

The Evolution of Play in Public School

Kindergarten Classrooms

by

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to portray kindergarten teachers' developmentally appropriate practices in order to authenticate the essential component of play. Recently, student achievement has been the primary focus in Early Childhood Education, and play is seen as an action that precludes academic learning. This is a qualitative study of teachers' perceptions and teaching practices through observations, interviews, surveys, and journal reflections. The study found that participant kindergarten teachers: (1) have a developing understanding of the positive impact play has on student development, yet they are not aware of how to successfully implement play in their classroom; (2) tend to be more work driven than play driven in their daily activities; and (3) perceive play occurs when manipulatives are made available for student use, however, the activities are largely teacher-directed in contrast to student initiated play. In summary, participant kindergarten teachers were found to be hesitant to let their control shift to child-initiated learning. There are gaps between teacher knowledge of how child initiated play impacts learning and the actual classroom implementation of child initiated play. Teachers need further development to understand how to use materials to integrate play into daily lessons. It is important to widely disseminate and support the use of Early Childhood National Board Standards regarding play in kindergarten classrooms. Kindergarten teachers require professional development that permits the integration of knowledge of play and the implementation of play in an increasingly accountability driven environment.

Keywords: Play; Perceptions of play; Learner-Centered; Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP); National Board Certification National Board

Certified Teacher (NBCT); National Board for Professional Teaching Standards  
(NBPTS); English Language Learners (ELL); English Language Development  
(ELD)

## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the most important man in my world, my husband, Kiernan Riley. I love you more than words can describe. Without you, I would not be where I am today. God has truly blessed me with the most amazing, gracious, loving, committed and caring husband and I am thankful that you are the one that is by my side for the rest of my life.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background of the Study.....	1
Problem Statement .....	4
Significance of the Study .....	6
Definition of Terms.....	6
Limitations of the Study .....	8
2 LITERATURE REVIEW.....	9
Introduction .....	9
Definition of Play.....	10
Impacts of Play .....	12
Perspectives and Theories of Play .....	15
Recent Re-examination of the Teachers Role in Play .....	21
Teachers Beliefs in Play.....	21
Role of Teachers in Prompting Play .....	23
Learner Centered Play-Based Curriculum.....	23
Teacher Standards .....	25
Teacher Quality.....	25
Teacher Effectiveness. ....	26
Student Achievement.....	27
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards .....	28

CHAPTER	Page
Five Core Propositions.....	28
Early Childhood National Board Professional Teaching Standards .....	29
Standards Role on Play .....	33
Conceptual Framework .....	34
The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Education .....	35
Two Types of Play .....	37
Guidance for Teachers .....	43
Conclusion.....	51
3 METHODOLOGY .....	53
Research Questions.....	54
Participants .....	54
Selecting the Participants.....	54
Setting.....	55
Myself as a Research Instrument .....	57
Purposeful Sampling.....	58
Field Entry.....	59
Data Collection .....	60
Multiple-Case Study Approach. ....	60
Observational Case Studies. ....	60
Research Procedures .....	61
Teacher and Classroom Selection. ....	61
Data Collection Sequence.....	61
Teacher/Parent/Student Consent.....	61

CHAPTER	Page
Teacher Questionnaire. ....	61
Audio-recorded Pre Semi-structured Interviews. ....	62
Audio-recorded Post Semi-structured Interviews. ....	63
Video Recording. ....	64
Direct Observation, Participant Observation and Field Notes.....	65
Introduction of the National Board Standards.....	66
Teacher Reflective Journals. ....	69
Data Analysis.....	69
Trustworthiness .....	70
Ethics .....	71
4 ANALYSIS OF DATA .....	72
Introduction .....	72
Participants' Background.....	73
The Kindergarten Classrooms .....	75
The Kindergarten Curriculum.....	76
Classroom Design .....	78
The Students .....	79
Teacher Schedules .....	81
Data Analysis.....	86
Pedagogies of Play .....	93
Facilitation of Play .....	94
Management of Play .....	94
Assertions .....	96



CHAPTER	Page
Summary of Analysis.....	112
5 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, FURTHER RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	114
Introduction .....	114
Summary of the Study .....	114
Conclusions .....	115
Research Question 1.....	115
Research Question 2.....	123
Discussion .....	134
Implications.....	142
Further Research .....	145
Recommendations.....	146
REFERENCES.....	150
APPENDIX .....	156
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT.....	157
CHILD ASSENT FORM .....	159
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE FORM .....	161
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE .....	164
INTERVIEWS .....	168
SEMI-STRUCTURED PRE-INTERVIEW.....	171
SEMI-STRUCTURED POST-INTERVIEW .....	174
PARENT PERMISSION LETTER.....	177
RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS – TEACHERS.....	180
RESEARCHER OBSERVATION.....	183
REFLECTIVE JOURNAL FORM .....	185

CHAPTER	Page
REFLECTIVE JOURNAL .....	188
INTRODUCTION OF PLAY IN EARLY NATIONAL BOARD STANDARDS LESSON PLANS: STANDARD VI.....	190
CURRENT REALITY AND CHANGE WORKSHEET.....	197
RECIPROCAL TEACHING POSTER .....	199
INTRODUCTION OF PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD NATIONAL BOARD STANDARDS LESSON PLAN: STANDARD VII .....	201
NEW LEARNING ROAD MAP .....	207
INTRODUCTION OF PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD NATIONAL BOARD STANDARDS LESSON PLAN: STANDARD VIII .....	209
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	214

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Daily Schedule of Participants .....	85
2.	Researching Dilemmas of Research-to-Practice.....	135
3.	Actual Play in Kindergarten Classrooms .....	141

# **Chapter 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the Study**

Although there is inevitably a debate on the type of play a child should engage in, it is agreed that play of some sort is necessary in a child's development. Especially in early years, teachers, researchers and parents have a constant concern about child development. This concern manifests as children have appropriate social interactions as this interaction is known to impact a child's intellectual, social and emotional development.

Play is an essential influence in a child's learning and development. Through the use of play, structure is intertwined in order to provide children with the opportunity to explore new concepts while making connections of their own. This structure provides individual accommodations for each child's unique learning needs. Children are able to relate the play situations to build upon previous knowledge. The structure given through play is necessary for a child to obtain the maximum benefit of the play situation.

A growing body of research indicates that there is a validation of play-based activities enhancing a child's development both physically and cognitively. According to Newman & Brody (1996), research conducted in child development has established evidence which validates the importance of play. It has been found that "play is essential to children's healthy development and that play time should not be sacrificed" for a purely academic only experience. Others view play as the most important learning process that "provides the context for children to exercise their emerging

skills in physical, cognitive, and social domains” (Newman & Brody, 1996, p.61).

Defining play has proven to be a complex task. As anticipated there are multiple definitions of play in a variety of contexts. However, many agree that play is engaging, goal-oriented, motivating and process-oriented. Various theorists define play in a way that reflects their theoretical lens. Play is also studied in the ways that it impacts a child. It is evident that all aspects of a child are impacted through play. According to the various definitions of play, two main sub-categories have emerged; teacher-initiated and child-initiated play. Although both are considered play, they have distinct differences.

Paley (2004) speaks of the issue of vanishing child-initiated play by stating:

“Fantasy play is at the barricades with fewer and fewer teachers willing to step up and defend the natural style and substance of early childhood, the source of all this vocabulary building and image decoding and Socratic questioning. It is not perceived by some as an obstacle to learning. We are allowed to nourish play only so long as it initiates reading, writing and computing.”

Many scholars, Roskos and Christie (2007) and Kendrick (2005) have studied the benefits of teacher-initiated educational play. Through teacher-initiated educational play, students are able to achieve the desired knowledge in various content areas while being engaged and enjoying the learning process in a way that is meaningful to them.

Despite the rhetoric of play being a strategy of the past, rigorous standards used by expert teachers incorporate the notion of play-centeredness in an Early Childhood learning environment. At a time when many states, districts, schools, principals and teachers are under the mandate to increase student achievement, the scrutiny of how teachers teach is under

constant surveillance. (Roskos & Christie, in press). Hills, as cited in Newman (1996), asserted that parental pressure for early high academic achievement may force educators to accelerate instruction. In this context, teachers must not forget the value of play. Therefore, with the significant evidence (Roskos & Christie, in press) that play enhances multiple levels of increased development, teachers need to find a way to incorporate what is known to impact student achievement with the mandates they are given.

The transformation of play in classrooms over the past century is remarkable. Research on play has produced changed concepts of knowledge, various strategies of implementation and new principles of instruction and teacher organization. Despite the knowledge that students excel when they are able to use developmentally appropriate strategies, new standards, regulations and evaluation processes have led teachers away from what they know about how a student learns. They have adapted their teaching to incorporate a no talk and non creative environment in Kindergarten.

The incorporation of developmentally appropriate strategies (DAP) in teaching practices ensure that students are able to have experiences which are at their own level of understanding and occur in a meaningful context. Through incorporating strategies that the students are interested in, students are able to construct knowledge while providing for an optimal level of development.

Early Childhood teachers are faced with decisions about implementing developmentally appropriate practices which are influenced by new political and educational mandates versus a learner centered curriculum. Some early childhood educators do hold beliefs that through the understanding of standards, teachers analyze how play can be incorporated into structured

programs. However, there is an increased number of teachers who are forgoing this knowledge and decreasing the amount of play in their teaching practices. Therefore, it is vital to understand how expert teachers incorporate developmentally appropriate practices, including play, while also ensuring high levels of student achievement.

The National Board Certification process is established and recognized for its rigor and achievement results. (Sato, M., Wei, R., Darling-Hammond, L. 2008). Through professional growth experiences, understanding and interpreting the early childhood standards, a teacher's teaching is improved while higher student achievement is obtained. (National Board Research Council, 2008). The National Board Certification process encompasses the value of play through the Early Childhood Standards. (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Early Childhood Generalist, in press.) Building a child's educational foundation is an area of extreme importance in early childhood education as this is the base for which the students will build their entire academic careers. The increased demand for excellence of teachers and in student achievement places a significant purpose in understanding how we can increase teacher quality. Studies have shown that the National Board Process increases a teacher's understanding of their own teaching while honing in on specific strategies to increase student success (Sato, M., Wei, R., Darling-Hammond, L. 2008; Lustick, D & Sykes, G 2006).

### **Problem Statement**

In Early Childhood Education, it is known that play is a vehicle used to provide experiences and to teach young students. There are two types of play: child-initiated play and teacher-initiated educational play. Child-

initiated play is known as free play where students are able to play in any manner they choose. Teacher-initiated educational play is a type of play that guide students by providing specific resources and set outcomes.

In today's accountability stressed kindergarten classroom, child-initiated play in kindergarten is no longer seen as an acceptable strategy. Play as a whole seems to be outmoded as teachers are asked to increase student achievement. Early childhood teachers seem to be aware of the benefits of play in early childhood settings. Nevertheless, kindergarten teachers are fearful of using play because of school and district level policies regarding English language instruction and the emphasis on student achievement especially in Title 1 schools. Numerous studies have shown that play helps a child develop emotionally, socially and academically. National Board Standards have proven to be a successful means for teachers to critique their own teaching and methods used (Harris & Sass, 2009).

Therefore I examined whether and how teachers implement play once they are aware of the Early Childhood National Board Standards related to play. I used direct instruction to model for the teacher participants how to incorporate experiences and curriculum into a structured play setting. I intended to model how structured play can be incorporated with sufficient use of individual, group and cooperative work. I am a National Board Certified teacher, and this in itself may be a source of bias. However, as I had completed the process of seeking national board certification, I had a first-hand understanding of the expectations for classroom practice that I aimed to convey to the teacher participants in the study. And this knowledge was also useful in developing a framework for data collection.



## **Significance of the Study**

As a result of this study I am hopeful that early childhood educators can gain insights about the importance of play and implement play in their day to day instructional practices.

## **Definition of Terms**

*Play* is an activity where the student is actively engaged in exploration and meaningful learning where they are intrinsically motivated. Play is a minimization of competition where children are doing an activity for their own benefit rather than to do better than someone else. Play is a way children communicate, enhance various areas of their development and a motivation to learn. Roskos and Christie (2006, p. 97) describe play as a process particularly influential for achieving cycles of self-organization and development that contribute to cognition.

*Perceptions (of play)* are the views individuals hold in which meanings of background, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings about play are perceived.

*Learner-Centered* refers to a classroom environment where teachers are the facilitators for a child's learning rather than a director. In a learner-centered environment, children are able to explore with concrete materials and interact with one another on their own and using the teacher as a guide. A learner centered environment allows for students to create their own meaningful learning experiences.

*Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)* refers to practices that are at the appropriate level for each individual child. It refers to practices

that make learning meaningful to students by incorporating their interests and are at the child's level of understanding.

*National Board Certification* is an advanced form of voluntary certification which identifies teachers who meet the high and rigorous standards of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. To obtain certification, teachers must complete multiple portfolio entries analyzing their teaching practice and successfully complete an exam. All components are scored by individuals trained to evaluate teaching according to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

*National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT)* is an individual who has completed all requirements of the National Board Certification process and achieved National Board Certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

*National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)* is a nonprofit, nongovernmental, independent organization. The mission of NBPTS is to advance the quality of teaching and learning by maintaining high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do; provide a national voluntary system of certifying teachers who meet these standards; and, advocate for related education reforms to integrate National Board Certification in education and to capitalize on the expertise of National Board Certified Teachers.

*English Language Learners (ELL)* are students who have a primary language other than English. They have not earned a proficient score on the state English Language Assessment showing that they are not considered proficient English speakers.

*English Language Development (ELD)* is the way students who are not proficient in the English language is taught. English language development focuses on a specific type of instruction that encompasses phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Arizona law does mandate that students who are in an ELD classroom receive a minimum of four hours a day of specific language instruction.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited to studying the practice and perceptions of three teachers who are currently teaching Kindergarten at a Title 1 school. However, others who teach in similar settings may find that they too can identify with the issues surrounding the use of play in an increasingly accountability driven kindergarten classroom.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

In early childhood education, the issue of play as a means to educate and provide experiences to a child has been a topic of great debate. Play has been defined with various meanings by theorists such as Piaget, Rubin, Fein, Vanderberg and Vygotsky. Although many recognize that play is the natural vehicle children use to learn about life experiences, others argue that structured play is necessary to guide the children to academic achievement.

Recently, the push for academic achievement of students has been a critical issue under discussion in every state, district, school and among teachers. Concurrently, the National Board Certification process has been noted as a strong professional development tool by which teachers are able to fine tune their teaching in order to benefit student learning. While National Board Certification has linked teacher quality to student achievement, it has not been primarily perceived yet as a viable tool for teacher development. In undertaking National Board Certification, teachers take part in an intense self-evaluation process in which they reflect upon their own teaching practices. Through this process, teachers are required to vigorously examine National Board Standards, their own teaching, student work samples and to study the content of their teaching area in order to increase the quality of their teaching and student learning.

This literature review has two major components: Play and National Board Certification. Play is defined and the roles that play holds in the development, readiness and learning of students, and achievement in Early

Childhood classrooms is examined. In addition, the literature also reviews the evidence around National Board Certification as a professional developmental process for teachers and links evidence of play in the Early Childhood National Board Standards to teaching and teacher quality in Pre-kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms. The purpose of this literature review is to establish a definition of play and to examine how accomplished teachers incorporate play as developmentally appropriate practice into their early childhood classrooms.

### **Definition of Play**

Play is defined as “a process particularly influential for achieving cycles of self-organization and development that contribute to cognition” (Roskos & Christie, J. , 2006, p. 97) It includes two categories of child-initiated and teacher-initiated educational play opportunities. In both categories play is recognized as an essential part of a child’s life and development. Play is a valuable method in understanding a child’s developmental growth. Through the action of play children are learning about themselves, their culture and environment.

Nielsen and Christie (in print) examined how pretend play is treated non-literally. Pretend play is imaginative and allows the child to develop their own perceptions and objectives about the specific play activity. Nielsen and Christie investigated the impact of adults directing the play of young children by becoming a model. Nielsen and Christie showed how pretend play can be constructed to also include a form of structure.

Gentile (1983, p. 436) states “Recent expansion of research in the area of play and its effects on learning firmly supports the notion that concrete objects and experiences manipulated by children at play are the

prerequisites to successful acquisition of more abstract skills such as learning to read (Smilansky, 1968; Singer, 1973; Sutton-Smith, 1976; Pellegrini, 1980; Yawkey and Fox, 1981).” Play experiences are an important part of learning. Play is essential to nurture the various aspects of child development.

Roskos and Christie (2007) described play as a compelling situation for young children to use to practice general cognitive processes, such as planning ahead, monitoring progress, evaluating success, correcting errors and so forth, that are essential for early school success. They went into further detail describing play experiences to include a child deciding what will happen, to practice deliberate remembering, problem solving and evaluating play activity. Play in this context is viewed as an effective means for promoting child development in a plethora of ways.

Kendrick (2005) drew upon an anthropological study conducted by Schwartzman in 1976. Schwartzman explained primarily play research in three perspectives. The first perspective is called the ‘upward’ perspective where play is an imitation and preparation for adulthood. The other two perspectives are the “the ‘inward-outward’ view (play is viewed as an expression of inner thoughts; it is psychological projection); and the ‘backwards’ angle (games are interpreted as reversals or inversions of cultural systems)” (Kendrick, 2005, p.7).

