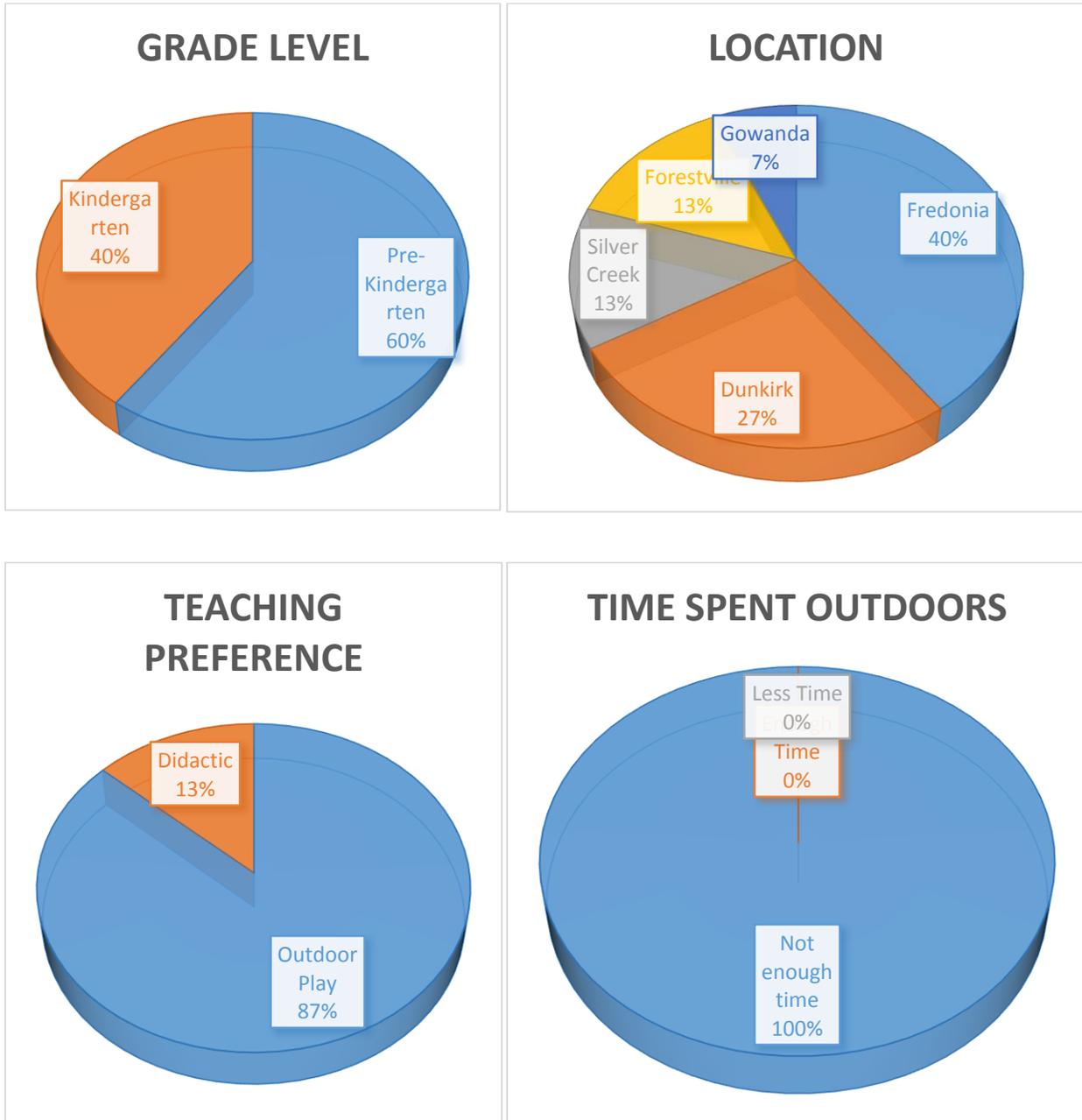
All classrooms are striving to reach the goals set out for them, even if it means losing what makes children, children, the ability to play, create, imagine, and explore. Less and less time is becoming available. Time is an educator’s biggest enemy when it comes to efficiently incorporating outdoor play and desk work into their daily routines.

