

The Impact of Play on Emergent Literacy Development

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Abstract

With increased standards in today's school's teachers are taking away play time and focusing on more specific literacy instruction. The opportunities to learn through play and exploration is a thing of the past. Although research states play is a natural part of a child's development (Wong, Wang, & Cheng, 2011) the research focused on what reading and writing activities are embedded in play and how play can help develop emergent literacy in young children. A qualitative study was conducted with a 5-year-old male, at the emergent literacy state of development. The current study observed the research participant playing within his home environment over a span of 6 weeks to determine if play helps advance a child's emergent literacy development. Results suggest specific types of play a child engages in, and particular literacy learning opportunities through play. Implication and results are discussed.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Today's schools are highly accountable, due to the increased demands of standards and strict curriculum. Teachers are moving away from a child-centered classroom that promotes play and exploration. Instead, teachers are basing their instruction on standardized tests leaving little time for students to develop naturally. The processes of reading and writing do not emerge independently. Instead, they develop through multiple modes that come together (Wohlwend, 2008). This is why play is so essential to a child because it shapes children's learning. Play allows children to put the real world into a distant reality and explore their world through multi-modal play. Children are offered multiple ways to expand meanings of the messages they produce through multi-modal play. Through play, children's reading abilities, classroom identity and social positioning are shaped. The integration of literacy and play together allows them to support and strengthen one another. Play is a natural part of a child's growth and proves to be a crucial role in improving a child's all-around development (Wong, Wang, & Cheng, 2011). Opportunities for play to influence a child's life are being ripped away and teachers need to be reminded why play is important and how it can help their students.

Research Questions

The main question of this study looked at the relationship between play and emergent literacy development. This examination started with investigating different types of play in which children participate. Also, the questions will center on what literacy activities are embedded in the natural aspect of play and how these activities expand emergent literacy in a child. For this examination, I had these following questions:

1. What kinds of play are young children engaged in these days in the home environment?
2. What type of reading and writing activities are imbedded within play to help expand opportunities for emergent literacy development.

Rationale

In today's society schools and educators are more focused on performance and assessment rather than student needs. Students go to school and are overloaded with information, worksheets, and tests. Schools just aren't the same as they use to be, and students are not given many opportunities to be kids and have fun. I have witnessed classroom teachers' focus on skill and drill, making the curriculum restrictive because of the mandated standards by states. Therefore, the rationale behind this study is to show how important play is to a child's development. My study explored play through through multi-modal dimensions. I intended to determine how the use of play supports a child's emergent literacy development. By doing this, teachers will see how essential play is to a classroom curriculum. Hopefully, educators will shy away from a teacher-centered approach with focus on standardized tests and move towards a child-centered approach that promotes exploration. However, in order to do this, first teachers need to know how reading and writing skills are embedded in different types of play. With this knowledge, teachers will be able to enhance student learning by providing support through play. This will help teachers make school and learning fun because it will be authentic.

Definition of Terms

I will introduce main concepts in this thesis study. The definitions provided below will allow for clarity and understanding throughout this study.

Emergent literacy looks at the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to developmental sign to conventional forms of reading and writing (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Child-centered approach focuses on students interest (Cianca, 2012).

Conventions of print focuses on the way books are read that can be understood without being able to read such as the direction of print and its read from left to right (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Knowledge of letters is knowing the alphabetic system and students are able to identify and name letters (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Linguistic awareness is being able to discriminate units of languages such as phonemes, words, or propositions in order to successfully read (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Phoneme-grapheme correspondence is having the understanding of how phonemes and alphabetic letters are linked to one another (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)..

Emergent reading consists of children pretending to read or reading objects such as environmental print (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Emergent writing is shown when children pretend to write or are learning to write letters (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

Study Approach

The context in which the research was conducted will be in the home environment. The study was theoretically driven with a qualitative research approach lasting six weeks. During the six weeks, two observation sessions occurred weekly, resulting in a total of twelve sessions.

Observations were the main source of data collection for this study, to determine the types of play in which child was involved. Throughout observations, I reflected on my findings and discussed how play is critical to a child's development. While conducting the study, aside from observations, the methods of data collection included informal conversations and interview. Data was also collected through other methods such as field notes, an interview, and audio recordings. To increase validity and reliability of the study, I used triangulation across the domains.

Organization of Thesis

The organization of this research paper consists of five chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic of interest. Specifically, the purpose and rational of the study along with the issues revolving around the topic. The next portion of the paper or Chapter Two is the literature review. Prior studies were explored to research current methods and findings with a focus on play, and how it helps children develop as emergent readers and writers. Chapter Three provides the methods utilized in the research including data collection, participant, and procedures. Data collection will include observations, an interview, transcripts, and anecdotal notes. Research findings and analysis will be discussed in Chapter Four. Finally, in Chapter Five a conclusion on the research will be provided. In this section, I will provide implications of the findings along with limitations within the study.

Summary

Overall this chapter focuses on an introduction into this qualitative research study looking into play. The background, rational, research questions, and study approach have been presented within the introduction. Methods of an interview, field notes, and audio recordings will be used to collect data of observations, informal conversations, and an interview. The research will focus

on the multi-modal use of play and how it enhances development of reading and writing skills to promote emergent literacy.

Chapter 2

Introduction

Every day children around the world engage in play. Play can have a large influence on a child's life. In this chapter, I intend to describe how play is defined in different perspectives by professionals, teachers, and children. I will also explore the history of play and what theorists have found in the past. Next, I will determine what the research says about play and why it is important to a child's growth. There are several types of play children engage in that are specific to my research study. Once I have researched the types of play, I will begin to investigate reading and writing activities imbedded within play. By doing so, I will be able to examine how play expands opportunities for literacy learning and if play supports emergent literacy development.

Definition

It is difficult to determine a set definition of play due to the different variations of play. Many researchers have given their perspectives on play to allow a better understanding. This section aims to provide the multiple ideas on how play can be defined and how play is perceived through the eyes of theorists, parents, and children. For centuries, researchers and philosophers have studied play and tried to connect play with a concrete definition. Structural, functional, and casual definitions have all been generated to describe play. A list of set criteria and characteristics has also been produced to define play (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). Webster New World Dictionary even provides a robust 59 definitions for play (as cited in Saracho & Spodek,

2007, p. 712). Due to play being described in a multitude of ways, it is almost impossible to define. Each researcher or philosopher has his or her own ideas of what constitutes play. Piaget describes play as a quintessential childhood activity and the most important work of being a child (2007).

Researchers Perspective

Play is recognized as an essential component of early education. Play enables children to understand the world, interact with others socially, control and express emotions, and establish their symbolic representation capabilities (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995). Overall, it plays an important role in enhancing a child's development (NAEYC, 1995). Play allows students to actively engage in an activity that requires intense concentration, as well as providing students with goal-directed motivation. All these attributes are seen as essential attitudes for quality learning (Wong, Wang, & Cheng, 2011). Johnson, Christie, and Yawkey (1987) define play as an intrinsically motivated process which is freely chosen by a child. They also continue to define play as a process-oriented, nonliteral, and enjoyable activity. Saracho and Spodek (2007) note that play provides opportunities for children to use language in literate ways, as well as using language in ways they see it practiced. Children assume a variety of roles when playing and they are able to learn about their social world, communicate their ideas, and negotiate with their peers during social problems (Saracho & Spodek, 2007).

Parents Perspective

Glenn, Knight, Holt, and Spence conducted a study focusing on the meaning of play among children (2012). Prior to conducting their own research they focused on previous studies related to play and the parents' perspective of play. They looked at surveys from Vetch et al.

(2006), which concluded the availability of social networks, facilities at parks and playgrounds, and the built environment determined active play. Valentine and Mckendrick (1997) claimed parents have growing concern for their child's safety causing them to move their children indoors to participate in whole-centered activities, rather than outdoor play. One final perspective they investigated was research from Singh and Gupta (2012), which stated that parents valued play but placed greater value on education. After examining prior research Glenn et al. directed their own research and concluded from their study, that children and adults have different opinions, agendas, and priorities regarding play (2012). Children could find opportunities to play almost anywhere with anyone; however, the children felt their parents focused on only "healthy" activities as play (Glenn et al., 2012). Parents did not take the time to understand what their children wanted, instead they imposed their views of appropriate play habits. Unfortunately, by imposing their own agendas, parents potentially take away the fun and spontaneity involved in outdoor activities. The children were feeling as if the play activity was more like work, and something they had to do instead of something they wanted to do.

Child's Perspective

There has been a lack of understanding of a child's perspective on play. Instead, the adults are the ones who identify what is considered a children's play activity, setting limitations on studies. Due to the lack of understanding of a child's perspective, a research study was created to help examine the meaning of play among children. Glenn, et al. (2012) used a child-focused approach with 28, 7-9 year olds in Canada. Data was collected through the means of art-based techniques, group activities, and storytelling. Having an assortment of diverse activities, the researchers hoped the children would feel comfortable communicating and expressing themselves (Glenn et al., 2012). Questions asked to the students included what, who, and where

do they play, as well as what the word play meant to them.

After conducting the research, Glenn et al. broke their results into the questions they asked the students. First, they found that almost any activity was and could be play (2012). They broke play into four categories: movement-focused activities, creative/imaginative activities, games and entertainment, and social-relational activities. The children considered each of the four categories play. The overall consensus was play is fun, and as soon as something was not fun, it was not considered play (Glenn et al, 2012). Next, the researchers looked at places to play and found children see opportunities to play almost anywhere, even if a specific location was not designated as a play space. The location of where the students were, determined the type of activities in which they engaged in. For example, if the students were inside, they played video games or participated in creative and imaginative play. Whereas if they were outside, they participated in movement-related activities. The researchers found if the children had a choice, they preferred to play outside. People the children played with was the final area the researchers focused on with the children. Again, the researchers found the children would play with almost anyone, whether it was their siblings, parents, friends, or an acquaintance. However, if the person behaved badly or was mean, the participants indicated they did not like to play with them (Glenn et al., 2012).