Burghardt (2011) identified play as a specific behavior incorporates all five categories of his criteria to determine play. Burghardt’s first criterion is that the behavior is not fully functional in the form or context in which it is expressed. The second criteria is that the behavior is spontaneous, voluntary, intentional, pleasurable, rewarding, reinforcing or autotelic (“Done

for its own sake"). Third, is that the behavior is incomplete, exaggerated, awkward, precocious, or involves behavior with patterns with modified form, sequencing, or targeting. He also stated that the behavior must be repetitive. Last, he stated that the behavior should be initiated when the subject's basic needs are met and not under stress.

Finally, Roskos and Christie (2011) defined educational play as the linking of educational goals, objectives and outcomes to one or more of the significant characteristics of play. They believe that play achieves two educational goals. The first goal is a way for students to learn strategies and skills to think on their own while being creative. The second is to use play as a vehicle to learn more specific skills. While these skills can be taught without play, the use of play can intrinsically motivate students to learn.

### **Impacts of Play**

Although there is inevitably a debate about which type of play is most beneficial for a child in school, scholars appear to be in agreement that play in general is a defining characteristic of a child's development. It has long been known that play is essential for growth in the areas of cognitive, social, emotional, behavioral and physical development.

Deliberate instruction through rules with specific objectives is a characteristic of structured play. Viewed in this way, teacher-initiated educational play also contributes to a child's growth academically, socially and physically.

Information about the cognitive impact of play on a child is found in multiple studies. Children enhance cognitive development as they develop and solving problems, gain academic understanding and living skills.

Vandermaas-Peeler (2009) stated, "based on Vgotsky's (1978) theoretical perspective that social interaction facilitates cognitive development, Rogoff (1990) developed the concept of 'guided participation', a process in which parents and children exchange knowledge through informal but important socially mediated activities." As this was, indeed, Rogoff's explanation of play, he described the use of structured play through the use of guided participation. And, in the case of cognitive impact, the children are learning and are making their own perceptions based on what they observe.

Schmidt (1995) stated, "Social interactions within the classroom culture often demonstrate literacy learning (Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992)." From the sociocultural perspective play is seen through a cognitive lens that promotes learning through interactions with peers. As children see various perspectives and use their questioning and reasoning skills through social interactions they are able to make their own educated and personal perceptions.

An emphasis on the social impact play poses on a child is shown through the study of Rackoczy (2008). Through play children learn how to socialize while making connections to others. "Early pretend play is not only a form of individual action that children engage in and understand, but an essentially social, cooperative form of action that embodies impressive abilities of collective 'we' intentionality" (Rakoczy, 2008, p. 499). As a child will inevitably observe their peers in the act of pretend play, scholars are able to see how this use of modeling is a source of structure. Children learn and adapt their own perceptions and interactions with their peers from what is observed. Children do benefit through peer interaction through the "facilitation of peers' feelings of belonging and support" (Johnson, 2001,



p.241). Children are able to learn about the world and how to interact with those around them through the actions of play.

The emotional well being of a child is also impacted through the use of play. A child develops self concept, self esteem and begins to understand ways in which he/she can express his/her emotions. Gentile (1983, p.437) showed how sociodramatic play "promotes social/emotional and cognitive skills." This play is associated with contributing to the experiences of a child while exposing them to the idea of role play. Role play is when the child interacts or mimics their views and perceptions of a situation that occurs in real life. The child fits into the character of the situation and begins to understand the emotional background through the expression of their emotions. "Children use play in a spontaneous way to work through events and feelings that absorb them" (Children's Play Information Service, 2004, p. 2).

Behavioral implications can also be seen through the impact of play in a child's life. Through play children are able to learn how to think for themselves and to make choices that will impact their life and experiences. Children learn through their interactions on what behaviors produce certain reactions. Some children choose to engage in non-social play. Predictions are used to understand a child's behavior through the observation of their non-social interactions.

The issue of physical growth due to play is a particular issue because it involves a child's progress in their fine and gross motor skills, strength, flexibility, health and coordination. Gentile (1983) stated, "Movement activities have been linked to physical fitness, which has a major bearing on a child's intellectual growth" (Piaget, 1952). Through movement children are

able to learn about their own body while also learning vocabulary to comprehend their experiences. For example, their knees must bend in order for them to jump high. Children need these concrete experiences to build their foundational knowledge as well as to make connections with what they read.

### **Perspectives and Theories of Play**

The Progressive Era (1890-1919) shaped educational progressivism by transforming the American education systems through pedagogical and philosophical underpinnings. Influenced by John Dewey (1859-1952), the progressive education movement reformed education through his belief of teaching through not only practice but also through real life experiences. Roskos and Christie (2011) described how educational play accelerated during the 1920's and 1930's through the rise of the child study movement.

"The progressive educator insists, rightly, that adroitness in accommodating, both psychologically and intellectually, what the student brings to the classroom is at least as important as wise selection of the most sublime material. Each student embodies a unique sensibility formed by years of interaction between genetic endowment and life experience" (Ackerman, 2003, p.347). It is clear that teaching requires skill in integrating content with meaningful experiences. Through educational progressivism, an understanding of teaching children through both structure and life experiences prevailed.

The main philosophy of Progressive education is that it emphasizes learning by doing with a focus on integrated curriculum. Through group work and collaboration, the student is able to collaboratively and cooperatively

work with their peers while they develop both social skills and problem solving and critical thinking. Students are guided by the teacher but are also able to explore with multiple resources.

John Dewey (1859-1952), Maria Montessori (1870-1952), Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) emphasized learning through interactions and discovery. Through their theoretical perspectives, curriculum is developed to incorporate the foundation of integration, development of social skills with an emphasis in problem solving and critical thinking through the action of play.

Play in early childhood settings is a powerful tool which contributes to a child's emotional, physical, social and cognitive health and development. Play is a necessary part of a child's development and is incorporated in the Early Childhood settings through a variety of faucets including both unstructured and structured play. Through the eyes of educational progressivism, structured play is a practice which follows the philosophy of incorporating both structure and learning through experiences. Vygotsky believed that learning and development work closely with one another. However, schooling initiates a new aspect as "that what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone" (Briggs, 2010, p. 64).

John Dewey "rejected the educational practices of his day and argued that one must understand the *experiences* of the child and what the child knows in order to move forward with instruction, which in today's terminology equates with *child-centered learning*, an effort to understand the child from his or her perspective with regard to any given matter (a psychological constructivist perspective), and then to guide the child to an understanding of

whatever it is that is being taught (a social-constructive perspective” (Kretschmer, 2010, p. 145). These theoretical points of view indicate that play is of both educational and social value in understanding content learned and the world around us. “In *Experience and Education*, Dewey argued that education in order to accomplish its ends for both the ‘individual learner and for society must be based on experience – which is always the actual life-experience of some individual” (Baez, 2005, p. 76). Students need to be able to take what they are learning from the curriculum and see how it applies to their own life. In doing so, the students are able to make real life connections in which the content they have learned is meaningful.

A learner centered curriculum allows the child to “explore, to follow his/her curiosities, and to exercise personal choice and responsibility” (Ellis, 2004, p. 41). Through an educationally progressive curriculum, a teacher is able to guide the student to self-realization and self-actualization through creating a stimulating environment with a teacher as a facilitator guiding the student with adapting to each individual learner’s specific needs. Students are given the freedom of discovery and choice through a structure that creates a context for development and growth.

Maria Montessori also believed that play incorporates structure through independent work and specifically placed and neatly kept materials. In the Montessori system, “The teacher is a guide, an expert in her field, who must also understand the means of the child’s development. It is the role of the teacher to put the student in contact with the material” (Kambich, 2007, p.4). Through the facilitation of learning and teaching to retain knowledge, the teacher assists the student in making real life connections to knowledge. Through a “prepared environment” and “practical life” (Rambusch, 2010, p.

40) children develop necessary life skills on their own timeline through a structured atmosphere where that was teacher initiated. In the Montessori setting work and structure was perceived as play. "It was work that was enjoyable" (Rambusch, 2010, p.40).

Through a cognitive perspective Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky viewed play in curriculum as a significant aspect in a child's development. Piaget believed that "people – children in particular – construct knowledge out of their actions with the environment" (Harlow, 2006, p. 45). Play in Piaget's perspective refers to cognition. The child learns through an experience, assimilates new information to the learning experience, and then accommodates to process the experience. "Knowledge can be constructed only as the child's internal processes interact with the external world of reality – the physical world" (Harlow, 2006, p. 46). Through Piaget's cognitive development theory, he believed that, "humans cannot be given information, which they immediately understand and use; instead humans must construct their own knowledge" (Powell, 2009, p.242). Therefore through the action of play children begin to construct their own knowledge through practice and interaction with peers and adults.

Lev Vygotsky believed that play is necessary to build a foundation of child development while guiding the child to learn about life experiences. According to Fox, Vygotsky believed that play is an important role in the development of self-regulation (Fox, 2008, p. 385). Vygotsky believed that play was a significant contributor to a child's development. Through Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, ZPD, the child is in a zone where learning is occurring through guidance. In the zone of proximal development a child is learning through observing peers and adults. This

process is also known as cooperative learning as students learn from both teachers and peers. "The key concepts in Vygotsky's ZPD theory are 'assistance' and 'experience' at the level a student can handle so that he or she can learn" (Powell, 2009, p. 247). Through play, children are given a context to practice their skills in a variety of roles while solving problems with assistance of a teacher and/or adult figure.

To have an understanding of the philosophy of play development in curriculum, definitions of child-initiated and teacher-initiated educational play need to be recognized. Thus play has been viewed as one of the most appropriate means of learning in early childhood education. Through understanding play, progressive education was able to transform the education system to include learning by doing.

Child-initiated play is a child's play time where the child gets to decide how and what they play. They have their own set of rules that may get changed along the way but it is decided by the children who are playing. There is very little input by the teacher or parent. This doesn't mean that the teacher or parent isn't there to supervise or make sure the play moves along with no bumps in the road, but it is totally driven by the children. Child-initiated play benefits the children in the emotional, cognitive, physical and social development as well as encourages them to be more creative and critical thinkers. It is also a great way for them to have fun without the stressors from outside sources.

In contrast, teacher-initiated educational play has a specific purpose with an intended outcome and is often being teacher directed. The idea of teacher-initiated educational play developed when Maria Montessori

incorporated structure through exploration of materials. Students were guided while also independently working towards a specific learning goal.

As stated earlier, Lev Vygotsky believed that play is a necessary part of development. Although unstructured play allows children to explore freely and without any guidance, new research shows that students benefit by teacher-enhanced structure in order to meet the standards required of them in content areas. Therefore, early childhood educators now need to find ways to incorporate play into their teaching to satisfy both the development of children emotionally, physically, socially and cognitively while coinciding with meeting academic mandates. This can be accomplished through the incorporation of structured play. Teacher-initiated educational play in balance with child-initiated play can be seen as a catalyst to achieving both child development and enhanced academic achievement. Teacher-initiated educational play is planned, guided, led and monitored by adults. Within each teacher-initiated educational play experience, there is a designed purpose. Children still have the opportunity to play, however some of it is designed to achieve a specific outcome of understanding while learning through hands on experiences.

This more recent view of teacher-initiated educational play as a continuum of activities is useful in that it accepts that non-playful or work-like behaviors can contribute to learning especially when they also contain dispositions such as engagement with task and active involvement" (Yelland, 1999, p. 218). The crucial differences among teacher-initiated and child-initiated play exist in the ways in which play is guided through self-directed or teacher directed play activities. Both types of play positively impact learning. The benefit of teacher-initiated educational play is that it is characterized by

its adherence to national and state standards allowing the child to enjoy learning while understanding and mastering the content the teacher is required to teach.

Through the use of teacher-initiated educational play children are able to learn specific concepts which will promote their growth academically, socially, cognitively and emotionally. Students are able to get a well rounded approach to curriculum through exploration and guidance. Through teacher-initiated educational play, students see meaning in their play and they will also learn that every action has a purpose and an outcome. Students will experience enjoyable learning through their structured play experience.

Progressive education theory posits that "all children will learn spontaneously at very high levels as long you use individualized, 'child-centered' approaches" (Pogrow, 2006, p. 142). Differentiating each lesson for the specific needs of each student is a skill that teachers must acquire through practice. Once this skill is achieved by teachers, students are able to learn from multiple perspectives and they are able to make meaning of the content being taught. Students can then be guided to apply information while seeing how it connects to various areas of their life. Dewey, Montessori, Piaget and Vygotsky have stated that learning is not only about teaching. It is the skill of transcribing knowledge into a meaningful language with each individual student in a way that is enjoyable and meaningful. This type of learning solidifies student understanding of content and allows students to transfer this knowledge into future learning.

## **Recent Re-examination of the Teachers Role in Play**

### ***Teachers Beliefs in Play.***



While incorporating a students' prior experience with direct guidance from the teacher, structured play is used to introduce various content. Play is a necessary part of a child's development and is incorporated in Early Childhood settings through a variety of ways including both child-initiated and teacher-initiated educational play.

Roskos and Christie (2006) examined the link and impact of play has on early literacy instruction. They described the shift that new teaching standards have in refocusing child-initiated play to "educational" play-play activities that are linked to educational goals, objectives and outcomes. In order to produce outcomes where teacher-initiated or educational play positively impacts a child cognitively, teachers need to learn how to design and implement specific play experiences.

Elkind (2007) illustrated that play is necessary for children to have a healthy social and emotional development. He also stressed that play is essential for academic learning and cognitive growth. Through the incorporation of educational play, students are preparing for success in school both socially and academically.

Roskos et al., (2010) identified methods that encouraged thinking through play. The purpose was to discover developmentally appropriate ways to improve mental processes that relates to reading. Through an extensive literature review they found a 'better understanding of the practical significance of the play-literacy relationship in promoting the acquisition of early literacy skills; early literacy skills are widely recognized as practical to overall school success.

## **Role of Teachers in Prompting Play**

### ***Learner Centered Play-Based Curriculum.***

Through teacher-initiated educational play in a learner centered curriculum, individual, group and cooperative work is a focus. John Dewey "rejected the educational practices of his day and argued that one must understand the *experiences* of the child and what the child knows in order to move forward with instruction, which in today's terminology equates with *child-centered learning*, an effort to understand the child from his or her perspective with regard to any given matter (a psychological constructivist perspective), and then to guide the child to an understanding of whatever it is that is being taught (a social-constructive perspective" (Kretschmer, 2010, p. 145). These theoretical points of view indicate that play is of both educational and social value in understanding content learned and the world around us. "In *Experience and Education*, Dewey argued that education in order to accomplish its ends for both the individual learner and for society must be based on experience – which is always the actual life-experience of some individual" (Baez, 2005, p. 76). Students need to be able to take what they are learning from the curriculum and see how it applies to their own life. In doing so, the students are able to make real life connections in which the content they have learned is meaningful.

Johnson et al., (2005) referred to educational play as activities that are linked to educational goals, objectives and outcomes. According to these authors, educational play is directed by specific planning and is structured by the teacher. They also inferred that educational play included the involvement of the teacher in the play activities.

Roskos and Christie (in press) identified four pedagogies that promote children's learning through play. The pedagogies include story drama, topic-orientated play, board/digital play and outdoor play. Through these pedagogies Roskos and Christie showed how play can be used in a learning curriculum by all teachers in order to increase children's knowledge, skills, understanding and perspectives of learning. The incorporation of these four pedagogies allows teachers to align play with academic goals related to all content areas.

Jones (2011) believed that teachers have multiple roles in which they engage students in educational play. These roles include teachers planning for play in advance, being a scribe, mediator, teller, manager and player. Through the incorporation of these various roles, teachers are able to create meaningful learning experiences in which students can engage in a learning environment.

Discovery of content and relating the learning to what is meaningful to the students allows the child to comprehend the content being taught. A learner centered curriculum allows the child to "explore, to follow his/her curiosities, and to exercise personal choice and responsibility" (Ellis, 2004, p. 41). Through the educational progressive curriculum a teacher is able to guide the student to self-realization and self-actualization by creating a stimulating environment. In such an environment, the teacher as a facilitator guides the students by adapting to each individual learner's specific needs. Students are given the freedom of discovery and choice through a structure that creates a context for development and growth.

Higher student achievement may be a result of using various strategies within a learner centered curriculum. In a learner centered

curriculum student's prior experience is incorporated within each lesson. Direct instruction can then be incorporated to model how to focus on key experiences and curriculum in a teacher-initiated play setting. With sufficient use of individual, group and cooperative work in a structured play setting, discovery of new concepts occurs.

## **Teacher Standards**

### ***Teacher Quality.***

The push for teacher quality in today's American educational system is burgeoning. An increased body of research indicates that an important factor of student achievement is linked to teacher quality (Johnson, 2001, p. 45). Teacher quality is described by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), as teachers who "are committed to their students and their learning, who promote students' character, responsibility, motivation, self-esteem and respect." The NBPTS (2002) also describes teachers as being members of learning communities and working collaboratively with parents. The impact a quality teacher has on the learning achievement of their students can be significant (Sato, M., Wei, R., Darling-Hammond, L. 2008).

An overlying theme in quality teachers is on teachers who thoroughly know and understand their student's and their levels of learning and understanding. Those are teachers who are able to establish connections with their students and their families, who deeply know the content they are teaching, and who are able to adapt their lessons to their specific students. Many of these concepts are core components of the National Board's Five Core Propositions. Goe (2007) indicated that different teacher characteristics,

such as qualifications and instructional practices, may be used to assess quality.