The final theme that stuck out to me was the fact that educators believed a mix of both outdoor play and didactic teaching is the most effective way of teaching.

“My view is that outdoor play is important and should not be taken out of the curriculum to make room for academic reasons, outdoor play should be used to enhance the common core standards, especially in early childhood. The two must work together to provide children with a positive educational experience.”

This is a proposal that I had never considered. Personally, I was thinking narrow minded and assuming it was either outdoor play or didactic teaching. However, these educators made the proposal that incorporating both outdoor play and didactic teaching will allow educators to still teach and reach the standards but also incorporate ways that will entertain and be easier for children to participate within. “I would enjoy a healthy balance between outdoor and indoor play along with a moderate amount of desk work. I believe that would work best in reaching all

student’s needs.” It allows all learning styles to be met and educators are still following the guidelines set forth, satisfying both ends of the spectrum.



### **Limitations of the Study**

There were some limitations of the study, including the number of teachers that participated, the area in which the participants stemmed from, the timing of the research study, the effects of the weather, and the school year schedule. The sample size of participants was small. To begin, I had sent out over 30 requests to teachers in the surrounding areas. However, only 18 educators responded back to the request, agreeing to participate. Out of those 18 participants, only 15 ended up completing the study to the end. Some participants sent in the consent form or sent in the consent form and completed the survey but not the interview. Therefore, their information was not incorporated into the study or data. If I were to continue the study, I would aim to enlarge the number of participants included by sending out even more requests to even more educators in the surrounding area.

Another limitation was the definition of local and the location of the participants. For me, I defined local as schools 15-20 minutes driving distance. I wanted to keep my participants local due to the fact that I was born and raised in this area, and therefore my main concern was how the educators in my area are proceeding with outdoor play. However, there are only a certain number of schools in this area that I could request help from. Expanding my definition of local and asking slightly farther districts for their participation could have given me a more exact and more defined analysis of the data. Therefore if I were to continue on my research, I would make sure to include schools in a farther range.

Furthermore, the study was conducted in a short period of time. A problem I had run into was finding the time to collect the consent form and conduct the interviews with my participants. Due to my schedule at my job and the schedules of the educators, it became harder to collect the data. If I were to go back and redo said research, I would conduct research during a period of

time where I am not working and have ample time to devote to my participants and work with their schedule.

The educators also faced time restraints due to their school schedules, time off, and the timing of state tests, report cards, and observations. During my research, a combination of the above mentioned was in progress. For each educator, one of the above was going on, therefore shrinking our available time to an even smaller amount.

### **Interpretation of Data**

After looking at the data, it is clear that the research study was successful and answered the question that I had set out to answer. In the beginning of the study I was looking at the opinion of local Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers on outdoor play and its impact in the classroom as well as if there is simply enough of outdoor play as a teaching style within the classroom. Going through the research, collecting the data, and coding the data it was clear that my research questions were answered.

Looking at the data, it is important to voice the opinions of the educators when it comes to outdoor play within early childhood classrooms. It is important for educators' to be able to teach to and reach all of their children and to cater to their different learning styles and needs. No two children are exactly the same, therefore they should not be expected to learn the exact same way. This research study was important because throughout an educator's career, especially within the early childhood field, one is taught about the importance of outdoor play, allowing children to explore and experiment with their surroundings. However, in today's society, that love and passion for outdoor play and play in general has all but been eliminated by the ever growing standards and requirements that are being pushed on children and teachers.

This study was important because it determined the views of my fellow educators when it comes to the topic of outdoor play, giving me the opportunity to support those views with research and theory. In order to provide students with the best educational experience, educators must first determine the best practice and best strategies to do so. Educators need to feel comfortable and content with what and how they are teaching. Without having their voice heard, it is hard to do so, which is where the research came into play.

For myself as an educator, I want to be able to take the information that I have collected and mold my classroom around best practice and strategies discovered throughout. I also want my fellow educators to be able to do the same.