Wong, Wang, and Cheng developed a study looking into children's perception of play and non-play (2011). Four students participated in the study: two kindergarten students, and two in their first year of primary school. Photography was the main source of data collection. The job of the four students was to take pictures of their peers when they were playing and non-playing within the school grounds, as well as in the community. After taking a picture to correspond to each category, the students were then interviewed. During the interview, the students were

asked to categorize the pictures, draw pictures of play and non-play, then discuss the reasoning behind their categorization.

The findings concluded that children perceive play in a multitude of ways. One child viewed play as self-initiative and freedom of choice. The same student, as well as another, believed you must have an object in order to play and have fun; without that object there is no fun to be had. These two students use the objects symbolically. Another finding proved all four children associated play with positive feelings. Play was also viewed as a social interaction that allowed more ideas of play to develop. Physical motion and games were also related to play by two students. Without motion there is no play (Wong et al., 2011).

The researchers also focused on perception of non-play. Wong et al. (2011) discovered that all four students saw learning activities as non-play. Any reading, writing, homework, or even drawing was considered non-play to the students. Even though the students chose to write during recess, or enjoyed writing/drawing, it was still considered non-play. If a student was learning while doing something, that means play could not be involved. There was also a link between the attitudes of a student when they are non-playing. From the perspective of the students, if someone was concentrating, was serious, and had attention on the activity it was considered non-play. One student took a picture of her friend playing the piano and she considered this non-play because she had to concentrate while playing the piano. Another connection made to non-play was a negative psychological state. Two of the focal students in this study viewed non-play as something that made them feel unhappy and bored. Wong et al. found the nature and function of the event, objects, and places are used to determine non-play.

A major conclusion Wong et al. determined based on their research was that both primary and kindergarten students view play as a self-initiated activity that they enjoy. Play is an

intrinsically motivated activity that allows children to be creative and interact socially with their peers. At the kindergarten level, the students viewed play as a symbolic pretense compared to their primary counterparts who associated play with games that had rules such as sports. Non-play in the eyes of the students was learning and working activities. This required them to be serious, have concentration, and express boredom and unhappiness. Specifically, the kindergarten students view any activity where the teacher was present as non-play. Another alarming finding by Wong et al. is that primary students often did not play during recess. Instead, they worked on homework and were reluctant to say they preferred to play instead of studying.

The primary students' responses suggest that teachers failed to teach through play. The children claimed class was not the time for fun, and play is fun; learning is not (Wong et al., 2011). Anything involving learning in the child's eyes is considered boring and not fun. The researchers claim that the pressures put on teachers' bears an impact on the children and their learning. Wong et al. explain that the goal is to transfer the positive attitudes of play into play-based curricula, which provides quality learning. However, the researchers claim that in order for this to happen, teachers must listen to their students and base the curriculum around the students.

History of Play

Piaget and Vygotsky both developed the theories of play and literacy in the late 1970's and 1980's. Both theorists had a strong emphasis on the cognitive connections between literacy and play. They suggested that children should be able to practice or learn using representational media through symbolic play (as cited in Roskos & Christie, 2001, p. 61). This new perspective led to a series of correlated studies developed to examine the cognitive perspective and the relationship between dramatic play and reading readiness. Positive correlations were shown through the studies, but it was impossible to determine the relationship between the two (Roskos

& Christie, 2001).

A new perspective called emergent literacy was developed in the mid 1980's which radically changed the view of how literacy and play were connected. According to Roskos & Christie (2001) the emergent literacy perspective believed "children construct their own knowledge about written language as they interact with others in everyday activities that involves reading and writing" (p. 62). Another perspective based on ecological psychology was developing at the same time of emergent literacy, which argued children's behaviors were influenced by their physical environment. Both the ecological perspective and emergent literacy, provided a strong rationale for the research being conducted on literacy-enriched play settings in the late 1980's and early 1990's (Roskos & Christie, 2001). This research focused on the idea that environments where play can take place, must be filled with materials that create an environmental press for play-related reading and writing activities. During the same time period, researchers began studying the effects of literacy related props being added to a dramatic play setting. Research found an increase in emergent reading and writing activities within play when a print-enriched play environment was provided (Roskos & Christie, 2001). Other researchers including Neuman and Roskos (1990), Christie & Enz (1992), and Vekelich (1991) conducted their own studies, but the results came up inconclusive to finding a link between children's play in print-enriched settings and literacy development (as cited in Roskos & Christie, 2001, p. 62). Piaget and Vygotsky's theories did not receive as much attention than in the previous decades, but their theories continued to drive the interest of cognitive connections between play and literacy.

The role of adult-child interactions was another highlighted point of Vygotsky's theory. Vygotsky developed the zone of proximal development, which valued the ability of an adult or

competent peer to help a child engage in activities they could not do on their own. This theory determined that adults could help children learn through assisted help. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development drove investigations for further research on the direct adult involvement and peer interaction in literacy-related play activities (Roskos & Christie, 2001).

The Piagetian theory is a well-known theory revolving around play. Jean Piaget believed children accommodated the work into their mental structures when participating in spontaneous play (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). Dramatic play was a focus of Piaget's theory, which stated dramatic play was developmentally appropriate for young children. Dramatic play allowed children to obtain information and gain meaning through their experiences. Development of recall is used to relate play and literacy together. The Piaget theory believed children first imitate what they see and then express what they recall to generate new meanings in the specific context of play or a book (Saracho & Spodek, 2007).

Vygotsky claimed there must be three characteristics in order for something to be called play. Those three elements include the creation of an imaginary situation, explicit roles, and implicit rules. Without one of the three, the situation would not be considered "true" play (Bodrova & Leong, 2006) Vygotsky was a strong believer that play did not just affect a child's cognitive growth. The social interaction that occurs between a child and others during play introduces children to literacy concepts and skills. These concepts and skills require children to accept different viewpoints, which in return promote literate thinking and elaborate social exchanges (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). A child's development as a whole is influenced by play, rather than specific skills (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). Vygotsky further continued to argue that play is not the most unrestricted "free" activity in which a child can actively engage. Rather, Vygotsky believed play provided a situation in which children have to face more contrasts than

in any other context (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). With these constraints, a child must practice self-regulatory behaviors, but due to the activity being desirable, a child is motivated to comply with the limits placed on play. Vygotsky also developed a mechanism called “law of the development of the higher mental functions” (as quoted in Bodrova & Leong, 2006, p. 117) Children develop deliberate and purposeful behaviors; therefore, in order to regulate ones behaviors, a child must experience being regulated by other people, as well as regulating other people’s actions.

Benefits of Play

The benefits of play are considered endless. The development impacted by play include cognitive, social-emotional, physical, moral, and aesthetics. This benefits the whole child development. (Chakraborty & Stone, 2009; Ginsburg, 2007). One area in particular that benefits from play is a child’s language and literacy development through socio-dramatic play (Chakraborty & Stone, 2009). Play promotes children to be creative, which allows a child's imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength to grow and develop (Ginsburg, 2007). Children are able to engage and interact with the world around them through play. This engagement allows children to create and explore the world, master the world, conquer their fears, and work with others (Ginsburg, 2007). New competencies are developed resulting in growing confidence and resiliency that is needed to face challenges in the future (Hurwitz, 2002/2003). Also, providing undirected play provides students with opportunities to learn how to work in a group, share, negotiate, resolve conflicts with others, and self-advocacy. Finally, children practice decision-making, move at their own pace, and discover their areas of interest when play is self-driven (Hurwitz, 2002/2003). Saracho and Spodek (2007) state that play helps children learn and develop their intellectual, social, symbolic, and language world. Specifically, role-playing allows children to enhance their social language by using different

conversation patterns, flexible and expressive tones, and language rules. By developing their language skills, a child's social and symbolic play is nurtured (Saracho & Spodek, 2007).

Walsh, Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, Raffert, and Sheehy (2006) conducted research comparing play-based and formal approaches to teaching in Northern Ireland. The study focused on 70 year one classes, which broke down into 28 traditional classes and 32 enriched curriculum classes. The traditional class curriculum focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic with a very structured schedule. Constructivist and Vygotskian theories influenced the enriched curriculum. The curriculum emphasized play, oral language, phonological awareness, attention, concentration and memory skills, confidence, and social relationships. Once the study concluded, the researchers found the enriched curriculum provided the students with a higher-quality learning experience. Through the enriched curriculum, the students were provided more opportunities to act independently, engage in more challenging activities, and demonstrate more learning. Also, the students showed higher levels of emotional, social, and physical well-being than their formally educated counterparts.

Links between Play and Literacy Development

In recent years the government has moved away from play in the classroom and demanded a teacher-directed instruction. The pressures of teacher accountability and standardized testing has led to child-directed play and exploration in the classroom to be a thing of the past. Instead of allowing children to wonder and explore within their classroom, playtime is being taken away to allow more academics. The effects of play on a child's literacy development is being put into question. However, Karen Wohlwend (2008) is one researcher who has delved into this area and proved the benefits of play exist. In 2008 Wohlwend spent her time in Abbie Howard's Kindergarten classroom for a year researching child's play and how play can contribute to

student literacy development. Howard created a play-rich learning environment, which allowed the children to choose their activities and projects during their literacy block. A morning in Howard's class started off with thirty minutes of adult-supported literacy centers. The literacy centers would range from shared reading and writing, listening center, independent reading with big books, story easel, songs and poems, inquiry projects, and design activities. Next, was a thirty-minute writing workshop block. During this time, students had the opportunity for independent drawing, writing, designing, puppet making, painting, paper folding, storyboard planning, and dramatization. Finally, the students were given thirty minutes of choice time. This time was a learner directed period where the students could use blocks, math manipulatives, board games, puzzles, snack table, housekeeping corner, doll house, and most literacy centers (Wohlwend, 2008).