### ***Teacher Effectiveness.***

Stemming from teacher quality is the concept of teacher effectiveness. How a teacher implements the content they know, applies their knowledge of their students into the delivery of the lesson and adapts throughout the lesson impacts how well the student's learn. Teachers not only need to be of quality but need to be effective with their teaching. Teacher effectiveness is defined by Nye, Konstantopoulos and Hedges (2004) as the portion of student achievement gain that remains unaccounted for after controlling for student demographics, class size, and school fixed and random effects.

Berry (2009) reported that effective teaching is not just about teacher's knowledge, skills, and dispositions – but also about the conditions under which they work. He further stated that successful efforts to raise teaching quality and student achievement have been made in high-needs schools. Little (1996) noted an intensive focus on working conditions. Making sure teachers teach in the fields for which they are prepared; have adequate time to work with colleagues on matters of instruction; that they have ready access to information, materials and technology' and that they receive helpful feedback about their teaching.

A number of policymakers and researchers have suggested that effectiveness, as measured by teachers' contributions to their students' learning, should be an important component of accessing teacher quality (Goe, 2007). Most schools are measuring teacher effectiveness through linking the growth of students by connecting teacher and student data.

### ***Student Achievement.***

Numerous studies have been conducted regarding the comparison of National Board Certified Teachers with Non-National Board Certified Teachers, specifically aiming to examine student achievement. "Students taught by teachers who are board certified make larger gains on achievement test scores" than students who are taught by non-board certified teachers (National Research Council, 2009). Most studies described the different methods and the attention to detail which National Board Teachers employ. Although these changes seem minute, the effects on student achievement are tremendous.

Student understanding and student achievement are significantly higher with students who are taught by a National Board Certified Teacher. In a study by Okpala, James and Hopson (2009) principals perceived National Board Certified Teachers as "being highly effective in terms of instructional skills, classroom skills, and personal skills. One of the key factors that studies identify as impactful on student learning is that NBCTs reflect on their teaching practice and implement new techniques and strategies into their teaching. This is one of the reasons why this difference in student achievement is so significant.

In the report, *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession: A Status Report on Teacher Development in the United States and Abroad*, Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos (2009) identified findings regarding the impact of professional learning on teacher performance and student learning. They found that that in order to increase student achievement, professionals needed to go through intensive professional development, collaborate with their fellow teachers, and ensure that the

professional development they seek out focuses on teaching, learning and is connected with the implementation of new teaching strategies.

### **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**

The National Board was officially founded in 1987 and its first task was to define their vision of accomplished teaching practices. The first policy statement of the NBPTS, "What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do" was published in 1989 and remains the cornerstone for the National Board Certification process (NBPTS, 2002). This publication outlines each of the five core propositions.

#### ***Five Core Propositions.***

##### *Proposition 1: Teachers are Committed to Students and Their Learning*

Accomplished teachers are committed to their students and helping them achieve. Teachers need to know that just because they are teaching, it doesn't mean their students are learning. Every moment of teaching needs to be meaningful and building a foundation. Teachers also need to go above and beyond the time required to be at school. By being life-long learners teachers are able to constantly learn new strategies to assist their students.

##### *Proposition 2: Teachers Know the Subjects They Teach and How to Teach Those Subjects to Students*

It is important for teachers to know the content and how to specifically teach each concept while adapting how they teach based upon the students needs. Professional Development is a necessary component for teacher development. Teachers need to be committed to life-long learning. We are always learning more about our students and how we can better teach, new strategies to use and adapting the curriculum for the various levels of

learners.

*Proposition 3: Teachers are Responsible for Managing and Monitoring Student Learning*

Classroom management is a huge factor for student learning success. In a well managed classroom students know what is expected of them, in regard to behavior, routines, and learning procedures. Teachers are able to effectively keep students on task while adapting classroom management procedures to best reflect the needs and behaviors of the students.

*Proposition 4: Teachers Think Systematically about Their Practice and Learning from Experience*

Accomplished teachers think in advance about their student's needs and how they can keep students engaged and learning. They anticipate possible challenges and plan for ways to avoid and remedy those situations. Teachers also use what they have learned, adapt it, and apply it to their future lessons.

*Proposition 5: Teachers are Members of Learning Communities*

Expert teachers take pride in their profession. They see the value of being a part of a professional learning community and being a lifelong learner. By sharing perspectives, teachers are able to work with other teachers in developing strategies and figuring out what is best for their students and school.

**Early Childhood National Board Professional Teaching Standards**

National Board Professional Teaching Standards are used to guide instructional decisions and encourage teachers self reflective practice. The standards are divided into ten categories, although there are some common



characteristics among them due to the consistency and seamless qualities of accomplished teachers. These ten standards were recently approved for the Early Childhood Generalist National Board Certification (NBPTS, in press).

*Standard 1: Using Knowledge of Child Development to Understand the Whole Child*

Teachers need to know the stages of child development. Teachers must be able to foster physical, cognitive, language, social, emotional, and moral and ethical development. They must also be aware of second language learning and development. By having this knowledge teachers are better able to understand the levels at which to teach, as well as have a better understanding of the needs of their students.

*Standard 2: Partnering with Families and Communities*

Having a strong relationship with families and the communities helps the students to know that they have a support system and that everyone is involved and cares about their learning. Teachers must reach out to families to learn about their culture, differences, and needs; this information can be used to help guide instructional decisions. Teachers should also foster reciprocal relationships between the children in their class and the larger community.

*Standard 3: Fostering Equity, Fairness, and Diversity*

Teachers need to know how to ensure that all students are treated fairly by having a set policy. Teachers should aim to empower all children, and ensure that all students are treated fairly by one another. Teachers need to explain the importance of treating everyone fairly to their students. They should recognize and embrace diversity, while explaining that everyone is

unique and that we need to respect every person and their differences.

*Standard 4: Knowing Subject Matter for Teaching Young Children*

Teachers need to have mastery over all the subjects they are teaching. They need to know how to adapt lessons and how to teach according to the state standards. Teachers should be able to integrate all of the areas of development, such as social, cognitive, linguistic, etc., as they are aware of the importance of educating 'the whole child' especially during the early childhood years.

*Standard 5: Assessing Children's Development and Learning*

Teachers need to know how to appropriately assess their students by matching what they want to assess according to what they want to see in the outcome. Assessments should be used to drive the teacher's instruction. Accomplished teachers must be able to vary their assessment strategies to ensure they are measuring all children's abilities accurately. Teachers should be able to articulate what they are assessing and why they are assessing it; this helps students to understand why they are engaging in a given activity.

*Standard 6: Managing the Environment for Development and Learning*

Learning can occur best in an environment which the child feels safe and secure. Teachers need to know how to create this environment and manage it every day and throughout the school year. Accomplished teachers set up the classroom in a way that clearly organizes the space and is conducive to student learning and play. They should also plan a daily schedule that meets the needs and developmental abilities of the children in their classroom. Teachers should also be able to improvise when needed.

*Standard 7: Planning for Development and Learning*

Planning is a vital process in both teaching and learning in early childhood and elementary classrooms. How a teacher plans helps them to correctly implement the concepts while they are teaching. Planning should begin with a specific goal or objective and a way in which that goal or objective can be assessed. Accomplished teachers should plan activities that challenge children; however, they should also provide them with the resources or support needed to make that goal attainable.

*Standard 8: Implementing Instruction for Development and Learning*

The way a teacher delivers instruction is important to the learning of every child. Teachers must ensure that they teach in a way that all learners are able to understand and that they make connections with the student. Teachers should use their knowledge of their students to plan instruction. They should also include activities such as play and technology to keep children motivated and excited about learning.

*Standard 9: Reflecting on Teaching Young Children*

Every day is a new day of learning. Teachers should view reflection as purposeful and essential ways of improving on their practice. There are always different experiences that we can learn from. By reflecting on their teaching and how the students learned teachers are able to adapt their teaching to ensure they are using the best methods for our students. When children are having difficulty with a topic or subject, educators should first examine their teaching practice to see why students are struggling.

*Standard 10: Exemplifying Professionalism and Contributing to the Profession*

Teachers are the biggest asset to the Education profession. Teachers need to contribute to the profession and hold themselves to the highest standards. It is important that teachers maintain a healthy life style so that

they are best able to support their students. Accomplished teachers stay up to date with regard to educational research and best practices. They serve to inspire others through their dedication to the field of education.

### **Standards Role on Play**

How play is perceived within standards have a huge impact on how play is implemented in the teaching of every Early Childhood lesson. Within the Early Childhood /Generalist Standards of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the term play is incorporated in multiple areas.

Standard VI: Managing the Environment for Development Learning, managing play in the learning environment is discussed. Teachers are shown the value of play in a child's development. Through the importance of development in the cognitive, emotional and physical aspects of curriculum, play is incorporated according to the age of a child, with appropriate physical space, specific materials and accommodations.

Standard VII: Planning for Development and Learning focuses on each student's development through developmentally appropriate practices. Play in the Early Childhood age is a developmentally appropriate practice as children are very curious. Children use this curiosity through play in order to find answers to their questions. Within this standard, designing and selecting activities and resources are a critical part of the learning process. Teachers must integrate play in a way that connects the experience with the child's own understanding of the world. Teachers must also design activities that connect with the subject content so the students are able to make the connection of what they are learning through the activities.

Standard VIII: Implementing Instruction for Development and Learning incorporates engaging children in learning experiences, using strategies to foster children's learning and development, facilitating play and using resources to support learning. In order to engage the students in their learning, teachers help children to develop skills in a structured learning experience. This allows the students to create an understanding of what they are learning. Through the use of multiple strategies, students understand the concepts because it is presented in a way that is meaningful to them. When learning is meaningful, children want to learn and they see a purpose for the learning experience.

Various types of play are incorporated in daily learning experiences. The 3rd Edition of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards state that teachers understand the ways in which play can help children begin to deal with issues of justice and fairness, and they know that play provides opportunities for children to practice generosity, fairness, tolerance, understanding, and other key social development traits. Through the use of using resources to support learning, teachers know the importance and use resources to promote student learning. These materials are used in innovated ways in order to engage students in the learning environment and experience.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The professional field of early childhood education has long advocated the importance of play in the learning of young children. Johnson, Christie & Wardle (2005) traced the beginning of play to the work of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi, and Friedrich Froebel. These scholars argued

that activities incorporating play had significant academic, social, and emotional advantages over activities with stringent instruction. The argument for play is based on the theory that young children learn differently than older children and adults; their cognitive development is still evolving and not yet ready for abstract methods inherent in direct instruction.

### **The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Education**

Throughout the past decades, the role of play in preschool and kindergarten has continued to evolve due to demands for increased academic achievement of young children in the public education system. Play has had a long history of being controversial and vacillated between proponents of the theoretical views of direct instruction (teaching is telling) versus child centered learning (child learns by “doing.”) Today, play has been drastically reduced in favor of didactic teaching methods. Roskos and Christie (in print) claim that there is less time for play as it is “under siege by strong curricular forces focused on cognitive development, literacy and mathematics that have dramatically reduced children’s opportunities to play.” The type of education that is now advocated is delivered via strict, specific and “rigorous” methods. Teachers are given scripted lessons relating to state standards and told to keep play out of the classroom (Falk, 2012, p. 24). Many of the objects and materials used for dramatic play in the housekeeping corner and blocks used for constructive play are taken out of the classroom as they are not perceived as tools that will assist children to become proficient academically. Teachers are considered “excellent” if someone walks into their room and the students are engaged in listening to the teacher and doing their work quietly. The students in these classrooms appear similar to robots as they are

programmed to do work without talking and have no interaction with their peers unless directed by their teacher (Falk, 2012, p. 24-26).

The exact opposite is seen in contemporary programs such as Montessori and Reggio Emilia schools, where play is seen as a catalyst to learning and becoming proficient in academic areas (Roskos and Christie (in print)). Both Montessori and Reggio Emilia use play as a vehicle to enhance student understanding and achievement. Roskos and Christie (in print) describe Montessori and Reggio Emilia schools: "Montessori programs feature independent activity with semi-structured play materials that teach specific concepts, whereas Reggio schools emphasize creative expression with unstructured art materials and group dramatic play."

These schools follow the philosophy of the Progressive movement championed by John Dewey. Dewey declared that one must understand the *experiences* of the child and what the child knows in order to move forward with instruction (Kretschmer, 2010, p. 145). Roskos & Christie (2007) explained that the difference between these programs is that Montessori programs incorporate independent activities with semi-structured play materials to teach specific concepts and Reggio schools emphasize creative expression with unstructured art materials and group dramatic play.

The difference in these two approaches to educating young children is that play is used as a developmentally/educationally appropriate practice in the Montessori and Reggio Emilia schools whereas play is taken out of the classroom in the public education system in favor of didactic instruction. The question which remains is what methods are best suited for young children to learn and develop their cognitive, social and emotional skills? What would

these methods look like? In order to answer these questions, a more detailed description of the types of play is necessary.

Play in Early Childhood settings is a powerful tool which contributes to a child's emotional, physical, social and cognitive health and development. "Play is by its very nature educational. And it should be pleasurable. When the fun goes out of play, most often so does the learning" (Oppenheim, J. 1984 in Baines, L. & Slutsky, R. 2009). Research has focused on two types of play as significant in early education; teacher-initiated and child-initiated play. Although play is perceived as a vital part of development, there is a debate about the type of play that is considered to be the most beneficial. Roskos and Christie (2007, p. 5-1) explained how child-initiated play is decreasing in the Early Childhood setting and teacher-initiated play is seen as the catalyst to achieving both child development and academic achievement.

### **Two Types of Play**

To understand the role of play in an Early Childhood setting, it is important to understand the two types of play which may be evident in classrooms; teacher-initiated and child-initiated play. Child-initiated play is defined as a free play in which children decide what they want to do with little to no guidance from adults. In child-initiated play, children are able to choose what they want to play, how to play, where to play, and the length of the play. In contrast, teacher-initiated play is planned, guided, led and monitored by adults. With each teacher-initiated play experience there is a purposeful design. At the heart of the dispute is the question, which is more productive – teacher directed or child initiated play? The general agreement is that play is a necessary part of development. However, the type and



amount of play in the classroom varies depending on the standards and/or expectations placed on teachers and administrators at the school they represent (Falk, 2012, p. 36-38).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the United States is seeking ways to improve the quality of our children's education and their knowledge of content by implementing mandates such as the "No Child Left Behind" Act. As a result, Kindergarten has become more academic while the implementation of child-initiated play is regulated out of the classroom. Therefore, early childhood educators must seek to find ways to meet children's need for play by incorporating both teacher-initiated and child-initiated play in order to satisfy the development of children emotionally, physically, socially and cognitively while coinciding with the academic mandates.

Child-initiated play is a free play through which "children direct and invent this kind of play – no one presents them with a task or a set of standards to follow" (Flaxman, 1999, p.40). Through the use of materials such as blocks, dolls and puzzles, the environment and imaginative play, children engage in free play because they enjoy this action. "Unscripted yet guided by children's own rules, students use their imagination and develop self-regulation, symbolic thinking, memory, language, and social skills, as well as construct their knowledge and understanding of the world" (Ashbrook, 2010, p.26). Of importance, however, is the fact that unstructured play does not have rewards or consequences. Children are able to decide the length of time in each activity and also change activities when they want to modify or engage in a new form of play.

It is argued by child advocates that child-initiated play is the most beneficial play to children as it promotes emotional, physical, social and

cognitive health and development. Emotionally, children develop “self-confidence while trying new things in a nonjudgmental environment” (Flaxman, 1999, p.40). Physical development is enhanced through fine motor, muscle and hand-eye coordination when a child has free use of manipulatives and opportunities to exercise in outdoor play. Socially children are able to learn how to use cooperation to interact with their peers while developing speech and language skills through imaginative play. Cognitively, children are able to problem solve and think creatively while exploring various scenarios and mimicking behaviors they have witnessed in the world.

Child-initiated play incorporates the idea of free play where no one presents children “with a task or a set of standards to follow. Children engage in such play because they enjoy it” (Flaxman, 1999, p.40). Through child-initiated play, “Children are not as concerned with particular goals or ends as they are with the variety of ways a goal may be achieved” (Almy, 2000,p.2). This helps them to intrinsically develop self help and curiosity skills and see that there is always more than one perspective to situations, and more than one way to resolve problems we encounter in life and school.

Teacher-initiated play can incorporate imaginative, construction, creative and physical play. Teacher-initiated play is “characterized as an activity organized by the teacher (not initiated by the child), for a specific purpose with some goal or end point defined. This view of play is at one end of a continuum of activities and at the other end is play the teacher is not involved at all and it is purely initiated by the child for their own purposes. Teacher-initiated play is useful in that it accepts that non-playful or work-like behaviors can contribute to learning especially when they also contain dispositions such as engagement with task and active involvement” (Yelland,

1999, p.218). Teacher initiated play can incorporate imaginative play, pretend, fantasy and symbolic play. It can also include constructive play involving children in the building of an object or idea through use of manipulatives, such as puzzles or blocks. Children can be guided to see structure through art, music and drama in creative play as well as in physical play which is introduced both indoors and outdoors. Directed physical play can encourage healthy living habits while promoting muscle control with fine and gross motor skills.

The significance of teacher-initiated play is that children are encouraged to explore as they do in child-initiated play and they are also given teacher guidance to scaffold learning to reach an understanding of various standards in all subject areas. Our society and educational system has specific academic goals for all children to reach. In order to engage young learners in methods suited to their abilities and interests during the kindergarten year, this may best be accomplished through the inclusion of both teacher-initiated and child-initiated play. Would the blending of both types of play help to achieve a more developmentally appropriate practice that will strengthen the young child's interest and self-efficacy at the same time as it impacts social, emotional and academic development?