The study provided me with the information that I was seeking. The data told me that the educators were feeling the same as I, lacking outdoor play and pushing and hoping for the chance to incorporate what we know best into our curriculum. Like myself, these educators prefer using their resources and surroundings as a means of education instead of relying solely on their desk and the paper work provided for them. Part of being an educator is being able to be creative, imaginative, and inventive when it comes down to teaching your students because as we are continuously taught, children do not all learn the same way. They do not all have the same learning styles. Therefore, sitting these children down and having them all perform tedious and uniform tasks is not going to reach those children who need to be up and moving or who learn through doing and feeling. Sharing these feelings with these educators made me feel that I was not alone and that play and outdoor play is something that needs to be a part of the curriculum for reasons aside from entertainment but experience, innovation, and creativity as well.

My interpretation of the data is that both these educators and I are feeling the heat of the new standards that have been implemented. These standards eliminated play, something that we

have been taught is crucial and necessary at this young age. The data showed me that the participating educators preferred the experimental learning that outdoor play offers children. The participating educators preferred allowing their children the opportunity to experiment, interact, question, and explore their interests through play. It also offers children the opportunity to +expand themselves in all domains. It offers opportunities in the physical domain as it allows children to get up and move around as well as interact with their environment. It provides cognitive advancement as children are questioning their surroundings, using their imagination with their surroundings, creating with their surroundings, and using their senses to explore what nature has to offer them. It also can boost social and emotional domains because it allows children to converse with their peers, discuss their surroundings, and become one with their surroundings. Finally, it can boost language skills through the expansion of vocabulary as children encounter new and exciting things, as well as discussing their surroundings and ideas with their peers. The possibilities are endless for children and their educators.

My interpretation of the data is that play is an essential aspect of a young child's education. It is something that I believe we need and that my colleagues as well believe we need. It does not need to be the only option but it should at least be an option. Combining the two, didactic teaching and outdoor play, can amp up the teachers repertoire and allow them to reach all children while providing them with an educational yet interesting experience. The data showed me that participating educators strongly believed in the importance of outdoor play; however the Common Core Learning Standards are reducing, if not eliminating, outdoor play. Play is essential and should not be taken for granted and I believe that was the most important theme that emerged from my research.

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Summary

Looking at elementary schools today, there is one big component that is beginning to become scarce. The lack of play and outdoor play in our early childhood classrooms has become an alarming factor for many educators. The focus on the new Common Core standards has begun to push what we have been taught out the door. My study focused on local educator's views on outdoor play and the lack of it.

Through a surveys and interviews, I collected data from 15 neighboring Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten educators. The data showed that the majority of the educators preferred outdoor play as a form of teaching versus the didactic style that is associated with the new Common Core Standards. However, all the educators, even the ones who preferred didactic teaching, still wished that they had more time to dedicate to outdoor play within their classroom. All educators realized the importance of outdoor play and the positive experiences it can provide for children and wish to incorporate those experiences into their classroom, even with the use of the standards and didactic teaching.

Looking at the research question and the literature review, the data supported the research and effectively answered the question. The literature review generated a big pull for play in early childhood classrooms. Prior research suggests that play is a crucial component of an early childhood classroom and needs to be incorporated as a means for young children to learn and explore their surroundings. Looking back at the literature review, it suggested that play offers positive impacts to children's domains as well as areas such as creativity, imagination, language, and so on. The data showed that educators preferred outdoor play for those exact reasons. It

provides children with advances in multiple areas in a way that they feel comfortable and safe doing so. The research also suggested that play is crucial because it reaches more than one learning style. It does not just settle for children who learn through lecture but it can reach kinesthetic learners, visual learners, auditory learners, and those learners who learn best by getting up and involved. The data suggested that educators were well aware of those impacts but were forced to use didactic teaching which focused solely on auditory and visual learners. It does not provide much help to those unique learners such as outdoor play does. The effects of outdoor play cannot be overlooked within the classroom.