In her article, Wohlwend illustrates a specific example of play with a student named Colin. Colin carries out a full conversation on a fake telephone with the doctor's office. During this conversation, Colin demonstrates his ability to draw upon familiar social practices including health care consumerism, concerned middle class parenting, and talking on the phone. Colin displayed the flow of a phone conversation by pausing and allowing for the other person to speak and also asking appropriate questions regarding the conversation. He also demonstrated his knowledge on leaving a voicemail and providing the necessary medical information for the doctor. Colin engaged in simultaneous mediated actions which include handling the phone, punching in numbers, repeating the telephone number sequence, using specific intonation when asking questions, and using appropriate conventions for politeness (Wohlwend, 2008). This type of play would be categorized as sociodramatic play, which imitated an adult conversation.

Another scenario Wohlwend illustrated, included three boys who were big sports fans. The

boys sat at the writing table where they all worked on their own drawing of an eagle, the local university mascot. Although the students had access to a generous supply of materials, the students most often choose paper to create pictures and markers, pencils, or crayons to write text. Wohlwend noted the students often produced drawings and child-made books that were aligned with traditional school literacy products (Wohlwend, 2008). During the drawing time, one boy chanted giving his pictures a new dimension and bringing it to life through animation. Another student, used a marker as a prop, pretending it was an air guitar giving the marker a double meaning. The boys recalled old memories of prior games, engaged in sound effects from the game, and even demonstrated the crowd booing. Also, the boys engaged in conversation with each other by ranking their favorite sports teams, comparing their likes and dislikes, and engaging in verbal competitions. Enacting mock battles with their writing tools, adding dramatic effects, and evaluating each other's work added to their drawing experience. Each boy was able to demonstrate their sports knowledge and call on prior knowledge of fan experiences allowing them to bond through shared experiences (Wohlwend, 2008). The teacher was then able to expand this experience to literacy practices by encouraging them to write and draw books of recent sports events, label diagrams of sports fields, and write scripts for iMovies.

During the time of Wohlwend's study, pressure was put on Kindergarten and primary teachers to justify a play-intensive classroom due to accountability measures. However, Howard created a play-intensive classroom which allowed her students to exceed the end-of-year literacy benchmarks for the district (Wohlwend, 2008). Howard created a curriculum that challenged her students, provided inclusion, and responded to the students' needs. Wohlwend's study in Abbie Howard's class proves there are benefits to incorporating play into the curriculum, and students can reap benefits from a play-centered classroom.

Another study by Korat et al. (2003) focused on sociodramatic play and how it provides opportunities for literacy development. Specifically, they looked at how teachers can play a positive role in student play. The study took place in a kindergarten classroom of 32 students located in Israel. The teacher set up play corners in the classroom which promoted sociodramatic play. Highlighted in the study were the office and the grocery store. The office was stocked with an old typewriter, telephone, chairs, two tables, and materials to create notes, forms, and diaries providing various opportunities for students to write and draw while playing. Students would find empty boxes and packages of food in the grocery store. Other items put into the grocery store included printed advertisements, a calculator made from a box, pencils, and paper for notes. The two corners weren't just an area in which to play, they were areas in which students could write, draw, read, and speak: all important elements of literacy (Korat et al., 2003).

In the office corner, students displayed their knowledge of concepts of print. When filling out the forms or writing in a diary, most students wrote from right to left, which is the formal direction to write in Hebrew (these students were being instructed in Hebrew). Different levels of the written language were represented at the office corner as well. Figurative signs or symbols, letter-like marks, or Hebrew letters and numbers were all used to engage in the writing process during play. Also, the study showed that with a little prompting and scaffolding, the teacher could act as a useful resource to guide student play. When the teacher role-played as one of the clients, the students displayed their ability to ask appropriate questions. After forgetting the answers, the teacher prompted the students to think of a way to remember. Instantly, the students thought of taking notes. When the student did not know how to write the word, mnemonic devices such as symbols, figures, letters and numbers were used to display the message, an

important first step of emergent literacy (Korat et al., 2003)). For example, the student wrote the number 3 for the babies age, then drew a baby next to the three to remember what the three was for. When the student needed to write down the duties of the babysitter, she realized she did not know how to write it all. With prompting from the teacher, the child drew a bottle for feeding, diaper for changing diapers, and a figure of a human being for walking. The children used their own version of writing, knowing it's not the conventional way. Not only were the students participating in aspects of emergent literacy, they also were engaged in socialization (Korat et al., 2003). The students cooperated with each other, one student writing the other speaking. Secondly, the students looked through the yellow pages together and talked to each other in the process of writing.

Another learning experience occurred while students played in the grocery store corner. With a little bit of scaffolding from the teacher, the students realized they needed to create a sign displaying whether the store was open or close. From there, a student grabbed a piece of paper and brought it to the best writer in the class to write open on one side of the paper and closed on the other. Although the one student was unable to write open and closed, he was able to go back to the teacher and read what the sign said, as well as reading it to a student who visited the store. In this scenario, the students showed their knowledge that signs have a social function and writing signs can help solve problems. During their play in the grocery store, the students were able to explore the written world by making connections to signs (Korat et al., 2003). The study showed that the one student who was a participant learned to make connections between people and written signs. He learned how to write open and closed and became a teacher to the student who didn't see the sign.

Both scenarios provide evidence that play can have a strong effect on a child's emergent

literacy development. Also, supported within the study, is the importance of a teacher's role in sociodramatic play. Data showed a teacher can scaffold and guide a student without taking control during play. By doing so, the teacher can be that bridge to connect emergent literacy to the real world for students. Writing signs or notes, planning them, discussing them with peers and the teacher, and using the written language were all actions that benefitted emergent literacy development but also created an enjoyable learning experience (Korat et al., 2003).

Cynthia McCallister (1996) is another researcher who discussed the effects of play on literacy development. She states that play is used as a learning tool for children by incorporating academic activities into students' social interactions. McCallister stresses the importance of teachers recognizing students' literacy learning is developed through their social worlds. She continues to talk about how students can help each other learn and how to use written text when play is literacy related. Cynthia focused her study on the findings of other researchers. One researcher including Carol Vukelich (as cited in McCallister, 1996) identified three areas children help their peers with written text. First, she found children informed each other of the function of writing. This led to children teaching each other the purpose for writing. Finally, the students informed each other about print features.

McCallister also looked at the research of Colette Daiute, who stated play serves as an important function in both writing development and first language learning (as cited in McCallister, 1996). Daiute found when students are writing they incorporate play for different purposes. Examples of ways students would incorporate play into their writing are to elaborate ideas and to become familiar with words, new ideas, and the general writing process. Students also used playful problem solving strategies while writing. This included playing with sounds and the meaning of language, playing with ideas and concepts, and engaging in interpersonal

play. Play provides an opportunity for children to mimic their parents and the real world. In return, they learn about literacy and how it is used day to day.

Another study McCallister delved into was Kathleen Roskos. Roskos focused on imaginary play and the story elements each play situation creates. After studying 41 play episodes, Roskos notes that each play episode she observed contained a setting, specific events constituting a plot, and a resolution. This displayed the students' knowledge towards literacy and the essential elements of a story (as cited in McCallister, 1996). Through her findings, Roskos urges teachers to create play centers in the classroom to support their students' literacy development. Teachers can have students share their pretend stories, write them down, and discuss them.

Another focus of McCallister's was how play and language development correlate. Opportunities for children to use their language and build upon their knowledge is possible through play. McCallister studied the work of Christie and Johnson who discuss how abstract situations are created when students are engaged in sociodramatic play. Essentially, this causes children to have to elaborate and explain their play through language. Also, through sociodramatic play, students may be reenacting a story, which in return increases comprehension. The more experiences a student has with a story, the more they learn, and the stronger their understanding becomes. They are able to point out story elements such as the plot, characters, or the story sequence (Christie & Johnson, 1983, as cited in McCallister, 1996).

Chapter 3

Introduction

This thesis aims to explore how a child engages in play, and what reading and writing activities are embedded within play that support a child's emergent literacy development.

Within this chapter, I will discuss the context in which the research will be conducted. Also, information about the participant will be disclosed in this section. The procedure of the research will be provided along with the methods of data collection. Finally, strategies for data analysis will be included for the final part of Chapter three.

Context & Participant

This study will be conducted in the rural town of Springville (pseudonym) located in western New York. According to the 2010 Census Bureau the total population of Springville is 7,641. The population of Springville is predominately white making up 95.4% of the population. The rest of the town's cultural demographics consists of 1.8% African Americans, .3% American Indian & Alaskan Native, .4% Asian, 1.6% of two or more races, and .5% left for other races. Most families' income is in the middle to low socio economic ranges. The overall median income in the town of Springville is \$68,985.