The role of adults is a significant component in teacher-initiated play. Adults can become advocates and facilitators of play. Child advocates illustrate the benefits teacher-initiated play can provide for the emotional, physical, social and cognitive health and development of children. "Providing play resources, engaging in play interaction, assessing play competence and supporting gender equity" (Bergen, 2009, p.427) encompass a wide range of

adult behaviors that promote and support children's learning through teacher-guided play.

Adults can contribute to resources in play by providing objects, books, materials and manipulatives the students will use to explore, examine and critically think about the specific concept or activity they are learning. Children are able to use their imagination and creativity to decipher how to use such materials and manipulatives to accomplish the task of each activity. The desire to learn how to positively interact with peers is fostered through adults modeling and encouraging peer interactions. Adults guide the facilitation of play without judging the process or outcome. Adults constantly assess the play competence of children and encourage growth. Beyond developing a strategy to assess the student's needs, adults may incorporate the idea that all children have various methods in which they learn best. Therefore, assessments need to consist of a variety of measures to show what the students have learned from various strategies and approaches. Furthermore, in order to support gender equity in the classroom, adults "should be sure to provide materials and equipment that do not have gender-suggestive advertising (Goldstein, 1994 in Bergen, 2009).

Certain individual characteristics and experiences heighten the development of children in developmental domains. Emotionally, children are able to see that there is a purpose and desired outcome for play experiences. Children are able to experience learning as enjoyable and engaging through structured activities. The children may then gain confidence as they see the purpose of the play experience which ties the learning into their lives in a meaningful way. The physical development promoted through teacher-initiated play can systematically enhance a child's fine and gross motor skills

through the use of various skills with pencils, crayons, tools, manipulatives and materials. Teacher-initiated play also promotes social development through skill building and the positive promotions of language and interpersonal skills. Socially students are able to play and to cooperatively explain and communicate in pairs, in groups and with the teacher and other adults. In addition to the above, cognitive development is encouraged through critical thinking when students are asked to think about how they will solve a problem while engaged in collaborative teamwork with their peers. Through teacher-initiated play, children learn about how they can play in a structured way. When teachers instruct the children how to play and state the expectations and outcomes desired of the play experience, children are able to understand the purpose behind the play experience. Children will see that although they are able to enjoy the play experience, there is a specific purpose behind their play actions.

The crucial differences among teacher-initiated and child-initiated play are in the ways in which play is guided through self-directed or teacher directed play activities. Both types of play positively impact learning. The benefit of teacher-initiated play is that it is characterized by its adherence to learning goals inherent in national and state standards while allowing children to enjoy learning while understanding and mastering the content the teacher is required to teach.

Teachers need to find a way to incorporate the value of play with the mandates they are given for student academic achievement. Thus, teacher-initiated play may be the new “go to” type of play in Early Childhood classrooms. “Standards increase accountability for emergent literacy instruction, thus creating new pressures for play’s role as a medium for

learning and a shift from unfocused free play to “educational” play – play activities that are linked to educational goals, objectives and outcomes” (Christie, J. & Roskos, K, in print).

### **Guidance for Teachers**

According to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the recently revised Early Childhood Generalist Standards (in press) clearly advocate that accomplished teachers use a mix of child and teacher-initiated play in their teaching in order to tie together child development and child learning. The NBPTS Early Childhood (EC) Standards clarify that because teachers know that the child’s development is not linear, they must attend to changes in the way children think and behave over time. The EC standards state that teachers should create ways in which children engage in cross-disciplinary practices such as experimentation, problem solving, and the use of primary and secondary sources. Teacher-initiated play that allows some measure of child initiated play can accomplish both of these components.

Recent studies support this view and suggest that children, especially at the kindergarten age do not grow up faster than they have in the past. They are being rushed out of childhood.

“There is less time for play; now, children play less than 16% of the time that they did in 1981. There is less opportunity for play at home, in neighborhoods and at school due to hectic and overscheduled family life, a lack of safe places to play, and academic pressure to learn the 3 Rs at an earlier age.” (Christie, J. & Roskos, K, in press).

Kindergarten age students are now expected to know more than those at the age of 5 in generations past. “Children are creating their own learning experiences” (Curwood, 2007, p.30). Although more is being demanded academically of students, students are not more capable than they used to

be. We must remember that children are still developing at their own rate and cannot be rushed in the developmental process. This is why children need to be taught at a level that is developmentally appropriate. Play is a tool that should be used to achieve the cognitive, social and academic results in a child's development. "Play facilitates the growth of children's reasoning abilities" (Elkind in Curwood, 2007) and "through experimentation children learn to make inferences and draw conclusions" (Curwood, 2007).

In contrast to both research and the stance taken on play in the National Board Early Childhood standards, the new Early Childhood standards being adopted throughout various states, indicate scant incorporation of play. State standards are often a result of committee and public agreement of what every student "should" achieve by the end of each school year. These are the standards that local teachers are required to adhere to in their jobs and upon which they are evaluated for proficiency. It presents a very real dilemma: What can early childhood teachers use to get these results in a way that is developmentally appropriate for their students? The National Board Standards provide a key element in the correlation between teacher quality and student achievement. Within the National Board standards there are crucial components which support and describe how teachers implement and blend teacher and child initiated play successfully into their classrooms in order to achieve the end result of students being proficient in the concepts proscribed by the National Board Standards.

The National Board Standards are considered the gold standard for teachers who are described as highly accomplished. An accomplished teacher is a teacher who is beyond their induction years and judged to be an expert in their particular field. Accomplished teachers have specific characteristics that

not all teachers possess. They have voluntarily undertaken a rigorous performance assessment and have been judged to have met the advanced standards for excellence as specified in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Accomplished teachers see the connection between their actions and student achievement, (Steele, 2009, p.77). Steele described an accomplished teacher as a detective who is always looking for clues (p.143). Teachers are able to monitor learning on a minute to minute basis, "They consistently check understanding through questioning, observing, and listening, as well as through analyzing students' oral and written responses (Steele, 2009, p.141). Accomplished teachers are also able to create an environment where all students have the opportunity to learn and be successful. Accomplished teachers have a rich knowledge and adapt the curriculum (Steele, 2009, p.49) in order to make the information accessible to their students.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) states (NBPTS, *Choosing Excellence*, p. 5) that the NBPTS standards are based on the Five Core Propositions that form the foundation for what all accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. As previously discussed, these propositions provide a reference that helps educators link teaching standards to teaching practice. The Five Core Propositions are Accomplished Teachers are committed to students and their learning, know the subjects they teach and how to teach the subjects to students, are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning, think systematically about their practice and learn from experience and are members of learning communities.



Through the understanding of the five core propositions, teachers are able to link these foundational practices to the National Board Certification standards. Teachers are able to see the standards as more than just what the students need to achieve by the end of the school year. Instead, accomplished teachers are able to truly know their students, their content, how to teach, the state standards, and how to implement everything through seamless teaching. Teachers are able to demonstrate this through not just their knowledge but also due to their passion and commitment to do their best in order to achieve the best results with their students.

The Early Childhood Generalist Standards consist of ten specific standards that are facets of accomplished teaching. Literature in educational journals has repeatedly concluded that the quality of the classroom teacher is the single most important factor leading to increased student learning (Hammond, 1997). Therefore, with reliance on these advanced standards, early childhood teachers are encouraged by the wisdom of highly qualified practitioners to reflect and analyze on their own experiences and draw upon their knowledge and expertise to plan and implement instruction in developmentally appropriate ways for the children they teach. Through the use of these NBPTS Early Childhood Generalist standards in conjunction with outcomes desired by the state standards, teachers may be able to transform their teaching to include specific strategies to increase the quality of the instruction they deliver.

Use of the Early Childhood Generalist Standards may help teachers bridge the gap between what teachers know about their students and content with the outcomes specified in state standards.

In this study, the Early Childhood Generalist Standards will serve as a guide for teachers as it relates to play, broken down according to various descriptors within several standards. Teachers will use specific NBC standards: knowledge of child development to understand the whole child, partner with families and communities, foster equity, fairness, and appreciation of diversity, know the subject matter, and assess, manage, plan and implement children's development and learning (Revised Early Childhood National Board Standards, NBPTS, in print). Specifically, the standards state the following, regarding play.

Standard VI: Managing the Environment for Development and Learning

"Accomplished teachers use play in all subjects and organize a safe environment that allows for adequate time to promote play." In understanding this standard, "accomplished teachers must be completely aware of the child's learning style, ability, culture and background." In the materials used for play, "accomplished teachers select material that is age and ability appropriate for each child." "Through play, accomplished teachers will promote language and social development."

Standard VII: Planning for Development and Learning "Accomplished teacher's showcase how play is a fundamental component in the development of a child." Therefore the "accomplished teacher designs activities that incorporate play in order to assist students in making a connection with their personal experiences and the content they are learning." This standard specifically states that "accomplished teachers need to design a dramatic play area that offers opportunities for young children to develop socially, cognitively, linguistically, physically, emotionally, and ethically."

Standard VIII: Implementing Instruction for Development and Learning

“Accomplished teachers provide various types of play for each student.” Through play “accomplished teachers encourage students to express their emotions and to work socially with their peers.” This standard specifically states that “accomplished teachers strategically place play concepts in activities to allow students to develop their cognitive skills in areas such as symbolic representation, solving problems, and developing higher-order thinking skills.” Through play “accomplished teachers help students to develop socially by helping them to understand social situations such as fairness, tolerance and understanding.” In situations where students become frustrated, “accomplished teachers help students to manage their emotions and to come up with a fix to their situation.”

Based on these descriptions of play and the advocacy of play provided in the National Board Early Childhood Standards, it is clear that early childhood teachers should implement the use of a blend of teacher-initiated and child-initiated play throughout the majority of the day with young learners, especially pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children. On a daily basis, typical kindergarten classrooms now have 60 minutes of reading groups and literacy stations. As an example of how this might be done, teachers can create small groups of students who rotate through six – ten minute stations. Some of the stations can be teacher-directed where students have specific activities in either phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary or comprehension. The remaining groups can incorporate teacher-initiated play but without teacher interaction. Also within these groups, students can be encouraged to work with their peers to explore and

create their own meanings. Activities in which concepts were previously taught in either a whole group, small group or individual setting are incorporated in each of the three play stations. Students are able to explore with manipulatives, work with their peers and complete assigned tasks. Teacher-initiated play literacy stations include activities such as using tiles with letters on it to create words, playing games such as sight word memory with their peers, using highlighters to “spy” the letter a peer sees and even using technology such as a tape recorder to tape and hear students retell the stories they read. Through these teacher-initiated play literacy stations students are able to enjoy learning through play while still accomplishing the goal of mastering specific concepts and standards.

Just as teacher-initiated play can be incorporated through literacy stations, it can also be used in math stations and science lessons. Math stations will include the use of manipulatives for children to use when guided to achieve specific results with each structured play experience. Teacher-initiated play math stations can include games such as putting numbers in order, matching sets to numbers, creating various patterns with manipulatives, sorting, addition and subtraction with dice, go fishing for numbers and transforming shapes into objects from the environment, and students may also be asked to solve authentic problems in their classroom experiences.

Teacher-initiated play can also be incorporated through science as children are teacher directed. Through exploratory activities, children are able to make predictions and use manipulatives to examine various concepts in science. Children are also able to discuss their perspectives with their peers and compare and contrast why their reasoning differs from that of their

peers. An example of teacher-initiated play is the concept of sink or float. Children are free to explore and pick objects to test if it sinks or floats after they make an educated guess about what the result will be. They are able to have hands on experience, guided by the teacher to enjoy the inquiry-based learning experience.

Both results of enjoying learning through play and becoming proficient in concepts related to the standards can be accomplished through teacher-initiated play in the Early Childhood classroom. The level of teacher directed play will vary with different activities. Yet students become confident in their knowledge as they see through these directed experiences that learning can be fun. "Many research-based strategies for promoting phonological awareness in preschool and kindergarten use playful activities such as singing songs, reciting nursery rhymes, reading books that play with the sounds of language, and game like activities. (Christie, J. & Roskos, K, in print). Through these activities, students enjoy the learning experience and perceive the learning as playful. Christie and Roskos (in print) specifically described what play should look in a classroom setting.

"For children to benefit fully from play, teachers must take their own roles seriously. Early childhood educators cannot wander about the classroom operating on the vague assumption that children learn through play while, at the same time, lamenting the challenges to play coming from parents and administrators. Instead, teachers must recognize play as one of the key teaching and learning contexts in the early childhood classroom, must acquire skills themselves in research-based effective teaching strategies such as scaffolding language use during play, and must incorporate play along with other more directive teaching throughout the preschool day."

Now that we know what teacher-initiated play looks like, we need to examine if it is actually being implemented in classrooms as intended. The intent of this study was to understand if a developmentally necessary skill,

play, can be integrated into a classroom with multiple barriers to play. I wanted to examine if teacher's learning about how to incorporate play through the sound instrument of National Board Early Childhood Standards impacts how a teacher implements play in daily math lessons.

## **Conclusion**

Play is an essential influence in a child's learning and development. Through the use of play structure is intertwined in order to provide children with the opportunity to explore new concepts while making connections of their own. This structure provides individual accommodations for each child's unique learning needs. Children are able to relate the play situations to build upon previous knowledge. The structure given through play is necessary for a child to obtain the maximum benefit of the play situation.

Play is defined in many ways through the categories of unstructured and structured play. Various theorists define play in a way that they see it through their theoretical lens. Play is also studied in the ways that it impacts a child. It is evident that all aspects of a child's development is impacted through play.

Teacher quality and effectiveness are a significant role in the way students are taught. The use of play in an early childhood setting is created in order to give children the opportunity to learn through developmentally appropriate practices. Through reliance on the Early Childhood Generalist National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, teachers are able to implement play in a way that promotes child development and academic success.

My research will continue to explore the role of teacher perceptions on play, with an increasing focus on how standards are used to impact the teaching of play and how it impacts student learning and engagement.

In this study I will focus on if using Early Childhood National Board Standards which advocate for play impacts how teachers incorporate play into their daily lessons. I want to see if teachers know there are standards that back up using play as a developmentally appropriate practice, if it changes how they use play as a vehicle to teach concepts in their own classrooms.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers' perception of play-based learning. The definition of play and how play is incorporated into classroom was also investigated. The study further explored how National Board Standards and teachers' perceptions of play impact their teaching practices.

For the purpose of this study, play-based learning is described as a tool for incorporating structure and academic content into an experience wherein children enjoy the encounter, are engaged, and intrinsically motivated. Specific National Board Standards, which include the topics of Early Childhood and play, were given to the teachers within the study.

In order to achieve valid results, this qualitative study involved understanding the participant teachers and the environment in which they do their work. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.3) defined qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the word." Specific methods and approaches to qualitative research were necessary to portray accurate findings. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.2) identified the types of qualitative research as, "case study, politics and ethics, participatory inquiry, interviewing, participant observation, visual methods, and interpretive analysis."

This study is divided into eleven categories in order to provide a complete description of the methods used. In subsequent sections I present details about the participants; the setting for the study; myself role as the researcher, the purposeful sampling strategy that was used to identify participants; details about field entry, research procedures, data collection,



and data analysis; how I attempted to establish the trust-worthiness of the inferences; and ethics.

## **Research Questions**

This study was directed by the following questions:

### Research Question #1

How do Early Childhood National Board Standards used by non National Board Certified Teachers impact teachers' perceptions of what teacher-initiated educational play is and how they view its' use in their classrooms?

### Research Question #2

How does implementing Early Childhood National Board Standards in teaching impact how teachers' incorporate play in their lessons?

## **Participants**

### ***Selecting the Participants.***

This study sought to learn more information about classrooms that represented very specific environments – those classrooms that were structured and did not incorporate play, and classrooms that were structured while incorporating play in their lessons.

The participants for this study were chosen as they all taught at a school in which the kindergarten students made significant gains in academic achievement. All three participants were kindergarten teachers. The school is a Title I School in a large Arizona school district. Participants were volunteers who wanted to learn more about their own practices. All participants had their Elementary Education degree and Early Childhood Endorsements.

Two teachers were considered veterans at the school as they both had taught kindergarten for more than five years. The other teacher was a veteran in teaching as she also taught for over five years, but began her first year of teaching at this school in the kindergarten grade level during the 2011-2012 school year. I used pseudonyms Ms. Smith, Ms. Clark, and Ms. Little to preserve the teachers' identity.

#### Ms. Smith

Ms. Smith is a Caucasian woman in her upper 40's. She has taught kindergarten for the past 12 years. The last third of those years has been teaching children who are second language learners.

#### Ms. Clark

Ms. Clark is a Caucasian woman in her early 30's. She has taught kindergarten for the past five years. All of those years has been teaching the classroom labeled as English speakers. She does not teach students who speak English as a second language.

#### Ms. Little

Ms. Little is a Caucasian woman in her mid 30's. She has taught in early childhood for the past five years. However, this is her first year teaching kindergarten. Ms. Little teaches the classroom which is labeled as English only speakers. She does not teach students who speak English as a second language.