### **Significance**

The significance of this study and the findings that came from this study is that outdoor play is a crucial component of early childhood education. In our classrooms today, we are lacking the necessary experiences and education that children need to succeed. Instead, we are being forced to focus on desk work and teaching to the test, something that has been proved to be less efficient. This study shows me and my colleagues that teachers prefer and can be efficient with using play as a means of educating their students. It is important that not only the students feel comfortable with the learning styles and methods in the classroom but the teachers can only be effective if they feel comfortable as well. I believe the most significant aspect of this study is that it effectively shows that educators are not 100% comfortable with the standards and the teaching methods that they are required to use within their classrooms. It shows that educators have different preferences based upon learning styles and their own interests. Educators should be able to pick and choose the ways in which they believe they are effective and ways in which their students learn best. Teaching should not be a one style fits all mold. Teaching is about creativity and blending methods together to reach the best style possible. This study provides

evidence that educators think along those lines and do not prefer this one style fits all but wish to break out and use alternative methods such as outdoor play or play in general within their classroom.

## **Conclusions**

Looking back at the research study, the main focus was outdoor play in the classroom. The research question was “What are preschool and kindergarten teacher’s perspectives on the impact of outdoor play or lack thereof in early childhood settings?” Glancing back at the research, the literature review, and the data collected, it is safe to come to the conclusion that yes, the research question had been answered.

Beginning the research study, my answer to the question was that educators do not receive enough time for outdoor play and that the use of outdoor play is slowly but surely being diminished within the classroom. When reading through the data, a unanimous poll determined that teachers do indeed feel as if there is not enough time to implement outdoor play within their classrooms. The data also stated that outdoor play and play in general is rare due to the lack of time available as well as the push for didactic teaching presented by the common core standards. Although my questions were answered through the data, it also presented me with more information that I had initially searched for. The data showed me that the common core standards are not as hated as I had thought. They are not preferred nor wanted within the classroom, but the educators do believe that they do have some pieces that can work well if they were geared towards the appropriate age. The data also showed me that a mix of the two would be welcomed by educators. However, the most important piece of data that was collected through the research answers the question best. Educators do not believe that play receives enough time throughout

the day, outdoor play included. Therefore educator's biggest wish is to add time for all avenues of play within the classroom, including the teachers who preferred didactic teaching.

### **Future Research**

Although the research study effectively answered the research questions, the research ended up leaving me with numerous questions and different areas in which to continue to pursue. First, adding more participants to my study would be the first step as well as redoing the study with more participants. My study was limited to a very small area, therefore for other researchers who take interest in the topic, I would suggest they focus the study on larger groups of participants in more urban areas, therefore adding to the data I have already collected. For other researchers interested in the topic I would also suggest that they shift the emphasis of the study and focus on classrooms that implement both didactic teaching and outdoor play rather than focusing solely on outdoor play.

Secondly, the data showed me that teachers would prefer a mix of both outdoor play and didactic teaching methods within their classroom. I am aware the educators like to have a number of tools in their belt, so to speak, and that educators are encouraged to find ways that work best for them and their students. However, I have not looked into the possibility of combining the two methods together as well as what the outcome would be. Therefore a possible avenue for continued research would be to look at what the two concepts would look like within a classroom and determine whether or not prior research has been done. I also could conduct my own research to determine if these two are combined in any local schools or the thoughts and views educators possess on combining the two.

The final area that I wish to pursue farther into, due to my study, would be how this influences my own teaching practices. I have always been an outdoor lover, as well as an active, creative individual. I love to bring the outdoors indoor and vice versa within my classrooms. I also enjoy incorporating arts and crafts and creative abilities into my lessons to better engage and reach my students. Conforming to a didactic method of teaching would be rather stressful to me and I believe I would not be working to my fullest potential if I were unable to mold the lessons to fit mine and my student's needs. There further research would be into ways that I can work with the common core and mold it to work with my interests and my student's needs. The new research would include ways for me to better understand and manipulate the common core to provide my students with the best possible learning experience.

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## Appendix A

**Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study****Outdoor Play: The Importance and Lack Thereof****Dear participant,**

My name is Colleen Fabritius, and I am a graduate student at Fredonia State University of New York. I am writing to request your permission to participate in a research study to be used for my graduate thesis project. I am conducting a research project on educator's view on the importance of outdoor play in early childhood education.