For this study, the research will be conducted within the home environment. The home in which the focal child lives provides many opportunities for children to play and learn. In the kitchen, a child-friendly calendar is displayed where the date can be added each day. A list of the months is also placed above the calendar. Along with the calendar, there is a poster that shows the weather for the day. A learning wall is also located in the kitchen, which provides the children with opportunities to hang up their projects. As you walk through the kitchen you come into the play area. On the one wall, a built in bookshelf is filled with a variety of books, coloring books, and puzzles. Then there is a kitchen set in a corner of the room, along with a fridge, cash register, ironing board, and high chair. Many dolls are around the house along with numerous toys to use with dolls including a stroller, crib, and a swing. A toy box holds an assortment of

toys consisting of trucks, tractors, blocks, dinosaurs, etc. A tool bench with a variety of tools is along another wall in the room. Other toys in the room include a rocking horse, Play-doh, instruments, a barn, and a carpet that displays roads to play with toy trucks. Displayed on the walls of the playroom includes a shapes poster, names of all the family members including the animals, the ABC's, a word wall, posters for each number that also writes the number out and displays it with dots, and finally maps of the world. The next room is used as the craft/computer room. A table sits on the one side of the room that has four chairs and serves as a place for children to make arts and crafts. A huge bookshelf goes across a wall that holds different supplies and materials for arts and crafts. Some materials include crayons, markers, colored pencils, pens, scissors, glue, paint, yarn, string, and sticky letters.

For this study, I will be observing a Caucasian male whom I will call Parker (pseudonym name). Parker is five years old who lives in a two parent home with his mom (Charlotte, pseudonym name) and dad (Ron, pseudonym name), 3 brothers, 2 sisters, cat, dog, and seven chickens. It is important to note, Parker's mom attended SUNY Geneseo where she received her Bachelor of Elementary Education and Special Education. She continued her education at SUNY Geneseo where she received her Master of Childhood Literacy K-12. After graduating, Charlotte taught six years in a third grade classroom at Marcus Whitman. Parker has an older brother who is 15, an older sister who is 7, 2 younger brothers who are ages 4 and 2, and then a younger sister who is 6 months, so he has other kids to play with all the time at his house.

If Parker were attending public school, he would have started kindergarten this fall. However, his mom decided to home school him due to her background in education. Currently, Parker is receiving approximately five hours of schooling a day. Within those five hours, two of them involve 1-on-1 work with his mother, which includes reading and math instruction. The

other three hours include activities and instruction that involve his siblings. Other subjects that are taught but not necessarily every day include science, social studies, art, and music. No official literacy assessments have been conducted, but Parker is an early emergent learner.

The family is very involved and likes to visit places all the time. During a week, the family will visit two local libraries for story hour. While they are at the library, the family is always checking out books. The family also participates in field trips with a mom's group that consist of children that are home schooled and others that are not old enough for schooling yet. Parker is also very involved in his own activities such as wrestling, baseball, and swimming.

My name is Ashley Gazza, the researcher conducting this study. I identify myself as a middle class Caucasian who grew up in Springville, New York. I received my teaching certification in elementary education, and I am currently working on my master's degree in childhood literacy at The College of Brockport. During the study, I was an inactive participant who made observations. During observations, I noted the different types of play in which the focal child was engaged. Also, I looked for and noted any reading and writing activities embedded in the focal child's play.

I secured permission from the parent through a letter. The letter explained the study and asked for the signature from the parent in order to secure consent. Confidentiality of the participant was secured by providing a pseudonym name.

Data Collection

Data was collected through several techniques to explore a child's play tendencies. Methods of data collection included observations, interviews, and video recordings. I wrote field notes of my observations, reviewed the interview, and provided dialogue of my focal child's

play. Figure 1 shows my methods of data collection and how each piece of data will be used to answer my research questions.

Method	Types of Data	Use of Data
Observations	Field Notes	Research Questions 1 & 2
Interviewing	Transcribed Interview	Research Question 1 & 2
Video Recording	Transcribed Dialogue	Research Questions 2

Figure 1. The types of data collected through the methods of data collection

Observations

During each session, I carefully observed the focal child. During the observations, I took field notes on my observation sheet (see appendix A). I documented anything that related to the research topic, specifically the play activity in which Parker engaged in and his participation in the activities. After documenting the play activities, I reflected upon Parker's actions and how this helped his literacy learning. The observations were used to answer my two research questions.

Interview

Prior to starting my observations, I performed an interview (see appendix B) with the mother of the focal child. During the interview, I asked questions related to what types of play in which her son engages. Also, I questioned her about her son's emergent literacy development. She shared her view on play for her son relative to his literacy development. The interview gave me information for answering my research question about what types of play a child engages in at home as well as literacy activities embedded within play.

Video Recordings

During my observations, once a week I recorded a segment of talk during the focal child's play sessions. Through these recordings, I was able to highlight important aspects within play and identify reading and writing activities embedded in play. Video recordings gave me insight to be able to answer my second research question about what types of reading and writing activities are embedded in play and how play supports emergent literacy development.

Procedures

To start the research, I gave the parent interview. This provided me with useful information prior to my observations. After the interview I began observations. The study lasted 6 weeks, with 2 observation sessions a week, resulting in a total of 12 sessions. Each session lasted for an hour, and I took field notes. Also, on the second observation of the week, I video recorded the focal child for a span of 30 minutes. This provided me with opportunities to dissect the language of the focal child during play. *Figure 2* breaks down my observations and data collection per week.

Week	Collected Data
Week 1	Observation 1: Interview & Field Notes Observation 2: Field Notes & Audio Recording
Week 2	Observation 1: Field Notes & Informal Talk Observation 2: Field Notes, Informal Talk, & Audio Recording
Week 3	Observation 1: Field Notes & Informal Talk Observation 2: Field Notes, Informal Talk, & Audio Recording

Week 4	Observation 1: Field Notes & Informal Talk Observation 2: Field Notes, Informal Talk, & Audio Recording
Week 5	Observation 1: Field Notes & Informal Talk Observation 2: Field Notes, Informal Talk, & Audio Recording
Week 6	Observation 1: Field Notes & Informal Talk Observation 2: Field Notes, Informal Talk, & Audio Recording

Figure 2. Types of data showing Parker's play collected during a 6 week period.

Data Analysis

This study was conducted in January and February of 2015 and lasted for 6 weeks. Each week consisted of two observations. This study looked at how play supports emergent literacy development. For this study, I collected observation field notes, informal talks, video recordings, and an interview with a parent. The data was analyzed to answer the research questions. The student's engagement in play in the home environment was analyzed through all the means of data collection. The types of reading and writing activities embedded within play, and how play supports emergent literacy development, was analyzed through data collection methods of field notes through observations, video recordings, and the parent interview. To increase validity and reliability of the study, I used triangulation across the domains

Summary

This thesis aimed to explore play within the home environment. Play is such a natural process for children allowing reading and writing activities to be embedded in play naturally.

Therefore, this study examined what reading and writing activities in which the focal child participated and how it helped emergent literacy development. Research was conducted in the home environment in the rural town of Springville, NY, a predominately Caucasian town. One five-year-old boy was chosen as the focal student to study and examine play. In order to acquire the necessary information, data was collected by means of observations, video recordings, and interviews. At each observation, meticulous field notes were taken while the video recordings provide an opportunity to take a second look at dialogue. Also, the interview process revealed the mother's perspective and how she viewed play in her child's life. The overall time for the research included six weeks with two observations a week. The focal child was recorded once a week for thirty minutes. Validity and reliability of the data collected was maintained through triangulation of data.

Chapter 4

Introduction

Play has had a large influence on the life of my focal child, Parker. As the researcher, I studied Parker engaged in different types of play. I was able to examine how play expanded opportunities for his literacy learning and if play supported his emergent literacy development. The questions I inquired about in this study are as follows: what kinds of play are young children participating while in the home environment and what types of reading and writing activities are embedded within play that help support emergent literacy development? During my study, I observed Parker in his home environment for six weeks with two observation session per week resulting in twelve sessions.

My first research question focused on the types of play in which children engage while in the home environment. I noticed two specific themes in my findings that fit within this topic.

These themes are independent play and cooperative play.

Children Engage in Independent Play

Through the constructs of independent play, I observed the child incorporating aspects of dramatic play, constructive play, and competitive play. Dramatic play is reflected in Piaget's theory, which states dramatic play is developmentally appropriate for young children. Dramatic play allows children to obtain information and gain meaning through their experiences with dramatic play. Development of recall is used to relate play and literacy together. The Piaget theory states that children first imitate what they see, and then express what they recall to generate new meanings in the specific context of play or a book (Saracho & Spodek, 2007).

Through our twelve sessions together, Parker was involved in dramatic play in several different scenarios. According to the parent survey, Parker's mom responded to the prompt, "Are there ever times your son doesn't play with his siblings?" by stating that half of her son's dramatic play is independent. Additionally, his dramatic play often involves acting out aggression or aggression-type behavior. His strong affinity for "play fighting" was shown through his use of medieval figurines, army figurines, dinosaurs, animals and cars. For example, in our second session together Parker demonstrated a fight between the army people and the king's castle. He is very aggressive with his play, as he hammers blocks and makes gun noises. In my next observation, I witnessed Parker engaged in dramatic play with his trucks and dinosaurs. He used the trucks to transport the dinosaurs, as he tried to save the dinosaurs from being shot. In the same day, he returns to playing with dinosaurs and engaged them in a fighting scene. He discussed out loud the attributes of each dinosaur to create different dinosaur teams.