### **Setting**

All participants were kindergarten teachers at the same school. The participants all teach full-day kindergarten. The classrooms are organized in English as a Second Language (ESL) and non-ESL classrooms. The ESL

classrooms comprised students who speak English as a Second Language. These students were identified as ESL based on the home language their parents specified on their school enrollment forms. Students labeled as ESL students are placed in a classroom where their teacher is ESL endorsed. These students are typically given extra strategies throughout the year to assist them with their English language development. Students who are in an ESL classroom, can opt-out of the classroom if their parents request it by completing the necessary forms. The non-ESL classrooms comprised students who speak English as their primary language. One of the classrooms observed was considered an ESL classroom whereas the other two classrooms were considered English speaking.

During the 2011-2012 school year, this particular school ranked among the top of the District in the kindergarten Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) results as well as District Benchmark assessments. The review of the pre and post test scores of the students in the kindergarten classrooms at this school revealed that there were significant differences in student achievement from the beginning of the year to the end of the school year. However, significant gains in student achievement were identified at this school's kindergarten classrooms as compared with other kindergarten schools in the district.

This school has been using the Reading First Model for the past 8 years. Within this model, a mandatory 4 hours of interrupted reading instruction takes place on a daily basis. The four hours consisted of lessons incorporating phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The teachers implement daily reading and writing lessons through the Harcourt Brace teacher lessons.

Math is also taught on a daily basis, but only in the afternoon period. Math instruction is driven by the quarterly pre and post assessment results. Teachers follow the required state standards in developing daily lessons.

Science and Social Studies do not have specific curricula and guidelines. These subject areas are left to the teachers' discretion as to when and how they implement these subjects into their classroom studies.

### **Myself as a Research Instrument**

As the researcher in this study, I am the critical instrument for collecting and interpreting data. As an early childhood educator with prior experiences, I entered this study with a general notion about what I desired to study. Qualitative researchers embed themselves in the research situation through their particular paradigms, including perspectives, training, knowledge and biases; these aspects of the self then become woven into all aspects of the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p.197). Therefore, through this qualitative research study, in my role as the researcher, I became the primary instrument used to conduct the various components of the research.

Every aspect of my life influences my research perceptions and perspectives to some degree. I examined the observations I made throughout the study through two different lenses. First, I examined the observations through my own perceptions. Another way is through a perception that is not mine, but that of the participant. I know that qualitative research is partly in the eye of the beholder. I worked to seek out the information that is apparent rather than what I may have assumed about the participants.

Qualitative research also entails interpretation of the observations. I recognized the role that my perceptions play in my interpretation of events. I approached the study with the orientation that I needed to seek out the participants' perspectives.

As I am a National Board Certified Teacher in the content area of the Early Childhood Generalist, the research questions, data collection and interpretation of data are all influenced by my National Board certification. By completing the National Board Process, I naturally developed a desire to see how specific content standards could characterize one's teaching. Therefore, I was able to enter the study with a good idea about what I was searching for in the participant teachers' classroom teaching practices.

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) noted that qualitative observational research involves formulating a thoughtful and well-understood relationship between the researcher and research participants. As a research observer of the teacher participants, I was able to make a connection with them with great ease as I myself am also a kindergarten teacher. The participants viewed me as a vehicle to improve the quality of their own teaching.

All aspects of my being impact my own perceptions and perspectives. I am aware that I am a novice education researcher who is attempting to use qualitative research methods. Therefore, it was important to look from perspectives out of my comfort zone to develop a more robust set of ideas about what I could learn from the study.

### **Purposeful Sampling**

Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that the best sample was represented in this research study. This allowed for relevant and bounded

data to be collected. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61)

### **Field Entry**

Entering the field of observation is a vital task in research. The purpose of observing participants in their natural setting is to develop a deep understanding of the participants, their interactions and the topic of our research. The main importance in the field is to ensure that the participants feel comfortable. In doing so, this may cause discomfort to the researcher. A qualitative researcher in anthropology, Rosalie Wax, describes her perspective of participant observation:

*The person who cannot abide feeling awkward or out of place, who feels crushed whenever he makes a mistake – embarrassing or otherwise – who is psychologically unable to endure being, and being treated like, a fool, not only for a day or week but for months on end, ought to think twice before he decides to become a participant observer (Wax, 1971, p. 370).*

In order to find appropriate classrooms and participants for the study, I wanted to find a school which incorporated "structure" into the daily curriculum. Multiple participants needed to be full day kindergarten teachers. The participants also needed to have no previous exposure to National Board standards in the content area of Early Childhood.

Erickson (1986) noted that the negotiation of entry for qualitative research begins with the first letter or telephone call to the site. My entry to this site began with my relationship with the teachers and the principal. The teachers previously knew me as a trusted colleague. Through daily

interactions with the prospective participants, I was able to build a rapport and seek their participation in the study.

I described the study and informed the prospective participants that if they wanted to participate in the study it would involve interviews, observations, videotaping, and taking self inventories. All three possible participants were willing to volunteer after understanding the involvement I sought for their participation in the study.

## **Data Collection**

### ***Multiple-Case Study Approach.***

Robert Yin (YYYY) indicated "the strength of the case study method is its ability to examine, in-depth, a 'case' within its 'real-life' context." Case studies are a qualitative method which enables researchers to examine important topics. There are two types of case studies; single case studies and multiple case studies. In this particular study I am using the multiple-case study method.

### ***Observational Case Studies.***

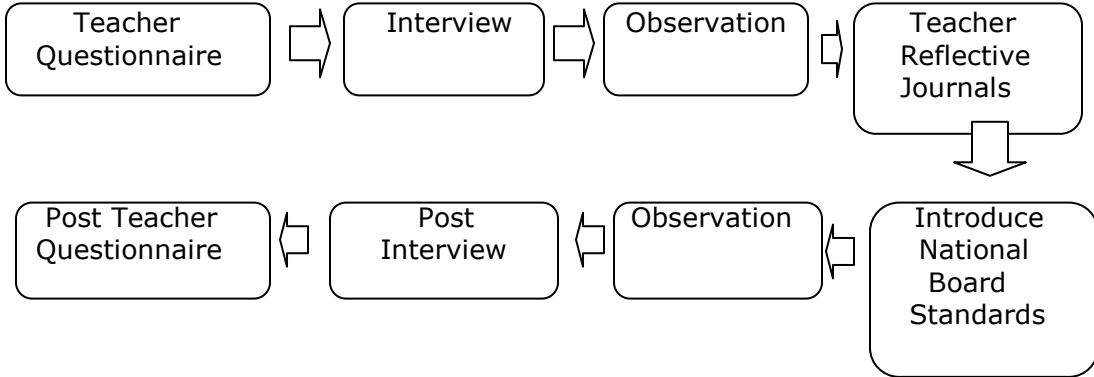
The observational case study is a technique used to incorporate participant observation. Observations in case studies consist of formal and informal interviews, reviewing of documents, and taking field notes. Biklen and Bogden (2007) noted that in observational case studies it is important to keep the number of participants that is not too small, yet not too big. Managing data collection efforts for a dissertation study necessitated that I seek no less than three and no more than six participants.

## Research Procedures

### ***Teacher and Classroom Selection.***

This study includes three cases involving three classroom kindergarten teachers and their students. All three teachers teach at the same Title 1 school. Two of the teachers teach students who are English only speakers. The other teacher has a classroom with students who are English Language Learners.

### ***Data Collection Sequence.***



### ***Teacher/Parent/Student Consent.***

Once I received informed consent from the teacher participants, through the teachers, parents of their students and students in their classrooms received permission forms. With parental permission and student assent, I began data collection.

### ***Teacher Questionnaire.***

At the start of the study, participant teachers completed a background questionnaire about their age, experience, education, and perceptions of how they value, organize, design lessons, monitor, manage, and teach play in their classrooms. This allowed me to learn about their background, and



prepare for the interviews. The questions about play were developed based on the National Board Standards in the content area of the Early Childhood Generalist. The Early Childhood Generalist was chosen as a focus as it directly pertained to the age group in which “play” is being marginalized or made obsolete by school accountability movements and administrative decisions regarding classroom instruction. Even more specifically the questions were derived from the specific standard categories that included play.

I administered the questionnaire at the end of the study. I now had pre and post data for the three teachers. I compared the pre and post scores. As these results were teacher’s perceptions, I used this information to assist in the interpretation of the results of the observations. Because I wanted to see if play was used differently once teachers were introduced to the Early Childhood National Board Standards, I used data from my observations. Once the observation data were collected, I used the questionnaire to guide my understanding of how teachers’ perceptions of play influenced their use of play in their classroom instructional practice.

#### ***Audio-recorded Pre Semi-structured Interviews.***

I used semi-structured interviews to understand teachers’ perceptions of play. The interview questions were framed as open-ended questions in order to allow for explanations and details. Responses to pre and post questions were used to gain an understanding of any changes in teachers’ perceptions that may have occurred since the implementation of the National Board standards in their instruction.

Prior to each interview with the teacher, consent forms were provided to seek permission to use the information stated in the conversations as well as to audio-record the interview. Individual interviews were conducted in

order to maintain the privacy of the teachers. The one-on-one interview also allowed the teacher and researcher to get to know each other in the research context.

Each of the participants' were interviewed in their own classroom environment. There was no one else present except for the researcher and the teacher. This allowed for a quiet environment where the participant could concentrate. There were no distractions such as students needing attention.

The interview began with questions that allowed time for the participants to feel 'at ease.' As questions involving knowledge and skill could potentially be threatening (Patton, 1990), inviting questions were asked first. This allowed the conversation to begin at a pace where the participants felt comfortable rather than jumping in directly to the context.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission. The audio-recordings were transcribed and participants' reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described the audio recorder as a third party that should not be seen. The audio recorder is used as a tool to refer back to at a later time. However, field notes are still necessary in order to ensure the accuracy of the interviewee's verbal language that the audio recorder is unable to capture. Through these nonverbal cues, interviewers need to make certain this information is captured to gain a clear picture of the interviewee's thoughts and perceptions.

The pre-interviews were geared towards learning more about the participants' teaching experiences, perceptions of teaching and incorporating play in their teaching, educational history and understanding of the National Board standards.

### ***Audio-recorded Post Semi-structured Interviews.***

Each participant participated in a post- interview. Similar to the pre-interview, the post-interview also began with non-threatening questions. Some questions about knowledge and perceptions of play in the classroom were the same as in the pre-interview. Other questions were added to the post-interview to ask discern if the participants noticed changes, if any, in how they incorporated play in their teaching or their perceptions about play in the classroom. During these post interview sessions, participants were also asked to reflect upon their teaching in the two video clips. They were asked to share whether they knowingly or un-knowingly incorporated the same, less or more play into their structured teaching lessons as compared to before they were introduced to the National Board Early Childhood standards on play.

### ***Video Recording.***

All three teachers were videotaped teaching a lesson where they incorporated their perceptions of play. After the lesson, the teachers were presented with National Board standards. I wanted to understand if teachers' were implementing these standards into their instruction. A month after introduction of the standards, each teacher was videotaped teaching a second lesson that involved play.

A video camera was used in this study in an uncomplicated an unobtrusive manner. The video camera was used to "photograph people in action while helping the researcher to remember and manage the data" (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 113). I decided to set up the video camera in an area of the room in which it could capture the entire setting. The free standing video allowed me to take field notes during the study while the

camera was filming without a videographer. This ensured that the kindergarten students were not distracted by an unfamiliar person.

***Direct Observation, Participant Observation and Field Notes.***

I use the pre and post videos, participant observation in the classrooms, and interviews, to compare whether and how play was incorporated in participants' teaching practices before and after introduction to the early childhood National Board standards related to play.

Field notes were also taken. I used the fields to make connections between teacher's perceptions of their teaching and what I observed during teaching episodes. Bogden and Biklen (2007) defined field notes as the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study. Patton (2002, p.406) stated, "Repressing analytical insights may mean losing them forever, for there's no guarantee they'll return." Therefore, I made a conscious effort to record all non-verbal interactions as well as verbal exchanges in order to enhance the quality of notes to be deciphered at a later time. Corbin (2008, p.124) noted that field notes are data that may contain some conceptualization and analytic remarks. Hence, researchers need to be cautious of their own preconceived notions they may bring into the process of taking field notes.

The differences and similarities between the three classrooms were triangulated. Triangulation occurs "when two or more independent sources all point to the same set of events or facts" (Yin, 2006, p. 115). Bogden and Biklen (2007, p.116) define triangulation as many sources of data being better in a study than a single source because multiple sources lead to a fuller

understanding of the phenomena being studied. Therefore in using this definition of triangulation, throughout this qualitative study, multiple data-collecting techniques such as interviews, observation and self-reflection were used.

I observed a one-hour time frame during the teacher's mathematics block. I chose to use the mathematics block, as I believe that math lends itself to play as kindergarten age children naturally use objects to help their mathematical understanding. I also felt that teachers' would feel more comfortable with the use of play during their mathematics block as in pre-service Early Childhood education courses pre-service teachers learn the use of manipulatives to guide the learning activity. I took notes describing the activities, teachers' actions, and student interactions with the teacher and each other. From content analysis of these observations, responses to the questionnaire, interviews and working with teachers with specific lessons regarding Early Childhood National Board Standards, I developed three composite descriptions, one for each teacher, to describe the teacher. The three composites clearly show various instruction time, student engagement, teacher-directed and learner-centered curriculum. The composites also illustrated classroom management and interactions among peers and teacher.

### **Introduction of the National Board Standards**

I introduced the incorporation of Early Childhood National Board Standards as a guide to facilitate reflective practices to participant teachers. The verbiage regarding play in these standards were explained in an explicit manner during weekly meetings. The state standards that the teachers are

familiar with do not incorporate play, thus the explanation and use of the Early Childhood National Board Standards was critical to this study.

#### Overview

On a weekly basis, over four weeks, components of the Early Childhood National Board Standards that include play were explored and discussed with the teachers. The teachers were given a copy of the entire Early Childhood National Board Standards 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition prior to implementation of the intervention section of the study. This document offered a general idea of what the National Board expects of highly accomplished teachers and how it relates to the student's learning.

To introduce the standards, I gave each teacher specific standards within the National Board Standards document they were to focus on. I asked each teacher to thoroughly read through each component of the standard on her own. As a group we then re-read the standard through the specific components. Each teacher highlighted in the document, the main components addressing play that stood out to them within the specific standard. Finally as a group we deconstructed each component of the standard. We discussed what each component of the standard meant and looked like in teaching. As a group, the teachers shared what they highlighted and why they felt those specific aspects of the standards were important, and how they might be able to adapt the concept for instructional use in their own classroom in a manner that would benefit students' learning.

As indicated in multiple studies on professional development (Falk, 2012, p.30), modeling is a key component of instruction that demonstrates to teachers how to incorporate specific strategies into their teaching. As the researcher, I modeled how to incorporate play within my teaching in a

developmentally appropriate manner with kindergarten children. After I modeled how to give instructions and how to design activities which include play, we dissected the standards and matched each component to what they observed within the model lesson.

I then taught a lesson to the teachers explaining how to incorporate this strategy of play into their classrooms. Each teacher was given background information to implement their teaching activities to better understand the standard and how they can incorporate play into their own classrooms. Teachers worked with one another, asked questions and tried new ideas within this safe environment. I then asked each teacher to answer specific questions regarding the learning experience. They reflected upon their learning and how they implemented the strategies through written explanations. The teachers asked each other, "How do you use play in your classroom? How can I use materials to enhance the play experience while still relating the content to the Common Core Standards?" The teachers tried new ideas through acting out situations with one another. One participant took the role of the teacher while the others pretended to be students. Through such role play participants mimicked how they believed students would respond to their strategies of introducing play. The teachers concluded that they needed to try the strategies they discussed with their own students to see how they would react and if it would help student understanding of specific content. These explanations were one way I accessed teachers' understanding of play related standards in the Early Childhood National Board Standards.

I then, asked each teacher to design a lesson that incorporated play in their teaching and also create related specific directions for their students. I

asked teachers to review their previous lesson plans, reflect on how play was included (or not) within the lesson, and adapt the lesson so as to include play in a manner that reflected the Early Childhood National Board Standards. The teachers then prepared a write-up of how they would include teacher facilitated play in future lessons and how they would adapt past lessons to incorporate play according to the Early Childhood National Board Standards.

### ***Teacher Reflective Journals.***

I asked teachers to maintain reflective journals of how they used play in the classroom. I used these data to assess teacher perceptions and actions with regard to play that they self-reported. This self-report allowed me to review teacher actions in the classrooms during times that I could not observe.

Reflective journals were used throughout the entire data collection period. Teachers logged the activity they did on a daily basis during their mathematics block. They wrote the length of time for each activity, if they thought play was incorporated in the activity and if so, how long and how play was incorporated. All three teachers began their reflective journals after their first observation. They continued this journal through a 90 day period of lessons and until their post-observation was completed. This 90-day period allowed me to develop an understanding of the amount and type of play that was incorporated before and after I introduced participants to the standards.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collection mechanisms (teacher questionnaire, teacher checklist, observation, video analysis pre and post interviews) produced



abundant data for analysis. I began to make sense of the data as I collected data.

In order to portray accurate representations and interpretations of the observations, I prepared observation records and interview transcripts. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state, "Research is a collaborative document, a mutually constructed story out of the lives of both researcher and participant." Therefore, this analysis represents observations that frames a snapshot of time in which we can analyze to better our future understanding of this study.

### **Trustworthiness**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p.205) posed a critical question that I used while interpreting the qualitative data from my study: Are these findings sufficiently authentic that I may trust myself in acting on their implication? As a researcher I must establish a rapport with the subjects of my study. "The researcher's goal is to increase the subjects' level of comfort, encouraging them to talk about what they normally talk about and, eventually, to confide in the researcher" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 82). Over time spent with participants in their natural settings, getting to know the participants' trustworthiness is accomplished. "Researchers build trust by making it clear that they will not use what they are finding to demean or otherwise hurt people" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 82).