**Description of the research**

You are invited to participate in a research study on the importance of outdoor play within early childhood education. The focus of this study will be to determine the educators views on whether or not early childhood curriculum should incorporate more time in the day dedicated to learning through outdoor play. The study will also look at how much time is dedicated to academic skills and desk work versus outdoor play. As a participant, I will be asking you how much time is dedicated to outdoor play in your classroom, your personal views on outdoor play, and whether or not you believe more time should be dedicated towards outdoor play in the curriculum. The purpose of this research is explore the thoughts and ideas that educators hold when it comes to outdoor play and whether it is lacking in their curriculum or not. This study will help to determine whether or not educators feel more comfortable using outdoor play as a means of learning versus learning through straight forward, desk work. You will be asked to complete a survey, answering a few questions about the amount of time dedicated to outdoor play versus desk work. Next you will also be asked to complete and interview either in person or via e-mail. The interview will delve deeper into your thoughts about outdoor play and whether or not you feel more time should be dedicated towards outdoor play. Your answers will help to advocate for outdoor play within early childhood education.

**Risks and discomforts**

There are no known risks associated with this research.

**Potential benefits**

This research may help us to understand educator's views on outdoor play in early childhood classrooms and curriculum. Your participation will also help to advocate for outdoor play in today's classrooms. A potential benefit from this study will be having your voice and your opinions on outdoor play heard. It is important that as educators we feel comfortable and content

with the curriculum and how we are asked to teach. Therefore, this study will help to make the educators views and ideas known.

### **Protection of confidentiality**

In order to maintain confidentiality of the subjects involved, the participant's names will not be given to other participants involved. Also, within the research itself, no real names will be used. Pseudonyms will be used instead. The data will be safely stored and not shared with any individuals until the data has been published and all participant information has been cleared. Individuals will be able to withdraw from the research at any time without any repercussions. If a participant is withdrawn for any reason, their information will be terminated from the research project all together. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication resulting from this study.

### **Voluntary participation**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

### **Contact information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Colleen Fabritius at Fredonia State University at 716-680-0148. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Fredonia University Institutional Review Board at 716-673-3335

### **Consent**

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to participate in this study.**

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

A copy of this consent form should be given to you.

## Appendix B

**Outdoor Play: The Importance and Lack Thereof****Survey Questions**

1. What grade do you teach?

Pre-Kindergarten \_\_\_\_\_

Kindergarten \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the name of your school? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you prefer outdoor play as a form of learning within your classroom?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

4. Within your classroom, how much time is spent outdoors? (In all aspects, play or educational) \_\_\_\_\_

5. Within your classroom, how much time is dedicated to outdoor play as a means of instruction? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Within your classroom, how much time is spent dedicated to didactic teaching or desk work often associated with the common core standards? \_\_\_\_\_

7. In your professional opinion, do you prefer teaching through exploration and experience within outdoor play or through desk work and academic skills associated with didactic teaching?

Outdoor Play \_\_\_\_\_

Didactic Teaching \_\_\_\_\_

8. As an educator, do you wish more instructional time was set aside for outdoor play as a means of learning?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

**Outdoor Play: The Importance and Lack Thereof****Interview Questions**

1. What is your view on the use of outdoor play in early childhood education?
2. What do you believe are the effects of outdoor play on young children's learning?
3. What do you believe outdoor play has to offer as a form of learning for early childhood classrooms?
4. What is your view on the new common core standards that are currently being implemented?
5. Have the common core standards changed your view on outdoor play?
6. Do you believe the new standards dedicate enough time towards outdoor play within the curriculum?
7. As an early childhood educator do you prefer outdoor play as a form of learning or rely more so on desk work?
8. In your professional opinion, do you find outdoor play to be more effective or desk work as the more effective strategy?
9. Within your classroom, do you wish more time out of the day was dedicated to outdoor play as a form of learning?
10. Any final thoughts or ideas regarding outdoor play and its importance within the classroom or lack thereof?