Parker participated in dramatic play with his dinosaurs for the rest of the observation. When one fight ended he created another. For example, after sorting the dinosaurs, he had them fight each other and eventually had the horns win. To continue with his dramatic play, he had the dinosaurs team up and fight a pink Barbie convertible eventually having the dinosaurs prevail as winners. In session five, his dramatic play was enhanced by his constructive play when he created two castles designed elaborately with cannons. This scene was the perfect setup for a battleground in which the wooden cylinders were used as cannons to shoot at each castle. There was a continuous relationship between dramatic and constructive play as Parker created elaborate castles, knocked them down, played with trucks to transport blocks, to only begin building again to knock them down in a battle scene. Session seven showed to be very similar to session five when Parker built then created a battle. Before the battle started, Parker added dinosaurs to both teams and then the fighting began. As the battle continued, Parker added cars and a motorcycle. At the end of session nine, Parker re-enacted a war with army men making noises to represent machine guns and rifles.

Wilson describes constructive play as “manipulation of objects to create something new (2015, p. 145). While involved in constructive play, I observed Parker looking at a book and drawing freehand on a large piece of paper. He talked to himself while drawing his dragon and explained with details about what he was trying to create. Also, within the same observation session, Parker sat down on the floor singing his ABC’s, as he began to complete an alphabet puzzle. Each piece represented a letter with a corresponding picture to match. For example, when Parker found “J”, he said Igloo, the matching picture to the puzzle piece “I”. He searched for the puzzle piece, and then was able to hook the two pieces together. In session two, I observed Parker interacting with crayons, cards, and blocks, as he attempted to construct roads and castles.

In session five, Parker participated in constructive play, as he built two castles. Each castle was flanked with wooden cylinders that he pretended were cannons. The building of the castles was the setting for his change of play from constructive to dramatic. This demonstrates the direct link between constructive and dramatic play because he used the castle he built to lead his dramatic play. After engaging in the dramatic play and destroying the castles he built in the beginning of session five, he begins to rebuild before engaging in dramatic play again. This cycle continues until the end of his play session. Similar to prior sessions, Parker built castles with blocks in session seven and eventually linked it to his dramatic play in session five. Instead of going back and forth multiple times between the two types of play, Parker first focused on constructing his castles and then acting out a fight through dramatic play. He started with two castles - a good guy and bad guy castle, as he described them. Using long blocks, he built a gate to protect the castle with blocks on top representing army men. Next, he built another good guy castle with a secret lair to hide the king during battle. When his construction came to an end, he had 4 castles with cannons and a secret lair. At the start of session nine, Parker was building three different areas using blocks, cars, and miscellaneous toys. One area included a fence built from blocks, with cars and helicopters surrounding the area. Another area included a silo and army men. Within the same day, Parker put together a dinosaur puzzle. At times, Parker would look at the provided picture to figure out where a certain piece of the puzzle should go by inspecting the colors and images on the piece of the puzzle. After he finished the puzzle, Parker rebuilt his castle knocked down by his brother. In one of Parker's final sessions, he took out a notebook and a non-fiction dinosaur book to draw freehand. Before he drew anything, Parker inspected the picture in the book.

Competitive play involves constraints where a child must practice self-regulatory behaviors, but due to the activity being desirable, a child is motivated to comply with the limits placed on play. Vygotsky also developed a mechanism called “law of the development of the higher mental functions” (as quoted in Bodrova & Leong, 2006, p. 117). Children develop deliberate and purposeful behaviors, therefore, in order to regulate one’s behaviors, a child must experience being regulated by other people as well as regulating other people’s actions.

With Parker, this was the least observed type of play. I labeled his play on computers as competitive play because Parker is competing against himself to perform and reach the next level. During my fourth observation, I had an opportunity to witness Parker competing to complete the literacy activities given to him. Such activities included finding specific letters and recognizing their sounds, matching pictures with words, recognizing upper and lower case letters, and other various literacy activities. The current level Parker was working on focused on the letter B. Once completing the required activities, he successfully passed level six and moved onto level seven.

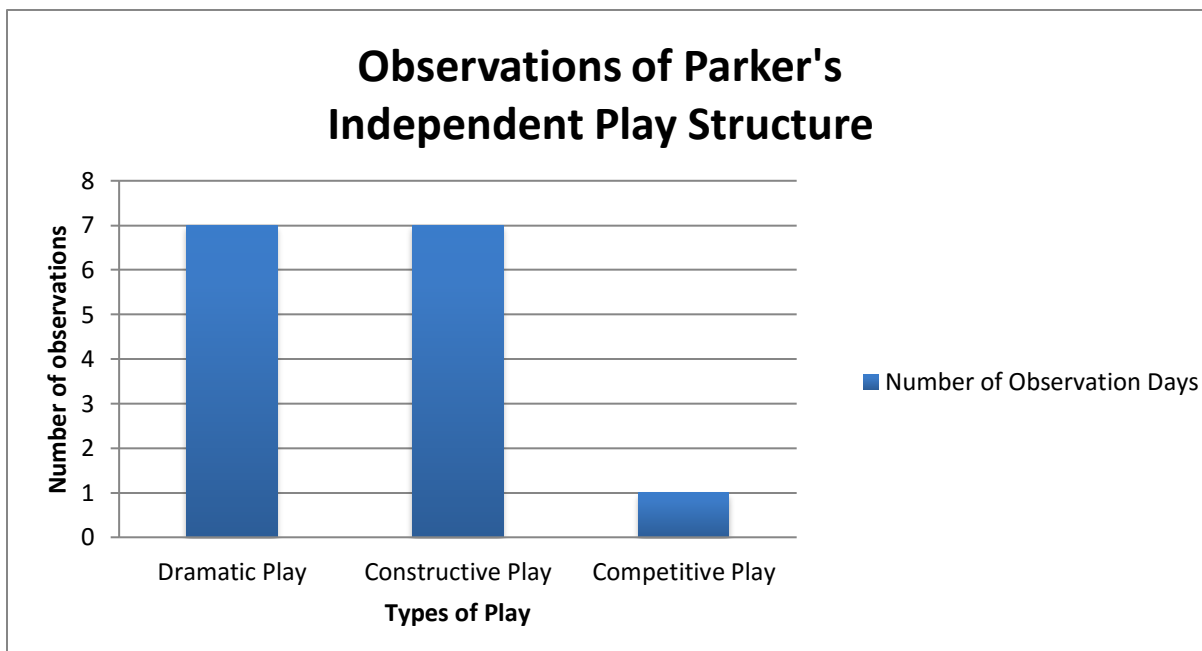


Figure 3. Types of play Parker engaged in during each observation when playing independently.

Children Engage in Cooperative Play

Cooperative play is defined as “two or more children playing together in an organized manner with defined roles” (as quoted in Wilson, 2015, p. 146). During my observations, when Parker was involved in cooperative play, he was engaged in dramatic, constructive, and competitive play. In the parent survey, when asked how play makes her son feel, Parker’s mom stated, “Happy! Excited! It makes him feel more cooperative. If he is setting up a scene, he will want someone to play with him.” I followed up with a secondary question asking if there are times when Parker isn’t happy when he plays, and his mother responded with, “If his playmates aren’t doing what he wants them to do, he gets upset.” During my observations, I often noticed Parker engaging in cooperative play, but as soon as his play partner did something he did not like, he switched directions and found an activity to do on his own. I will refer back to these specific situations when discussing the three types of cooperative play in which Parker was involved.

While cooperating and working with his siblings, Parker was engaged in dramatic play. In this instance his mother’s response held true. In session one, I observed Parker playing with dinosaurs with his older sister, but then he decided that he did not like the way she was playing. This resulted in Parker taking his dinosaurs away and playing with another sibling. After being coerced by his sister into cooperative play in session two, Parker played with a delivery truck and discussed getting supplies such as bananas. Parker took control of the cooperative dramatic play, and the delivery truck became an army tank. The play continued on productively for the rest of the session. A gas station, a police station, a fixer shop are all part of Parker and Renee’s dramatic play during session four. They each contribute ideas to the storyline they created. Their

dramatic play took up the majority of the session. During session eight, Parker was involved with cooperative dramatic play with his three siblings. The whole session involved their dramatic play which included a farm, cutting down trees, driving around a car, going to a party, playing with and purchasing airplanes, and getting lunch. Parker and Renee led the play, as the other two followed along. Parker engaged in more dramatic play with his older sister, Renee, in session nine. The play started with a kingdom and secret passwords, and then quickly shifted to airplanes. To start session ten, Parker was playing dinosaurs with his sister Renee. It is important to note during this time that Parker decided to play independently in between playing with his sister and playing dinosaurs with his younger brother. He often took breaks from cooperative play when he feels it's not going the way he is directing it to. Parker and Wyatt were playing with tractors and pretending they were on a farm working in session eleven. Jobs were assigned which include spreading the cow poop, chipping corn, and the boss of the farm. The boys discussed their roles and worked together to tend the fields of the farm. Wyatt walked away and Dagon, Parker's youngest brother, replaced him and the play continued.

In session one, Parker was involved in constructive play with his older sister. They were working on an ABC puzzle. At first, this was an independent activity for Parker, but his sister joined him later and helped by singing the ABC's to remind him of what letter comes next. Both children engaged in discussion when puzzle pieces accidentally became unhooked. Occasionally Renee provided advice. Just like session one, in session two, Parker started a puzzle of a barn on a farm on his own, but later his brother joined him. Together they looked at the color of the puzzle pieces and determined where each piece should go. Parker led the play by having his younger brother hand him the puzzle pieces and Parker placed them in the correct spot. After finishing the puzzle, they discussed the puzzle together. Parker helped his younger brother create

a castle during the fifth session. Both boys worked cooperatively, as Parker directed the play. In session nine, Parker was playing independently with his dinosaur puzzle, but then enlists the help of his younger brother. Parker directed his brother to grab specific puzzle pieces and bring them to him to be able to finish the puzzle.