It is the researcher's responsibility to provide accurate information regarding the participants. Merriam (1995), advocates that researchers provide thick descriptions which allow the readers to be well informed. Through a detailed description of the participants, setting and context of the

research, credibility is established and a better understanding of the research study is generated.

Validity is necessary in every research study. In qualitative research, the idea of validity is thought of as credibility and authenticity? Does the researcher's account seem credible and authentic to the reader? In order to accomplish credibility and authenticity, I attempted to triangulate data through multiple forms of data collection.

I documented interviews with field notes and also reviewed the audio recordings. I documented participant actions through observations in my field notes, video recordings, and teacher self-reported checklists.

### **Ethics**

I attempted to maintain ethics in every interaction with participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.48) described ethics in research as "the principles of right and wrong that a particular group accepts at a particular time." Therefore as the researcher I effectively followed the strategies to support ethical approaches in my fieldwork by using informed consent and an Institutional Review Board approved research protocol to conduct this study with human subjects.

## **Chapter 4**

### **ANALYSIS OF DATA**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine teachers' perceptions of play-based learning before and after the teachers' were introduced to the Early Childhood National Board Standards. This chapter provides a summary of the participants' background, perceptions, and findings from the research study.

In my study I focused on how play is used during mathematics time in each kindergarten classroom. I focused on the key elements of play that my literature review indicated should be an integral aspect of Early Childhood classrooms. I looked to see if these key elements were evident in the classrooms of the three kindergarten teachers that I observed. Using teachers' perceptions about play that I gleaned from the interviews and surveys, I also compared their beliefs about play with the observed practice in their classrooms.

Early Childhood National Board Standards were the main framework for this study, as they served as a guide for accomplished teaching. These standards specifically state that play should be used in Early Childhood classrooms as "developmentally appropriate practice." I wanted to understand if there was a difference in whether teachers used play in their classroom before and after being familiarized with the Early Childhood National Board Standards.

In this chapter I will share the processes I used to arrive at my findings. My goal is to demonstrate how I analyzed the data and arrived at my interpretations.

### **Participants' Background**

The data for this study was collected throughout the Fall 2011 Semester from three female kindergarten teachers in the same school in an Arizona school district on the east side of the greater Phoenix area. All three kindergarten teachers were White, with an age range of 31 to 46 years, and their length of teaching experience varied from 6 years to 12 years. The three teachers received their teacher training from three different states and Universities. All three teachers received their Bachelor's degree; two in Elementary Education and one in Communications and Marketing. Two of the teachers had their Master's Degree in K-12 Reading. Two of the three teachers were also English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsed. All three teachers taught low socioeconomic students in the same school. One teacher taught an English Language Development (ELD) classroom where all the students spoke English as a Second Language. The other two teachers taught in English only classrooms where the students spoke only English. The students in the ELD classroom were primarily Latino whereas the students in the English only classroom were primarily Native American and White.

#### **Ms. Smith**

Ms. Smith has taught both half day and full day kindergarten for the past 12 years of which four of those years were teaching English Language Learners in an English Language Development (ELD) classroom. Ms. Smith received her undergraduate and graduate training from Arizona State

University. Her undergraduate degree was in Elementary Education and Master's degree focused on Reading in the K-12 setting.

During this study, Ms. Smith's classroom comprised 12 boys and 10 girls who were five and six years old. Ms. Smith explained that most of her student's parents were immigrants from Mexico. However, the children were all born and raised in the United States. The majority; approximately 80 percent of Ms. Smith's students had parents who did not speak English or needed a translator to assist them in their understanding of the English language.

#### Ms. Clark

Ms. Clark received her Bachelor's Degree in Business from St. Louis University and after a few years in the business world, returned to get her Master's in K-12 Reading from Font Bonne University. After graduation, she moved to Arizona to begin her job search in the teaching profession. Ms. Clark has been a teacher for six years. She has taught kindergarten at the same school for all six years. Her classroom consists of native English speakers.

At the time of this study, her English only classroom had 18 boys and 10 girls who were five to six years of age.

#### Ms. Little

Ms. Little received her Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from Northwestern College. She taught first grade for five years. After this time, she took a few years off for maternity leave. Ms. Little went back to teaching in the same district but in a new school teaching kindergarten. This is her first year teaching in this position.

Ms. Little's classroom is also a classroom for native English speakers. Her class is composed of 15 boys and 13 girls who were five to six years of age.

### **The Kindergarten Classrooms**

The three kindergarten classrooms that was studied occupy half of a building. The building is shared by four kindergarten classrooms, three first grade classrooms, an interventionist office room, a teacher work room, and a library. Four kindergarten classrooms are on one side of the building. Each room is connected to one other kindergarten classroom. Each kindergarten classroom consists of either trapezoid or circle tables where students share their work space, a teacher desk, book shelves, white boards and tack boards.

Next to the kindergarten classrooms, there is a playground which is shared with students up to the third grade. The kindergarteners share the playground with the other grade levels at all times except for their morning recess. On the playground, there is an area for running, slides, swings, a rock wall to climb, and a jungle gym. This open space is available to the kindergarteners before school from 7:20-7:40 am, at their first recess from 10:00-10:15 am, and at their lunch recess from 11:00-11:25 am. The students have a total of 60 minutes a day where they are able to play and use the equipment in any way they choose.

There are a total of 4 kindergarten classrooms in this school. Two of the classrooms are for English only learners and two are for second language learners. In this study one second language learner and two English only classrooms were observed. All of the kindergarten classrooms use the same

curriculum, follow the same standards; teachers are all female, and they attend the same professional development activities within the school.

### **The Kindergarten Curriculum**

Prior to this school year, this school was a Reading First school for the past 8 years. The Reading First program requires teachers to incorporate specific components into their daily language arts teaching. These components consist of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The Reading First program mandated that all teachers teach reading and writing for at least 120 uninterrupted minutes per day. All teachers in this school continue to follow the Reading First program although it is no longer funded. According to the teachers this is done because they believed that the Reading First program worked and increased student achievement in the previous years. Another reason is a lack of funding as the school was unable to buy new books even if they wanted to change the curriculum.

This is the first school year that the kindergarten teachers are following new standards, mandated for all subject areas. These standards are called the Common Core Standards. Kindergarten teachers teach common core standards since when the current kindergarteners are in the third grade, they will all be taking a new Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test linked to common core content. Additionally, new Common Core Standards were developed for each grade level. The mission of the Common Core Standards is to:

“provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young

people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.” (National Governors Association for Best Practices, <http://www.corestandards.org/>, accessed March 24, 2012).

All four kindergarten teachers follow the same curriculum in all subject areas. Harcourt Brace is the adopted teaching basal which guides the teachers during their language arts (reading and writing) block of time. Harcourt Brace is a scripted program that incorporates a daily Morning Message, Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Vocabulary, Shared Literature and Writing components. The scripts provide teachers with specific narrative to be used verbatim.

There are four kindergarten teachers at this school, and I am one of them. I too follow this literature program. However, on a daily basis in addition to following the scripts, I add additional content into what is being taught. I design my lessons to follow the content within the scripts while adding explicit activities to provide learning opportunities that are meaningful to students while I also strive to be clear and informative. I believe that this is necessary to build upon students’ prior knowledge and to bridge their understanding of concepts to make the connection to how they will use this knowledge in real life situations.

The kindergarten teachers also have a core curriculum from Scott Foresman that they are given to follow in math instruction. However, not all kindergarten teachers in the study use this curriculum as they believe it is too easy for the students and it does not follow the Common Core standards. Instead, the teachers collaborate with each other during their lunch breaks, before and after school, and during their Professional Development time to brainstorm how they will teach each mathematical concept. Together they



also develop and share ideas and materials to ensure their students are learning the required content.

There is no set curriculum in this District for Science and Social Studies. However, the district requires that all kindergarten teachers take a science class. This class uses a book called *A-Z Phonics*. This book has science, social studies, writing and math activities for each letter of the alphabet. Teachers are instructed on how to use this book to deliver science activities within their classrooms. Kindergarten teachers are also given specific reading books that match the themes our district has in the Social Studies curriculum of "Community and Needs and Wants". There is no set curriculum, however teachers can use these books to tie contents from these materials into the social studies lessons they deliver.

This is also the first year in which the kindergarten teachers are using a new report card. In a district wide meeting teachers were told that the report card was designed by Committee members that included specialists, district personnel and kindergarten teachers who currently work in the district. It was created to align directly with the new Common Core Standards. This is the first year that Science and Social Studies were also added to the Kindergarten Report Card.

### **Classroom Design**

Each of the three classrooms is of a decent size. The classroom is 30 feet in length by 30 feet width and comfortably fits 25 students. However, all three teachers stated that they believed in maximizing the space of their classroom. Teachers feel that kindergarteners need to be in an environment where they feel comfortable and ready to learn. Therefore the classroom

design follows the Montessori philosophy of an open classroom in order to provide an age appropriate environment in which the child feels safe and that the environment incorporates learning in various ways and is stimulating for the children (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008).

All three kindergarten classrooms are set up in a similar fashion as each classroom has the exact same materials (type and amount of desks, chairs, reading tables, cabinets, and classroom perimeter design of the location of the bulletin boards and doors. In the middle of each classroom are student desks which are put together to form table groups. Typically there are 6 students who sit at each table. On one wall are bulletin boards. One bulletin board has a word wall and the other board is set up for calendar time. On the other side of each classroom are white boards for teachers to display their daily standards and objectives and to also teach their lessons. The classroom setup reflects the children as their work is displayed on multiple walls in each classroom. Student work is showcased in writing and with math and science activities.

The classroom learning environment has students sitting at desks. There is a table meant for sand and water exploration, however it is used to store student backpacks. There are no dramatic play areas such as a kitchen or puppets. Stuffed animals and blocks are also non-existent. The absence of these materials takes away from the integration of student interests with the learning experience.

### **The Students**

Within all kindergarten classrooms, the students range from five to six years of age. The majority, (approximately 80 percent) of all the students'

lives in poverty or are considered to come from low income families. This was measured by the number of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch at this school. Enrollment in for free or reduced lunch is used as a measure of poverty. Two to four students from each classroom also receive assistance from a program called "Brain Food." Through this program, students receive food products such as bread, canned goods and fruits to take home for their weekend meals. These students are identified when parents ask for more assistance or are identified by teachers who see that students are not receiving enough nutrients to be healthy in order to learn in their classrooms.

Most of the parents (approximately 80 percent) of students designated as the English Language learners speak Spanish at home. There are a few parents who also speak and understand limited English. Many of the parents have lived in Mexico and came to the United States to provide a better life for their families. The mothers tend to stay at home and take care of their children and their siblings. The fathers tend to be in the professions of building homes, landscaping, cooks at a restaurant, or other forms of manual labor.

In the English only classrooms, the majority, (approximately 80 percent) of the parents do speak English. Both-parents, mother and father, hold various types of jobs to bring in income for their families. In the English only classrooms, there is a variety of ethnicities. The students are Native American, White, African American, Hispanic and a mixture of races. A majority of the children are Hispanic. Within the English only classrooms, there are twenty-eight American Indian/Alaska Native students, ten Caucasian, seven African American students, and two Asian/Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander Students.

## **Teacher Schedules**

Kindergarten classrooms follow the same daily schedule as the rest of the 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. Their schedule is from 7:45 a.m. until 2:15 p.m., with Wednesday dismissal at 1:45 p.m. The Wednesday afternoons are used for teacher professional development and training. The teachers also use this time to work in their Professional Learning Communities.

All three kindergarten classrooms follow the same time allocation for reading, writing, math, science, social studies and specials (P.E., Library, Music and Computer). However, within these time frames the teachers are also able to develop their own lessons. They do not teach the exact same lessons on a daily basis. Instead they follow the same standards, and teach the same concepts but according to their own teaching styles.

*Reading Groups.* Reading groups are a daily routine in all kindergarten classrooms. Each kindergarten teacher follows a procedure called "Aide trade." Typically, each teacher will have an aide for two hours a day. Instead of keeping their aide to assist in classroom activities for two consecutive hours, the teachers "trade" their aides. For example, Ms. Clark, has Reading Groups from 8:00-9:00. So during this time she uses her aide and takes the aide from Ms. Little. Then from 9:00 to 10:00, Ms. Little has reading groups and takes back her aide as well as Ms. Clark's aide. Both teachers still have two hours of assistance from the aides. However, by using the strategy of Aide Trade, the teachers are able to have more assistance during the Reading Group block. Each aide is available to work with small groups and provide more individualized attention for each of their students. During this one hour time block, the students are focused on specific skills in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency in reading and writing. In

each classroom, the teachers group their students according to the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) scores. The reading groups have a maximum of five students in each group of five groups. Each group rotates in 12 minute increments. This allows for each student to meet with every teacher and work on the particular content each teacher is focusing on. Each group is also able to go to two independent groups where they are also working on specific reading and writing skills. The purpose of reading groups is to focus on specific skills in which the students are struggling, giving them intense intervention to ensure the students are brought to grade level in the various components of reading. Each reading group included hands on learning activities where students play with the manipulatives to better understand reading and writing concepts.

*Whole Group Reading.* For a one hour time block on a daily basis, each teacher uses a core basal published by Harcourt Brace. In the teacher's edition, there is scripted material for phonemic awareness as well as suggested activities to instruct during morning message, phonics, vocabulary, shared literature and writing. During this time students sit on the carpet for whole group instruction, interact with their peers for partner and group work, and go to their seats for individualized work. Students are encouraged to be active listeners and participants in each type of learning activity. Teachers indicated that the purpose behind whole group reading instruction is to facilitate students through guided instruction of new concepts and areas which they are reviewing. Teachers use various types of teaching methods using verbal and visual instruction as well as hands on learning experiences where students are actively engaged with objects and manipulatives to understand the concepts.

*Writing.* For 30 minutes on a daily basis, students are given instruction through guided, shared and independent practice. Students are guided through a teacher-initiated approach to create their own writing with the assistance of their peers. Students are provided with "space men", a figure which acts as a finger space for the children to put between their words.

*Outdoor Recess.* The children have two opportunities to play outdoors within the school day. The first outdoor recess is at 10:15 a.m. This recess lasts for 15 minutes and comes after 150 minutes of reading instruction. The second outdoor recess comes after the student's lunch. After they eat their lunch, an aide directs them to the playground where they are able to play for an average of 20 to 25 minutes. During this time the students have free play. There is no specific direction from the teachers. Students are able to use the outdoor equipment to play. There are always two aides on duty to ensure the students follow the directions of safety on the equipment.

*Lunch.* Every day, students go to the cafeteria as a class at 10:50 a.m. Students stand in line to get their lunch and sit as a class. After this time, the students are directed to the playground by an aide. The scheduled lunch time is for 35 minutes. However, this time is split between lunch and recess.

*Math/Science/Social Studies.* This is a daily block of 60 to 90 minutes. The majority of the time this instructional period is set aside for mathematical lessons. At least once a week, this time period is also used for Science and Social Studies activities. During this 1-1.5 hour block of time, the teachers do not follow a specific curriculum. There is a teacher's manual for mathematics published by Scott Foresman. However, the teachers consistently agreed that

this material is too “easy” for the students and it does not cover the current and updated core standards which the teachers are required to develop their lessons to follow. The kindergarten teachers do not have a specific curriculum in science or social studies. As previously mentioned, the district gives teachers activities for Science in an A-Z Phonics book and books to read to students about various Social Studies concepts.

*Physical Education.* Twice a week students are involved in 30 minutes of directed play and movement instruction. Students are taught about health and wellness through teacher-initiated play activities. This class meets either in the school’s cafeteria, in the multi-purpose room or in an outdoor setting.

*Music.* Once a week students partake in a 30 minute instructional period of musical awareness. This class is held in a room which is about one third the size of a typical classroom. During this class time, the teachers model how students are to use various types of instruments. They work individually as well as with peers to explore the various instruments and the sounds they make. Students are also taught using hands on instruments or materials so that they can grasp the concept of tunes and beats. Students are encouraged to work with their peers and to talk with them to create the music that is guided by the music teacher.

*Library.* For 30 minutes once a week, students are able to be involved in activities in the library setting. Students are read stories, watch movies about the stories they read, check out books and have activities that compliment the readings or lesson they had that day.

*Computer.* Once a week students are able to go to the computer lab where they are involved in their own independent learning experiences. Students are able to play technology games that involve reading and writing.

This class is held in a room which contains 30 computers. The classroom teacher stays with the students during this time to direct the students. The reading games involve students recognizing, matching and creating letters and their sounds, words, simple sentences and rhymes. The math games involve the students counting, adding, subtracting, matching and creating shapes and patterns and sorting.