I observed Parker engaging in competitive play with his sister Renee during my fourth observation session. During this time, I watched Parker and Renee play tic-tac-toe. Together they played four games; Renee won the first, Parker won the second, they tied in the third game, and Renee won the last. In observation six, Parker and his older sister Renee were playing a computer game where they created a monster and then played literacy games to get the monster back to his spaceship on the top of the mountain. Literacy activities on the computer focused on finding the correct letters to create words as well as learning the “ch” sound by sorting pictures with “ch” words on them. After Renee left the room, Parker struggled to continue with the computer game, as it was rather difficult for him to do independently. Parker raced cars with his older sister Renee during session ten. They narrated the race back and forth each saying their car went further. The play quickly ended when Parker decided he won, and Renee disagreed and walked away.

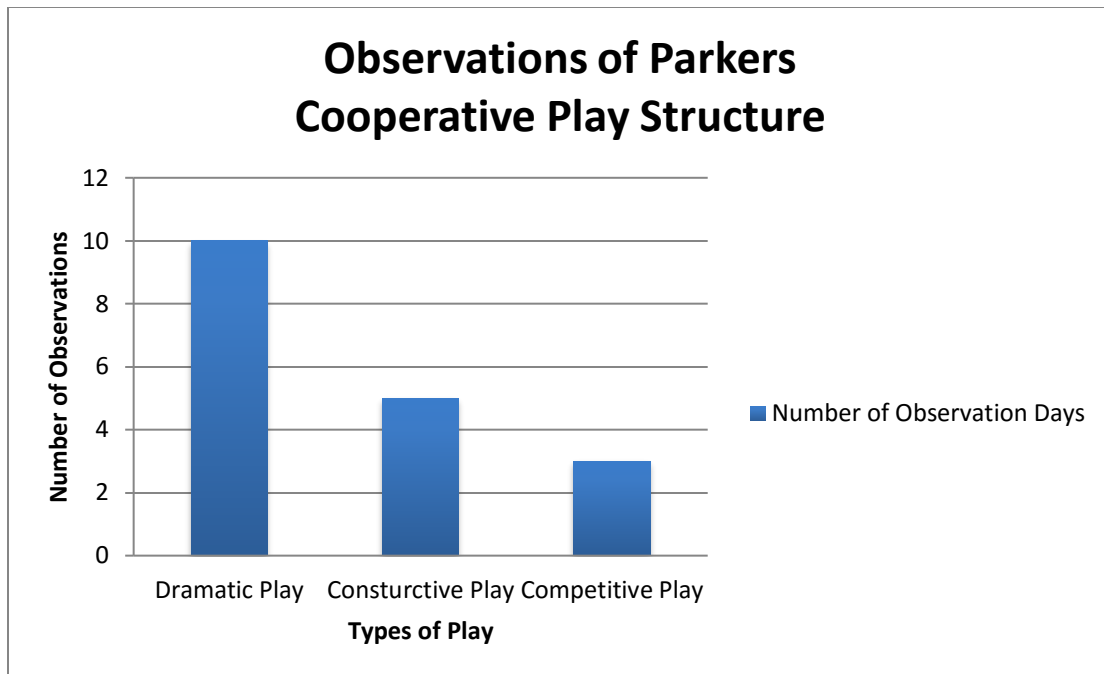


Figure 4. Types of play Parker engaged in during each observation when playing cooperatively with one or more of his siblings.

My second research question focused on the types of reading and writing activities embedded within play, and how they help the focal child's emergent literacy development. Through my observations, I found three significant findings. First, Parker was provided opportunities to learn and work on word knowledge during his play activities. Through his dramatic play, Parker developed storylines showing his conceptual understanding of narratives. Finally, his interactions with books provided opportunities to develop concepts of print and reading comprehension strategies.

Development of Letter and Word knowledge through Technology

Throughout my observations, I recorded the specific play activities in which Parker was engaged. By doing so, this allowed me to inspect each activity thoroughly to examine reading and writing activities embedded within his play. One play activity that proved to have a plethora of reading and writing tasks was Parker's time on the computer playing literacy games. Parker

was able to specifically work on identifying letters - a crucial part of emergent literacy development. Parker's mother stated that his literacy development is in the early emergent stage. He knows his letters and most of his sounds. One activity required Parker to make a train of upper and lower case A's. A mix of letters were shown, and Parker had to pick out the four A's to complete the train. After successfully completing the letter A, Parker completed the same activity for the letters M, B, and T. This specific activity showed Parker's understanding between upper and lower case letters, which his mom stated he was capable of doing in the parent survey. Also, the computer game helped reinforce the letter by saying Parker was correct, stating the letter, and giving the sound of the letter. Once Parker has proved his ability to identify letters correctly, he was able to create a letter book of B by picking the images that starts with the letter B. This is taking his understanding even further. Parker needed to be able to identify the picture, say the word, and then identify the first sound of the word. This is a beginning step in learning to solve unknown words, as an early reader first learns to use the beginning sound to decode words. This represents one's ability to understand phoneme-grapheme correspondence. Parker's skills continued to be tested when the next activity provided words and pictures and he had to match them appropriately. Parker was working on two skills important to emergent literacy development. First, he had to be able to read the word in order to match it with the correct picture. This is taking the prior activity a step further. Instead of only focusing on the initial letter and sound of the word, Parker had to focus on the rest of the word. He had to break apart the sounds of each word then blend them together to match it to the correct picture. This activity also helped Parker learn words and add them to his repertoire. He is able to work more on reading words when a letter book was provided as an activity. Each page showed an image with a corresponding word, and Parker followed along and read the book with the computer. By

showing the picture of the word, the activity demonstrated that pictures in books have meaning and can help with unknown words. Parker received multiple exposures to the same letter making this experience a multi-modal one. Wohlwend discusses how the processes of reading and writing do not emerge as an individual process. Instead they develop through multiple modes that come together (2008). This specific play scenario provided multiple modes to link Parker's learning and make it more beneficial.

After Parker worked with the letter C, the program took the literacy learning to a new level. The focus was the word "at" and the individual phonemes within the word. First, the computer provided the sound for each letter and then blended the sounds to make the word. After blending the word, the computer displayed the word, "at" with a variety of other words, and Parker had to locate the word "at". Then Parker had to blend the letters in the word "cat." Then he had to do the same with the word "mat." It is important to note that the original word was "at," which is in the words cat and mat. Although the program does not focus on finding a word within a word, it's a precursor to the reading strategy to chunking familiar word parts. Parker's mom stated, "Parker loves books but doesn't want to sit down and read them." She even continues on discussing how he does not do much reading in play. Even with his dislike of reading books, Parker was capable of playing the literacy game successfully and working on reading words and developing reading strategies without equating it to "reading." This specific situation allowed Parker develop emergent literacy skills through the use of technology.

To piggy back off learning the phonemes and letters of the words "cat" and "bat," the program digs deeper later by separating the first letter from the rest of the word. For example, the computer would say the letter /c/ sound and then "at." This strategy is called onset and rime. After giving the example, Parker had to successfully find the bubble with the letter C and the

bubble with the word “at.” Once he did this, the computer showed the picture of the word and blended the onset with the rime. This activity continued for the words bat, fat, mat, and sat. This enhanced Parker’s emergent literacy skills by providing exposure to onset and rime. Also, it focused on phoneme substitution, specifically replacing the beginning letter/sound of the word to create a new word. From this activity, Parker is learning there are words within words, and by changing the first letter of a word, you can create a new one - two important reading strategies to help emergent readers.

After Parker continuously worked with the words “at” and “cat,” the next step was to spell those words. The program provided three letters and Parker had to spell the word “at” by dragging the letters in order. Then he was given four letters to create the word “cat.” During this time, Parker’s older sister helped him complete the activity. Parker was able to pick the letter C and put it in the correct spot, but then needed assistance from his sister when he did not know what letter to put next. The following is an example of the dialogue Parker engaged in with his sister.

Renee: “A”

Parker: “And put it where?”

Renee: “In the middle”

This dialogue shows, without the help of his sister, Parker would not have been able to complete these activities independently. However, the exposure to the activity allows his word knowledge to increase, and he learns how to spell specific words by learning the order of the letters.

The final activity to impact reading involvement was a cooperative learning opportunity between his sister Renee and himself. After working with the letters b, c, and f, the program asked Parker to sort pictures by categories. The categories were words beginning with b, c, and f. The words are as follow: can, car, banana, balloon, feet, balloon, car, feet, basket, finger, fish, banana, bear, fish, car, balloon, feet. With the help of his sister, Parker was able to put the pictures into the correct categories. For example, Parker put feet into the wrong category so Renee prompted by telling him “f.” Parker knew the correct category, but he still needed to know what the letter “f” looks like. After the conclusion of this activity, I determined Parker was able to categorize and sort based on the information given. Being able to sort important information when reading is a useful skill. It will help when developing comprehension and processing new information.

Wong et al. (2011) formed a conclusion from their study that students viewed anything involving reading, writing, drawing, learning, or strong concentration as non-play. If learning was involved, their focal students viewed it as boring and not fun. However, Parker showed enjoyment and satisfaction for being able to successfully pass a level. He showed his excitement when stating, “I started at one and I am already at seven. I need to get to ten to get a present.” Although Parker is learning and having to concentrate to do the activities correctly, he does not view this as non-play and has a positive attitude towards the activity, unlike the students in Wong. et al. In 2012 Glen et al., researched the types of play and how it made children feel. Like Parker, the students viewed play as anything fun even if it involved learning.

Conceptual Understanding of Narratives through Dramatic Play

Throughout Parker's involvement in dramatic play, his ability to engage in storytelling and manufacturing his own creative plot lines was observed. Parker was observed doing so playing independently and cooperatively.

As Parker was playing independently in session five, he created an elaborate story line, and then proceeded to narrate the story. In the beginning of the session, Parker was playing with blocks and building a castle. He constructed two castles and developed characters, the good guys and the bad guys. After making the castles, he pondered who will win the battle based on the amount of materials he has on each side. Parker concluded the bad guys based on the number of dinosaurs located on that side of the castle. His plot development is demonstrated through the following dialogue he had with himself:

Parker: "Yup, I think the bad guys will win. You know why? Look at how many bad guys there are."

(Adds more to the good guy castle)

Parker: "Where should the king be. Where should the king go?"

Parker: "I'll build a secret lair."

Parker: "Look what I'm building right here. I'm building something."

Parker: "They got to cut down some trees. They got to cut down trees on top of the castle."

(Parker adds long green blocks to the top of the secret lair he created)

Parker: "I really think the good guys are going to win."

(Parker continues to add more to the good guy castle)

This is the dialogue Parker had with himself as he was playing. He negotiated the story line based on which side he wanted to win. He noticed the bad guys had a larger castle with more people, so he added to the good guy castle and created a secret lair. After these additions, Parker

stated that he thought the good guys were going to win, so he continued to work on the good guy castle. As the building continued, his narrative dialogue continued as well.

He created the setting and developed his characters. His ability to define who, what and where of his play story is impressive, as these are all essential elements of a good story introduction. As the session continued, I observed Parker increasing his understanding that a story needs a problem. The problem of the story in this play situation is the bad guys showed their dominance by trying to take over the good guys.

Parker: "This is a cannon; they are loading up the cannon. See the bad guys are going to win. They have a cannon."

Parker: "The cannon missed the castle and hit the mountain."
(Parker pretends the couch is the mountain)

The above excerpt demonstrates Parker's understanding of the problem in his story. He clearly articulates the bad guys attacking and winning against the good guys. To protect themselves, the good guys create a secret lair. This leads into the rising action when good guys and bad guys fight. Parker even goes a step further to elaborate on the conflict through the rising action by adding dinosaurs - T-Rex for the good guys and long necks and motor cycles for the bad guys. During the fighting, the motorcycle died, and then soldiers died. Next, dinosaurs were added to the good guys. Bad guys continued to die but then came back to life as a member of the good guy team. Then the T-Rex was eating other dinosaurs. Parker had the good guys prevailing during the story but then incorporates a suspenseful climax when the bad guys re-emerge with a tractor. The tractor is used to push through the walls of the secret lair where the king is hiding. The tractor and motorcycle eventually invade the secret lair and in a surprising twist, capture and kill the king. Parker wrapped up the dramatic play with a resolution. This shows his knowledge

that a story needs an ending. Not only did this observation display Parker's conceptual understanding of narratives, but it also displayed his creative imagination. This will be useful when he learns how to write his own narrative story.

Throughout the cooperative play opportunities, Parker has several chances to create a narrative story line with his older sister. In session two, in particular, Parker and his sister are developing a 'damsel in distress' type of story that highlights Renee's ability to determine problem situations and Parker's ability to provide problem-solving opportunities. These key components to narrative story telling are detailed in this excerpt of dialogue from session two.

Parker: "I'm driving around looking to help people."

(Moves around his motorcycle around the makeshift neighborhood he has created with blocks.)

Renee: "Help! Help! My wagon is stuck!"

Parker: "I will get the rope and pull you out!"

Renee: "Thank you, sir! I need to find the army guys."

Parker: "I will find them for you!"

(Parker searches for several army figurines and brings them to Renee.)

Renee: "Thank you for coming to find me army people. I broke the window in my truck. Can you help me fix this?"

Parker: "This is really a job for the truck repair shop."

Renee: "Oh, can you bring me to the shop?"

Parker: "Yes, I can. I will get the repair shop truck!"

This scene continued as Renee found different problems, and Parker suggested ways to solve the problems. This dialogue continued for ten minutes. Parker's ability to understand the concept of problem and solution is supportive in his conceptual knowledge of narrative story development.

Concepts About Print and Reading Comprehension Strategies through Book Interaction

My last finding resulting from my observations of Parker revealed opportunities for him to develop concepts about print and reading comprehension strategies through book interactions in play. According to Roskos & Christie (2001), emergent literacy perspective states, “Children construct their own knowledge about written language as they interact with others in everyday activities that involves reading and writing” (p. 62). Concepts about print are emergent literacy skills a child often begins developing prior to entering kindergarten through their use and experience with books. Typically, by the end of kindergarten, most children should understand the conventions of print but some may continue to learn these well into first grade. When Parker’s mother was asked about her son’s literacy development, she indicated he was “extremely emergent.”

Throughout my data collection, I observed and recorded Parker’s activities. The first activity I witnessed was Parker looking at a non-fiction dinosaur book and drawing pictures. He was using the text to create his own drawings. After drawing, Parker eagerly showed me his creation and went into detail explaining it. Although Parker did not write about his pictures, he had an understanding that the picture he drew has meaning even if there were no words. This displays his understanding that illustrations in books are more than just pictures. Instead, they provide meaning. During the parent interview, Parker’s mom discussed his preferred play activities. Her response was “Drawing freehand. He is into drawing everything very artistic.” She then continues saying he likes to draw scenes. She stated, “For example, this is a dinosaur on the hunt for this saber tooth.” Later in the parent interview, I learned that Parker’s writing is developmental, so when he attempts to write about his drawings, it’s a cluster of letters. Again, through the parent interview, I learned that Parker understands illustrations have meaning. This

is an essential part of concepts about print, but he has not developed the understanding of spaces between words. As the session continues, Parker shows his understanding that illustrations have meaning by going back into the non-fiction book and created his story by telling me what he believes is happening. Parker spoke the following dialogue:

Parker: "It looks like a person and a girl."

Parker: "He pretending that guy."

Ashley: "What are they pretending?"

Parker: "He is being a statue."

Parker looked at a picture, and he isn't quite sure what occurred. Parker examined the picture and determined there is a person with a girl. Then he decided the guy is pretending to be a statue. He doesn't know what the text of the book says, but he created his own meaning by studying the pictures. Another example shows Parker looking at a picture of a dinosaur skeleton.

Parker: "See the tiny point thing. They use it to stab them. He uses that part as a sword."

While looking at the dinosaur skeleton, Parker noticed the bone comes to a point at the tail. Again, Parker creates his own meaning and decided the tail was used as a sword. Time and time again, Parker displayed an ability to gather meaning from illustrations, a key component of concepts about print.

Another aspect of concepts about print includes understanding a book has a front and back cover, and you read from the beginning to the end. Parker demonstrated this concept when he opened his non-fiction dinosaur book from the front. Developing this understanding is essential in emergent literacy development. So the student is reading the story in the correct order. If a student goes from back to front, there will be confusion and little comprehension. As Parker looked through the book, he continued to flip page by page from front to back. Parker

practiced this same concept about print skill during session five when he reads a number book to his younger sister. Parker sat down by his sister and asked her, “Do you want to read a book?” Parker’s sister is a baby, so she is unable to respond. Parker went ahead and began reading. Parker started with the front of the book then flipped it open. Each page displayed a number under a flap that Parker lifted up to read. When doing this, Parker always started to read on the left page and moved over to the right page. Parker is practicing reading from right to left and again continuing to build his concepts about print knowledge.

As I observed Parker during his play, I also noticed he had opportunities to practice reading left to right and one-to-one correspondence, two crucial understandings necessary for concepts about print and emergent literacy development. Parker displayed both in session two as he was coloring in a letter book. The page Parker was coloring was letter b and had a picture of a bouncy ball. A sentence that linked with the picture was also displayed at the bottom of the page which read, “I can see the bouncy ball.” Once Parker finished the coloring, he moved to the bottom of the page to read the sentence. Parker started to the left demonstrating his knowledge that when reading you must start on the left. Then, as he read each word of the sentence, he used his finger to point showing one-to-one correspondence. According to Parker’s mother, when asked about her son’s literacy development, she explains, “Through repeated readings he just achieved the finger pointing with one to one correspondence.” Also, being capable of achieving the one-to-one finger pointing, Parker showed his understanding that letters compromise a word. Again, this is a new understanding according to his mother. This specific play scenario provided a fantastic opportunity for Parker to continue to develop on his concepts about print.

Parker is also able to develop specific reading strategies to foster comprehension as a result of his interactions with books and developing his understanding of concepts about print.

During the first session of looking at a non-fiction dinosaur book, Parker often had questions about what he was seeing. Questioning is a key reading strategy used before, during, and after reading to develop reading comprehension. In this specific scenario, Parker used questioning as a “during reading” strategy to develop his understanding of the pictures viewed. For example, Parker looked at a picture with animals running away from a cave, and this is his dialogue:

Parker: “Why are all the animals running away?”

Parker: “Uh, oh! A person in the cave and he is looking at him.”

Parker: “Look it! That’s where the dragon lives.”

This excerpt shows Parker questioning why the animals were running away. Then he observed the picture even further to get an answer to his question. He quickly noticed there was a cave and something staring at the person standing in the cave. Parker then made a comment about the dragon living in the cave. Although Parker doesn’t get a concrete answer to his question, he infers the dragon lives in the cave, and that’s why the people are running away. Making inferences often leads to deeper understanding. While looking through the same book, Parker came to a picture of a T-Rex, and this is what he said:

Parker: “Do they eat rocks?”