#### Daily Schedules of the Participants

Teacher 1: Ms. Smith		Teacher 2: Ms. Clark		Teacher 3: Ms. Little	
Time	Subject/Activity	Time	Subject/Activity	Time	Subject/Activity
7:40-8:10	Breakfast	7:40-8:00	Breakfast	7:40-8:15	Breakfast
8:10-9:00	Whole Group: Reading	8:00-9:00	Reading Groups	8:15-9:00	Whole Group: Reading
9:00-10:00	Reading Groups	9:00-10:00	Whole Group: Reading	9:00-10:00	Reading Groups
10:00-10:15	Recess	10:00-10:15	Recess	10:00-10:15	Recess
10:15-10:45	Writing	10:15-10:40	Writing	10:15-10:40	Writing
10:45-11:30	Lunch	10:40-11:30	Lunch	10:40-11:30	Lunch
11:30-11:45	Water Break/Rest	11:30-11:45	Water Break/Rest	11:30-11:45	Water Break/Rest
11:45-11:55	Calendar	11:45-12:00	Calendar	11:45-12:15	Calendar



11:55-12:00	Walk to Specials	12:00-1:05	Math	12:15-1:05	Math/Science
12:00-12:30	Specials: (Music, PE, Library, Computer)	1:05-1:10	Walk to Specials	1:05-1:10	Walk to Specials
12:30-12:35	Walk back from Specials	1:10-1:40	Specials: (Music, PE, Library, Computer)	1:10-1:40	Specials: (Music, PE, Library, Computer)
12:35-1:55	Math	1:40-1:45	Walk back from Specials	1:40-1:45	Walk back from Specials
1:55-2:15	Read Story, Pack Up, & Dismissal	1:45-2:15	Read Story, Pack Up, & Dismissal	1:45-2:15	Read Story, Homework, Pack Up, & Dismissal

### **Data Analysis**

In order to organize and compare the themes around the introduction and incorporation of Early Childhood National Board standards regarding play, I used qualitative methods to analyze the data from each of the three teachers. I used open-coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to make sense of the data corpus. The data corpus included field notes of six- one hour observations, six interviews, teacher responses to a questionnaire, reflective journals and separate reflections on learning. The reflective journals included teachers describing the type of play and length of time they thought they incorporated in each math lesson. The reflections allowed the teachers to reflect upon the professional development they were given in regard to how they incorporated the Early Childhood National Board Standards into their classroom. In order to make meaning of the observations and interviews of the kindergarten teachers, the field notes were

coded into multiple categories. Each code was then categorized into specific themes that helped me summarize the results.

I read through the observations, notes, and created commentary to interpret the data. It also served as a guide to remember original and specific circumstances in order to create specific memos. Through the memos, I was able to establish components of patterns in data. Commentary consisted of detailed explanations of the perspective the investigator took to understand each observation. My biases were also stated and assumptions were described. The detailed commentary allowed me to remember key concepts that allowed the assumptions to be formed.

I assigned various codes that pertained to each observation sample. Each line of the original field notes were separated into its own column. Codes were then created to decipher various actions and interactions among student to student interaction and teacher to student interaction. One or more codes were placed with each line of descriptions. I then organized each code to be lined up under one another while grouping the observations of similar codes. This gave clarity and organization to fully see all observations in each coding category.

I began to open code with three broad theoretical categories. These categories included:

- Pedagogies of Play. In every lesson that is taught there are various methods and processes for learning or instruction. Every teacher uses her own style to teach. I was interested in seeing what methods and strategies teachers used in their daily lessons to incorporate the concept of play.

- Facilitation of Play. How an activity or lesson is taught involves various types of ways in which students and teachers work with one another. Within each teacher’s lessons, the facilitation of play will differ. Therefore, I felt that this category was important to focus on the types of interactions that occurred.
- Management of Play. The objects and techniques which the teachers used to manage play related to how the teachers understood their student’s background, learning styles, proficiencies, deficiencies and their use of developmentally appropriate practices. Therefore, I felt it was important to understand the types of management teachers used to incorporate play into learning experiences for students. Below is an example.

STEP 1:

<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>THEORETICAL CATEGORY</b>
Teacher: “Wow, all the purple are here and all the red are here...wow, I love how you are sorting.”	Management of Play
Boy: “No, you can’t take all of them.” A student was reaching in for a lot of the bears.	Management of Play
The boy is lining up red bears of all sizes at the top, blue at the bottom of one side and the other side green at the top and yellow at the bottom.	Management of Play
Teacher: “What are you guys looking at?”	Pedagogy of Play
Girl: “Look it, look it, these are all green, these are all yellow...”	Facilitation of Play
Teacher: “Tell me an attribute about the bear.”	Pedagogy of Play
Girl: “All the bears have eyes, nose. But the sizes are different.”	Facilitation of Play
Teacher: “Wow, you noticed that. This bear is a total different color than that bear.”	Management of Play
Girl: “I am going to tell the teacher that you are not sharing...Mrs. Kent...” The girl raises her hand to tell on the boy.	Facilitation of Play
Teacher: “First of all, what do we talk about.”	Facilitation of Play
Girl: “We need to share. How can we fix this? What can we do?”	Facilitation of Play
Girl: “Put them back.”	Facilitation of Play

Teacher: "Let's try that."	Facilitation of Play
All students put it back in the center.	
Teacher: "Kindergarteners get ready to begin to explore."	Pedagogy of Play
The students start over taking bears to explore with.	Management of Play
Student in buttons say, "this is a giant one."	Facilitation of Play
Girls in the shell station are passing shells back and forth.	Facilitation of Play
They know what their peer is looking for and when they find one, they are sharing with their partners.	Facilitation of Play

In order to analyze the data, a grounded theory approach was used to complete a list of codes and generate themes to directly link with the codes. Embedded in each theme is various data that stood out. Three main categories of themes arose. The first category was pedagogies of play. Under this umbrella, the codes of instruction delivery (teacher-initiated) and (learner-initiated) were used. Under the category of facilitation of play, I used the codes of teacher direct instruction, teacher guided instruction, child independent and child collaboration. The third category found was management of play. In order to manage play, manipulatives and materials were used. Manipulatives were shown through the codes of hands-on learning and exploration. How the teacher questioned the students within the learning experience and how the various types of thinking the students used were also codes within the category of management of play.

Step 2:  
PEDAGOGY OF PLAY

<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>THEORETICAL CATEGORY</b>	<b>CODES</b>
Teacher: "What are you guys looking at?"	Pedagogy of Play	Teacher-initiated
Teacher: "Tell me an attribute about the bear."	Pedagogy of Play	Teacher-initiated
Teacher: "Kindergarteners get ready to begin to explore."	Pedagogy of Play	Teacher-initiated

FACILITATION OF PLAY

<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>THEORETICAL CATEGORY</b>	<b>CODES</b>
Girl: "Look it, look it, these are all green, and these are all yellow..."	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration
Girl: "All the bears have eyes, nose. But the sizes are different."	Facilitation of Play	Teacher Guided Instruction
Girl: "I am going to tell the teacher that you are not sharing...Mrs. Kent..." The girl raises her hand to tell on the boy.	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration
Teacher: "First of all, what do we talk about?"	Facilitation of Play	Guided Instruction
Girl: "We need to share. How can we fix this? What can we do?"	Facilitation of Play	Guided Instruction
Girl: "Put them back."	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration
Teacher: "Let's try that."	Facilitation of Play	Guided Instruction
All students put it back in the center.	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration
Student in buttons say, "this is a giant one."	Facilitation of Play	Child Independent
Girls in the shell station are passing shells back and forth.	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration
They know what their peer is looking for and when they find one, they are sharing with their partners.	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration

MANAGEMENT OF PLAY

<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>THEORETICAL CATEGORY</b>	<b>CODES</b>
Teacher: "Wow, all the purple are here and all the red are here...wow, I love how you are sorting."	Management of Play	Thinking
Boy: "No, you can't take all of them." A student was reaching in for a lot of the bears.	Management of Play	Manipulatives & Materials
The boy is lining up red bears of all sizes at the top, blue at the bottom of one side and the other side green at the top and yellow at the bottom.	Management of Play	Manipulatives & Materials
Teacher: "Wow, you noticed that. This bear is a total different color than that bear."	Management of Play	Thinking
The students start over taking bears to explore with.	Management of Play	Manipulatives & Materials

I was then able to further analyze the components of these three broad categories. The analysis led to detailed descriptions of the components that are listed below.

Step 3:  
Pedagogy of Play

<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>THEORETICAL CATEGORY</b>	<b>CODES</b>	<b>DESCRIPTIONS AND EMBEDDED COMMENTS</b>
Teacher: "What are you guys looking at?"	Pedagogy of Play	Teacher-initiated	Teacher is guiding children to think & answer question. Allows students to use more complex level of thinking to explain.
Teacher: "Tell me an attribute about the bear."	Pedagogy of Play	Teacher-initiated	Help children to think through their ideas. A strategy to foster learning & development
Teacher: "Kindergarteners get ready to begin to explore."	Pedagogy of Play	Teacher-initiated	Setting environment to explore to engage children in learning

Facilitation of Play

<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>THEORETICAL CATEGORY</b>	<b>CODES</b>	<b>DESCRIPTIONS AND EMBEDDED COMMENTS</b>
Girl: "Look it, look it, these are all green, and these are all yellow..."	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration	Flexible grouping to engage students together
Girl: "All the bears have eyes, nose. But the sizes are different."	Facilitation of Play	Teacher Guided Instruction	Student is answering a question from teacher.
Girl: "I am going to tell the teacher that you are not	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration	Children grouped according to

sharing...Mrs. Kent..." The girl raises her hand to tell on the boy.			personality and learning styles. Teaching students how to work together.
Teacher: "First of all, what do we talk about?"	Facilitation of Play	Guided Instruction	Teacher is closely monitoring the learning environment
Girl: "We need to share. How can we fix this? What can we do?"	Facilitation of Play	Guided Instruction	Teacher helping children to take turns speaking and listening.
Girl: "Put them back."	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration	Children learning strategies to work together
Teacher: "Let's try that."	Facilitation of Play	Guided Instruction	Helping children manage frustration
All students put it back in the center.	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration	Teacher is aware of the learning environment
Student in buttons say, "this is a giant one."	Facilitation of Play	Child Independent	Play is used to develop cognitive skills and making connections to other areas
Girls in the shell station are passing shells back and forth.	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration	Teacher found creative ways to draw on children's imagination
They know what their peer is looking for and when they find one, they are sharing with their partners.	Facilitation of Play	Child Collaboration	Children know expectations and what peers are doing

Management of Play

<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>THEORETICAL CATEGORY</b>	<b>CODES</b>	<b>DESCRIPTIONS AND EMBEDDED COMMENTS</b>
Teacher: "Wow, all the purple are here and all the red are here...wow, I love how	Management of Play	Thinking	Teacher is restating what child did. Immediate &

you are sorting.”			explicit feedback.
Boy: “No, you can’t take all of them.” A student was reaching in for a lot of the bears.	Management of Play	Manipulatives & Materials	Manage safe & inviting environment
The boy is lining up red bears of all sizes at the top, blue at the bottom of one side and the other side green at the top and yellow at the bottom.	Management of Play	Manipulatives & Materials	Through materials encouraging discovery, problem-solving, critical & creative thinking
Teacher: “Wow, you noticed that. This bear is a total different color than that bear.”	Management of Play	Thinking	Restating what students did with explicit feedback. Modeling importance of understanding what is being done.
The students start over taking bears to explore with.	Management of Play	Manipulatives & Materials	Learning activity that is coherent and connected.

### **Pedagogies of Play**

Participants in the classroom were one teacher and multiple male and female students. I was interested in observing the types of play that occurred in a classroom. I was interested in seeing if the play behaviors were teacher-initiated or child-initiated.

Teacher-initiated play is determined by the teacher’s objectives and begins with specific directions. Teachers use multiple techniques including modeling and explaining in order to actively engage the students (Gentile, 1983, p. 438).

Child-initiated play is when the students explore and interact with peers and materials on their own with or without guidance from a teacher. In a child-initiated experience, teachers set up the environment and materials



that are conducive to learning and playing (National Children's Bureau, 2004, p.1).

### **Facilitation of Play**

Play is used as a vehicle to develop specific life and academic skills. I was interested in the ways play was enabled in each experience. Therefore, this category was necessary to evaluate if the type of instruction used to facilitate play enhanced a child's development and learning. In order to decipher if play is enhanced, I needed to look at four ways I saw that play was facilitated within the observations. These four components include teacher direct instruction, teacher guided instruction, child independent, and child collaboration.

Teacher-directed instruction involved teachers talking to, explaining and modeling to the students while the students watch and listen.

Teacher-guided instruction involves student interaction while working on specific skills with the teacher.

Child independent instruction is when children are working by themselves on a particular task either prompted by the teacher or by their own curiosity.

Child collaboration is when two or more students are communicating or working together while the teacher observes.

### **Management of Play**

The types of play materials teachers select to use create a specific learning environment. I was interested in observing the strategies that were used to manage play. Therefore, I felt it was important to focus on three areas on how play was enhanced through the use of manipulatives, teacher

questioning and thinking processes were encouraged. Questioning and thinking processes involve how the teacher directs or engages students with specific questions and thinking in order to engage students in higher level thinking.

Manipulatives are concrete objects with which students explore, create, define, justify, solve problems and learn. Manipulatives are used to help the students connect ideas to physical objects. These tangible items can include such things as unifix cubes, bear counters, beans, sorting mats, cotton balls, blocks, etc. Manipulatives are used to manage learning experiences. "Although adults may provide the space and objects with which their children play, during play children practice their power to self-direct, self-organize, exert self-control, and negotiate with others" (Bergen, 2009, p.428).

The strategy of questioning is used for teacher's to have an understanding of student's comprehension of a concept, as a way to apply knowledge to real life, as a pacing guide, as an assessment tool and a management strategy. Questions are used to generate inquiry and student-directed learning. "Children's questions are a form of mastery play. In asking questions, children are creating their own learning experiences" (Curwood, 2007, p.30).

The use of various critical thinking skills is another tool teachers use to manage play. When students use creative thinking they are using their imagination. Practical thinking helps students to apply the learning to their personal lives. Analysis allows students to compare and evaluate. Through research based thinking (where students use materials and knowledge

learned to prove something) students are able to explore concepts while proving or dis-proving their perceptions.

### **Assertions**

From the collected data corpus, I made the following assertions regarding how play is implemented in Kindergarten classrooms, teacher perceptions of play and if Early Childhood National Board Standards impact how play is incorporated in a kindergarten mathematical block setting.

Assertion 1. Teachers have the foundational knowledge that play is a developmentally appropriate practice that should be incorporated in their lessons, but they do not know how to put this knowledge into action.

For the purposes of illustrating this effort, I have demonstrated specific instances of coding. These codes were shown through labeling and descriptions of the overlying categories. In the text that is in bold font you will see my interpretations of what was said or done in the observations that led to how the data were coded.

Specific methods and strategies were used to teach a lesson in a specific manner. Teachers chose how they structured a lesson. Each decision on how to structure a lesson is important as it impacts the resulting student learning and understanding. Newman (1996, p. 61) describes how teacher choices on lesson implementation can vary depending upon the school context. Newman also shares how some authority figures assert their beliefs on teachers regarding school curricula being academically structured tasks while de-emphasizing the importance of play in these activities. Newman also explains play should be emphasized in structured activities to augment a

child's development. Therefore depending on the context of the school, how a teacher perceives play and uses it in their classroom will vary.

Teachers play a significant role in each learning experience. Teachers need to have a strong content knowledge as well as knowledge of their students in order to create a lesson that is meaningful and relevant. How a teacher gives instructional directions to students does impact this learning experience.

I decided to combine all three teachers into one composite teacher, Mrs. Kent, due to the similarity of responses that arose from the questionnaire and interview responses of each teacher. All three teachers claimed they had drastic changes in the ways they viewed their teaching and thinking, which developed after exposure to the Early Childhood National Board Standards through the professional development lessons. Although data showed that the teacher's own perceptions significantly increased, analysis of observational data revealed that the teacher's understanding of their own teaching was still at a novice level with regard to fostering play in the learning environment. Therefore with all teachers being around the same level of understanding regarding play in the learning environment, Mrs. Kent, the composite teacher was constructed.

Mrs. Kent understood that play is a necessary tool to be used with early childhood students. She chose to use a teacher initiated approach to teach her lessons. The strategy of teacher initiated learning experience is shown in the below excerpt:

Teacher: We are going to go to our centers when I call your row. When you get there I have a job for you. **[Teacher initiated]**  
Students say ah!!! They are excited.  
Teacher: When you get to your center you will explore what is in the center of your station. You can sort them or you can look at attributes that makes them special. **[Teacher initiated, specific]**

**expectations]** She picks up a butterfly. What are the attributes of a butterfly? **[Teacher is modeling.]**

Student says it has wings.

Teacher says: You can question your friends. **[Teacher initiated]** I might tell my friend what do you see. How did you sort them? What is the same? What is different? **[Modeling expectations and questioning]** I will come around and help you with that. **[Teacher guidance]** But I want to talk to you about the attributes. When the bell goes off you will stand and point like always. **[Specific teacher instructions]**

This specific interaction included elements in the category “pedagogy of play” and more specifically relating to the code “teacher-initiated.”

1. The teacher is stating specific instructions that relate to the objectives and standards of the lesson.
2. The teacher is modeling behavior by showing questioning and thinking techniques that can be used in the exploration process.
3. The teacher states expectations to engage students in the learning independently and with peers.

Interviews corroborated the approach that Mrs. Kent took in using teacher-initiated play. Mrs. Kent had a pattern of using her-own instruction of modeling and stating expectations to lead off every learning experience. This pattern is how Mrs. Kent indicated she could get the closest to the play experience while still following state standards and expectations of school and district authority. Some teachers “tend to push kindergarten students to learn by mandating commercially structured programs and materials and thus unknowingly hindering a child’s maturation process” (Gentile, 1983, p.439).