Ashley: “No they eat meat.”

In the above dialogue, Parker is using questioning as a skill to gain more knowledge in regards to the T-Rex. He is not sure what the T-Rex eats, so he questions if they eat rocks based on seeing the rocks in the picture. Although rocks were not the correct food of choice for T-Rex, through his questioning Parker is able to learn what T-Rex does eat adding to his repertoire of dinosaur knowledge. When he reads more dinosaur books in the future, he will be able to activate this knowledge to help his reading comprehension.

Parker uses his prior knowledge when interacting with books. This strategy helps him before and during reading. Activating background knowledge allows students to think about what they already know regarding the topic and use that information to deepen their reading comprehension. The following dialogue shows Parker using his prior knowledge:

Parker: “A T-Rex eating a car”

Parker: “Look it”

(Parker points to a picture with a guy in it.)

Parker: “People weren’t alive when dinosaurs were alive, and dinosaurs can’t come here.”

While looking at the picture, Parker quickly points out that people did not live when dinosaurs were around. Also, Parker doesn’t say dinosaurs are extinct, but from the dialogue, you can tell he has an understanding that they are extinct because he says dinosaurs can’t come here. Parker is looking at the pictures and using his prior knowledge to make sense of what he is seeing. He now knows that the picture he is looking at is not real. Without knowing and observing his prior experiences with dinosaurs, I am unsure of where he gained this prior knowledge; however, as a result of the parent interview, I know he loves dinosaur books because his mom states, “He loves non-fiction books. We will go to the library, and he will check out books about dinosaurs.”

Parker engaged in early literacy strategies that specifically developed his comprehension. For example, Parker comes to a page with a picture of an egg floating in his dinosaur book. He examined it carefully. Prior to looking at this page, Parker examined different types of eggs. He saw eggs that he described as tiny, big, baby, red, and weird. He instantly went back to the original page showing the eggs, and found the egg in the bunch from the current page he is looking at. Although he is still in the early literacy states, Parker is developing an understanding

that he can look back into the text to develop his comprehension. In this situation, he is matching pictures of eggs, and when he begins to read words, this will be a strategy he can use when he may not know answers to questions or he wants to expand his understanding by linking topics together.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This research sought to study the types of play in which children engage and how those play opportunities have reading and writing embedded within them to help develop emergent literacy skills. The research relied on observations, anecdotal notes, parent survey, and video recordings to answer two research questions. After the completion of my observations, I concluded several things as follows: a) children engage in independent play, b) children are engaged in cooperative play, c) technology provides opportunities to develop letter and word knowledge, d) conceptual understanding of narratives develops through dramatic play, e) concepts about print and reading comprehension strategies are developed through book interactions in play.

My first conclusion is my focal child engages in independent play in the home environment. I came to this conclusion through my observations with Parker where I noted he enjoyed independent play through dramatic, constructive and competitive play. Parker does not favor dramatic or constructive play more than the other. Instead, they are both preferred almost equally, as he engaged in both seven out of twelve observations. Also, approximately half of Parker's play is independent

Another specific type of play Parker favored was cooperative play with his siblings. My second conclusion my focal child is engaged with cooperative play in his home environment. Through my observations with Parker, I noticed he enjoyed playing cooperatively through dramatic, constructive, and competitive play. Parkers preferred cooperative play of choice was dramatic play with his siblings, as he chose this play opportunity ten out of twelve observations.

My third conclusion is play through technology provides opportunities to learn letter and word knowledge. During my work with Parker, I observed Parker engaged with the computer, where he completed direct and purposeful literacy activities. Through this specific play activity, Parker worked on identifying letters, recognizing the first letter and sound of a word, matching words with pictures, onset and rime, sorting words by their first letter, blending phonemes of words, and building words. All of these skills demonstrated through Parker's play are all essential reading strategies he can use when learning to read. Specifically, this play opportunity proved to be beneficial, as it allowed Parker a play opportunity based on his own choice. It also provided an opportunity for literacy learning and development.

My fourth conclusion is the development of the focal student's conceptual understanding of narratives through dramatic play. In my work with Parker, I often observed him engaged in dramatic play with dinosaurs, medieval figures, army men, trucks, animals, and castles he built from blocks. Through these dramatic play scenarios, Parker demonstrated his ability to engage in storytelling and manufacturing his own creative plot. Independently and cooperatively, Parker narrated an elaborate story with a problem, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. He may not understand exactly what he is doing, but through his dramatic play, he is developing the understanding of narratives and how they work. This will help with reading comprehension.

My final conclusion is that concepts of print and reading comprehension strategies are developed through book exposure. During my time with Parker, I often observed him looking at books and being engaged. Through these multiple interactions in play, Parker unintentionally displayed and developed concepts about print and reading comprehension strategies. In regards to concepts about print, Parker displayed his understanding that illustrations have meaning and relate to the text. One-to-one correspondence, reading left to right and front to back, and chunking of letters in a word are other concepts about print Parker was able to develop through is play. Parker also showed his ability to use prior knowledge, questioning and inferring based on the pictures he viewed. Parker's current skill level with this is looking at pictures to create his own meaning rather than reading the text; therefore, these book exposures are providing opportunities for him to develop the necessary strategies for reading comprehension.

Limitations

There are significant limitations to this study. First, due to my limited access to children, I only had one participant to observe and study in regards to this topic. In order to get a better gauge on play in which children engage and how their play can help develop emergent literacy skills, a larger sample size would be more ideal. Also, having a mix of boys and girls may provide a different perspective. I strictly studied the play of a boy. It is possible the play of a girl would look different.

Another area I find to be a limitation is the environment in which I conducted my study. Again, due to limited access to a school at the time of my study, I performed my research and observations within the home environment. I explored how play is being taken out of the school curriculums because it is being viewed as non-educational. Today's curriculum focuses on skill

and drill due to increased standards and expectations. The benefits of play are no longer considered relevant to learning and school is becoming more academically focused for children of young ages. I strongly believe to better support this topic, research conducted within the school environment would be more desirable. More specific ideas and examples could be provided to teachers. Educators would be able to see how play can benefit students and how they can specifically incorporate play into their own classroom.

The final limitation of this study is its qualitative design. My findings are based on how I interpreted the data. If provided the opportunity, another researcher may look at the data I collected and have completely different findings. I am a strong believer that play is crucial to child development and provides multiple opportunities for literacy development. Although unintentional, my own biases may have clouded my views on my data analysis, swaying my findings. As the researcher, I collected and analyzed my data to receive true and honest answers. I believe what I reported as my findings are accurate, but it is important to note they are based on my interpretations.

Implications for Teachers

An important take away for teachers is that play can be a beneficial learning tool for literacy. First, let your students play and have fun. Play is a natural part of a child's development and plays a crucial role in improving a child's all-around well-being (Wong, Wang, & Cheng, 2011). Teachers need to allow students to choose what they want to play and a variety of play activities need to be provided. Teachers need to make the move towards a child-centered classroom. Incorporating play into the curriculum will lead to a more positive and happy classroom environment. Wong et al. explain that the goal is to transfer the positive attitudes of play into play-based curricula, which provides quality learning. However, to bring positive play

lessons into the curriculum teachers must listen to their students in order to base the curriculum around the students (2011). For teachers, it is important to be strategic with the types of play opportunities provided to their students. Teachers must be thoughtful and purposeful when they pick the materials for play and the play opportunities they are going to provide for their students. In Korat's research, the teacher was very specific with the play centers and materials she provided in her classroom in Korat et al. (2003) research. For example, she created an office that she supplied with a typewriter, telephone, chairs, tables, materiel's to create notes, forms, and diaries. All of the materials picked were very purposeful by the teacher, which led to experiences that had a strong effect on the students' emergent literacy development. This is what I believe, based on my research, that teachers need to do to effectively help develop literacy in a meaningful way.

Recommendations for Future Research

My study strictly focused on reading and writing activities embedded within play. For future researchers, focusing on the five literacy components of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing, may give a better insight into how much literacy learning is done through play. Also, future researchers could look into other benefits of play besides literacy development, which include cognitive, social-emotional, physical, moral, and aesthetic development. (Chakraborty & Stone, 2009; Ginsburg, 2007). By doing this, the researcher can expand on the multiple learning opportunities and benefits of play in the classroom. If future research can focus on these benefits, it may lead to a more child-centered classroom, which incorporates play into the curriculum. A final suggestion for future research is studying boys play vs girls play to determine, they are similar and different. Such research may give better insight to teachers on providing the most valuable play opportunities for each student.

Overall significance of the study

The findings in this research study have provided insight into the advantages of childhood play in regards to literacy development. Within just six weeks, I found multiple areas play impacted emergent literacy development. Dramatic play provides opportunities for children to develop their conceptual understanding of narratives and how to build a plot in a story. The use of technology in play builds a child's word knowledge. Finally, interacting with books develops and practices concepts about print and reading comprehension strategies. The findings in this research project can serve to educate teachers on the benefits of play and how they can provide meaningful play opportunities for children to help emergent literacy development. The first step is to provide opportunities for play.

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Date:
 Length of Observation:
 Family members:
 Tools/ Devices:

Time:
 Family/Location:
 Reading or writing materials:

Observation Notes		
Literacy/ Play Activities	Focal Child's Participation	Reflection

Appendix B:

Parent Interview

1. What activities do you see your son participating in when he is playing?
2. Does your son have any favorite objects he plays with? How does he use them?
3. How often does your son play when he is home?
4. From your observations how does play make your son feel?
5. What is your son's current literacy development?
6. Do you ever see your son incorporating reading and writing into play? How?
7. How often does your son play with his siblings?