Mrs. Kent responded to a question regarding if she felt play would be supported in her classroom:

“Play is geared more towards recess time, their own free time during the day during recess. In the classroom it is more academic driven and play would not happen.”

Mrs. Kent knows that in order to have developmentally appropriate practice, play is a concept that is necessary in learning. However, without the support of state standards or school leadership authority, she did not see play as a fit for her classroom instruction.

It is important to note that this Mrs. Kent is the composite of three teachers who shared this same perception. Mrs. Kent's beliefs about what she feels are developmentally appropriate and what she was taught throughout her teacher preparation program does not correlate directly with the style of teaching she used. This disconnect is shown through the teacher-initiated approach she uses throughout her teaching.

Relating Mrs. Kent's teaching in this instance to Assertion #1, Mrs. Kent knows her students need to create their own play experiences through exploration. However, she is using teacher-initiated play. In doing so, Mrs. Kent is not creating a genuine play experience for the students. Instead, she is guiding the students through directive probing statements such as telling them what they can ask their peers or what they can do to explore. To create a play experience that matched what she "knows" regarding play, Mrs. Kent needed to allow her students to explore and play with the materials without any specific instruction.

On the contrary side, child-initiated play is a strategy that many claim to be the approach that lends itself more naturally to the manner in which young children learn. Child-initiated play engages students learning through their own initiated experience. Below you will see an excerpt which describes an experience in which the learning began through student's own initiation.

Some students were reading books quietly at another table.  
**[Students chose their own books to read.]** The students get the books when they are done with the worksheet and the teacher collects

their work. **[Students eagerly turn in their work and rush to the bookshelf to pick out a book.]**

This seems to be a routine as all the students are doing this when their work is completed. **[Students do not ask the teacher to get a book. They just stand up and walk to the bookshelf.]**

Other students are still finishing their seatwork.

Students sitting at one table start talking about the book they are reading and showing pictures in the books they are reading to their friends. **[Students are excited to show their peers what they are looking at. Students are seeking out attention from their peers to look at the pictures in the book.]** The students stand up and get new books whenever they want. **[Some students look through the entire book and take their time. Some students flip through the book quickly and choose to get another book.]**

They do this quietly. They get a new book and sit down again.

Students are counting together in the book. **[No teacher instructions given. Instead the students just start this action on their own.]**

The teacher says to the students who are reading the books, "Hey friends people are still working so sit quietly."

Three students have been reading together for five minutes. These kids are enjoying the books they are reading as there are smiles on their face and they continue to point at pictures and talk quietly about what they see in the books. **[Students love the books they chose.]**

This situation was child initiated as the children were able to pick and choose what books they could read and their interactions. Child-initiated play is identifiable when "activities are shown by the exercise of choice, enjoyable, repetition and invitation by children to others to join the play" (The National Children's Bureau, 2004, p.1). This activity could have been done individually or with a peer depending on the child's choice. The specific elements included:

1. Students were able to explore the book on their own. There was not a specific direction on what the children needed to do with the books.
2. The environment was set up so that the children could use the book in any way they choose. The environment was conducive

to learning, working with peers, playing or working independently but quietly!

Interestingly enough, this instance of child-initiated play came after students completed a teacher-initiated activity. This was something the students were choosing to do on their own while waiting for their peers to complete their assigned work. The engagement and interest of students in this child-initiated experience seemed to be significantly greater than the activity they previously did that was teacher directed. Students were excited and explored the pictures and words in the stories they were reading on their own with no specific guidelines or expectations other than to be respectful to their peers. Students need to have an intrinsic motivation through their emotional attachments and if this is not apparent, it will be difficult to support the child's cognitive and physical development. "Emotional well-being is inextricably interrelated with physical health and cognitive development. It is impossible to target any of the other three dimensions in isolation of others" (Falk, 2012, p.20).

Mrs. Kent knows through her understanding of developmentally appropriate practices that her students need to play through exploration and hands on manipulatives. Mrs. Kent knows that her students need to create this learning experience on their own. In the example given the students are learning in this manner, but it is not intentional as Mrs. Kent planned for them to read the books only as a "filler" to wait for other students to complete an activity. Mrs. Kent needs to use her knowledge to specifically plan learning experiences that revolve around child-initiated play for a specific purpose and to make the most of their learning by discussing and extending it.



Assertion 2. Although teachers gained knowledge from Early Childhood National Board Standards describing how play can be delivered through multiple facilitation facets, when various facilitation methods were put into action it did not always result in play.

In each teacher's classroom I observed a pre and post intervention lesson to look at how play was facilitated. There are many strategies teachers can use in each learning experience. The data revealed that direct instruction by the teacher was apparent in the majority of the observed teaching episodes. The excerpt below is an example of teacher direct instruction.

Students were writing zero's with the teacher on their own white boards until they drew 10 zeros. **[Teacher instructed students through verbal communication to draw 10 zeros and to draw each one as she drew it on the whiteboard.]**

"Everybody erase your boards. Let's start again. We are doing this together. Don't get ahead of me." **[Teacher is giving direct instruction.]**

"Everybody make one circle. Make another circle. How many do you have now? **[Step by step instructions for the students to do individually but on the same pace as the teacher and the rest of the class.]** She repeated this until 5 circles are drawn. Count your circles and make sure you have 5." **[Students were expected to do exactly as the teacher said and to listen to the directions given.]**

Direct instruction is a strategy teachers use to deliver expectations to the students. The model of "listen and do" is apparent in teacher directed activities. Teacher direct instruction is shown in the following elements:

1. The teacher gives verbal direction to the students.
2. Teacher models what was expected along with asking the students to mimick her actions.
3. Students were required to listen to the directions and not interact with their peers.

Mrs. Kent was giving specific instruction in this learning scenario. However, the type of direction given was not specific to a play learning experience. Mrs. Kent has the knowledge that direct instruction allows the students to learn through modeling. However, instead of modeling a way for students to use manipulatives to enhance their learning experience, she is telling them directions to specific mathematical problems. Mrs. Kent is not allowing the students to use their imagination or prior knowledge to figure out problems on their own.

In comparison, teacher guided learning is used for students to work a little more independently but still follow a structure intended by the teacher.

“Guided play fosters academic knowledge through play activities. The environment can be enriched with objects and toys that provide experimental learning opportunities infused with curricular content. Guided play enhances a child’s exploration and learning by commenting on children’s discoveries, by co-playing along with the children, by asking open-ended questions about what children are finding, or by exploring the materials in ways that children might not have thought to do. (Falk, 2012, p. 27-28)

This brief excerpt exhibits characteristics of teacher guided instruction:

Teacher: Eddie, tell me what you are doing. **[Specific question that is requiring an answer from the student.]**

Eddie: Playing.

Teacher: You are playing, you are exploring. [Repeats back to the student his responses and acknowledge his response and actions.]

Eddie, ask Makayla what she is doing, what do you see? [The teacher is guiding the student to work on the specific skill of collaboration with a peer and questioning.]

Eddie: What do you see? [Asks the peer what the teacher requested.]

Makayla: Blue bears

Teacher: Eddie, what do you notice about that bear? [Teacher guidance is necessary to help Eddie think about what he is doing.]

Eddie: It is big and small. It is yellow. **[Student met the objective by answering the teacher’s question.]**

Students at the shell station are showing their shells to their partners. “Ohhh... look at that one.” They are passing the shells around. They have smiles on their faces. They are putting shells on their fingers.

**[Students are able to work on their own and with their peers without the teacher next to each individual.]**

Ethan: Mrs. Kent, are you going to ask me what I am doing? I am sorting by colors. **[Student wants to get reassurance from the teacher and show the teacher what he was doing correctly.]**

Similar to this student, other students are working on processing the information from the activities they are involved in. The teacher acts as a guide to help the students think through what they are learning and to verbally express their learning. Teachers “have the responsibility to plan ahead in a flexible way. But children cannot benefit from their play if adults over-plan and over-supervise the daily events of any setting” (National Children’s Bureau, 2004, p.3). The specific elements from the above excerpt included:

1. There are interactions between teachers and students and students with other students.
2. The teacher has a specific objective in mind and guides the students with questions to help the student arrive at their own answer.

Mrs. Kent knows that students need guidance to ensure their play experience is enhanced and that they are making connections with play to the skill or content being taught. During this experience Mrs. Kent guided the student but when the prompting occurred, the student stopped playing. Through reflection Mrs. Kent needs to learn how to use guiding strategies to enhance and extend the play experience rather than halting it.

In each learning experience, children also work independently. In every classroom, independent work is necessary to develop specific life and academic skills. The excerpt below illustrates how students use independent work as a vehicle to learn.

Students are at a different table than they were previously. Students are given new manipulatives to explore with. **[Students are at a table with peers. They are given specific materials but are in a different context than they were prior to this activity.]**

Students with unifix cubes are measuring how high their model is. **[Some students are choosing to explore with the materials in one specific way.]** Other students have manipulatives on the ground. **[Students choose where to use the materials.]**

Students have number cards on the table. The teacher walks around and gives the table a new number card. **[Teacher does not give specific instruction. Instead just adds a new manipulative for the students to use.]** Students start counting the manipulatives together.

Girl: Let's see if this number is eleven. The student begins counting. **[Student asking her own questions and learning independently.]**

Students seem to be working with partners but also talking to themselves and/or to the students on the entire table. **[Each student have their own choice on how they want to learn.]**

Teacher is walking around and checking for understanding. Students raise hands when created models that were greater, less than and equal to the models. **[Teacher is still there in case the students have a question but is not interrupting their individual learning.]**

Child independent instruction allows the students to learn on their own. Students use previous knowledge to create their own learning experience. Students working independently include:

1. Students working on their own to complete a specific task.
2. Independent work can be either prompted by the teacher, another child or a child's own curiosity.

Mrs. Kent knows that when children work independently that it can result in a valuable play experience. Although her students are working independently in this particular experience, their actions are not necessarily lending themselves to play. Instead the students have expectations imposed on them that they come up with specific answers by using manipulatives. The students are working independently on a specific task, but they are not playing to find out other solutions or to see where the use of manipulatives takes them through their own exploration.

It is natural for children to collaborate with one another in learning and play experiences. Collaboration allows students to learn from their peers and

see perspectives that they may not have on their own. "Froebel and Montessori, the Early Pioneers of Early Childhood Educators, agreed that children learn most effectively from self-directed activities that gave them a high level of empowerment and ownership and, thus, intrinsic motivation was high" (Yelland, 1999, p.217). The excerpt below shows students working collaboratively with one another.

Students are exploring at a new station with different manipulatives. **[All students at the table are given a variety of the same manipulatives.]** Students are using the manipulatives at this station to explore. **[Students are working together to accomplish a specific task.]**

Students are at the table that has manipulatives in the shape of children. The students are mimicking how the people are formed. **[Students are playing with the manipulatives in multiple ways than just the objective of the lesson.]**

Students with the ladybug manipulatives are making a design. **[Together students are creating.]**

Students with the unifix cubes are putting the cubes together in patterns. **[Students are working together to create multiple patterns.]**

The teacher passes out a number card to the students. The students are to use the manipulatives to create groups that are greater, less than and equal to.

Student: Michael we are doing the number seven. Students start counting numbers together. **[Students give one another instruction, communicate with their peers and help to keep each other on task.]** Teacher walks around to check on students and ask higher level thinking questions. "What's equal to 20?" Students are working together. "Dominick we got 20! **[Students respond together as they know they are doing the work as a group.]**

Dominick: We got a greater number. **[The peer adds in his thoughts about their results.]**

Students are able to think more deeply about each learning experience when they are able to talk through their thoughts and hear those of their peers. Through the student interactions student collaboration shows:

1. Two or more students are working together.
2. Each pair of students is focused on a specific task.

3. The teacher observes the groups working together and talks to them about their discoveries on their own based upon their prior knowledge and current explorations.

Mrs. Kent knows that when students collaborate with one another, they are able to be involved in an experience where they can play to investigate and explore while hearing other perspectives. However in this experience the students are not in a situation that they can explore freely. Instead they have had previous instruction in another station of exactly what they need to do. Therefore, although these are new manipulatives the students are using it in the same way they did in the previous, teacher-guided station. Although students could play, previous teacher-initiated experiences did not allow the students learning to result in play.

Assertion 3. Teacher's view themselves as incorporating play into their lessons when any concrete manipulative is provided to students.

It is necessary to manage each learning experience. Teachers choose to manage each experience with various strategies. The use of manipulatives allows students to create a learning experience that is fun and enjoyable but under the guidelines of the teacher. "If we allow children the freedom to experiment with language, higher-order thinking skills, and new ways of sharing a toy, they will make discoveries that help them throughout life. (Flaxman, 1999, p.2). In the below excerpt the use of manipulatives will show how play and learning is managed.

Students reach for the items in the buckets in the middle of the table.

**[Multiple manipulatives are provided for the students.]**

Some students take a paper or pencil. **[Students choose the manipulatives they want to explore with.]** Some start to take links and put it together without measuring an item. **[Students are exploring in their own way.]**

A girl in the purple jacket puts unifix cubes on the width of a paper.

**[Student is using the manipulative to solve a problem.]**

Each table has unifix cubes, links and paperclips for the students to measure with. They also have scissors, pencils, glue and scissors. **[There are multiple manipulatives.]** These are the items they are measuring.

One girl is taking a pencil and tracing the length of the glue and begins to measure what she traced with the links. **[Tangible items are used to explore.]**

Through the use of manipulatives, lessons are able to be managed to incorporate a learning experience that incorporates play. This is an example of managing play by:

1. Concrete objects were used by children to explore, create, define, justify, solve problems and learn.
2. The tangible items were used to help connect ideas.

Mrs. Kent knows that the provision of manipulatives is a way to allow students to play. In this situation the students were given various manipulatives. Due to students using manipulatives in the learning experience, Mrs. Kent feels as if the students are playing. However, this is not the case as other factors contribute to if a student is actually playing. In this situation students are also given direct instruction on what is expected to be done with the manipulatives. When students are told directly how to play, they are not actually playing, they are just following directions.

Questioning is another strategy teachers use to manage play. The strategy of questioning is used to stimulate learning and active engagement. Questioning can encourage students to think profoundly about the content, encourage students to stay on task, and prompt elaboration and explanation of their thinking process. "As we watch children play, we can make comments, ask questions, and suggest materials-based on what we see children doing in their play- that will help their play deepen and expand"

(Falk, 2012, p. 138). The excerpt below illustrates questioning within a lesson.

Teacher: You were just able to explore and look at attributes. You guys were finding lots of different attributes. **[Teacher restating what students did.]** I want you to look at my sorting mat up here. (She has the sorting mat on the easel.) What do you notice here? **[One type of questioning. Various levels of Blooms Taxonomy should be used within a lesson.]**

Ethan: It has the same number.

Teacher: Oh, I have the same number of tape on each side. **[Repeats what student said in another way.]** What is a number attribute you see? Tell me a characteristic about my mat? **[Various levels of questioning according to Bloom's Taxonomy should be used within a lesson.]**

Earnesto: It is yellow.

Teacher: I want you to watch me. When you were at the bug center, were all the bugs the same? **[Teacher refocuses the student and asks a follow up question.]**

Student: No.

Teacher: What did you notice? **[Probing question.]**

Student: There were blue and other colors.

Teacher: What else? **[Asking for details and to think deeper.]**

Giselle: They had green, red, and blue.

Teacher: So there were all different color bugs. **[Restating response through categorization.]** Were they all the same size? **[Asking a thoughtful question.]**

Student: No. The butterflies were blue and red.

Ethan: No, but I saw a spider and a butterfly.

Teacher: And they were not all the same sizes? **[Think deeper to prove information.]**

Ethan: No, because the spider has legs and mouth and the ladybug had smaller legs and the butterfly had wings, and antennas.

Through the artful use of questioning, student learning through play is enhanced. Questioning "through peer-interaction settings allow children to gain feedback about their own ideas and social strategies, and modify them according to this feedback. Social interactions and feedback of this nature have been found to lead to gains in social cognition, moral reasoning, and decreases in delinquency" (Newman, 1996, p.67). The use of questioning is shown through:

1. The teacher was able to determine what students knew when they were asked to explain their thinking process.



2. Through questioning students were able to think about how they could apply the learning to a practical situation
3. Depending on the responses, follow up questions were asked.
4. The teacher was able to use the questions and responses as an assessment tool. When teachers are able to assess student knowledge, they are able to adapt lessons accordingly.

Questioning is a strategy that Mrs. Kent knows can further the play experience. However understanding how to implement the art of questioning into the play experience is complex. Mrs. Kent has not become proficient in using questioning to promote thinking during play. Instead she is using it for students to explain what they are doing. Mrs. Kent needs to formulate her questions to allow the students to think about the experience while continuing to play and explore new ways of learning with the same experience.

Provoking thinking is another management strategy that is used to ensure students are learning in a play setting. The deliverance of thinking strategies by teachers has a profound influence on how students learn. Steele describes the importance of surface versus deep learning based upon how students are taught to think.

“Surface learning included no deep involvement with the task. A student may focus on memorization or follow procedures without much thought simply to learn the basics and move on. In contrast, deep learning occurs when someone strives to thoroughly understand and finds meaning and satisfaction in the task at hand” (Steele, 2009, p.211).

Teachers who strive to explain to students how to think and understand complexity will help students to achieve deep learning. Below you will read an excerpt where a teacher engages the analytical thinking strategy.

Teacher: Great. So I sorted by color. When I bring this out, what does it mean? (Takes magnifying glass out.) **[Uses a tangible item to help the student make a connection with the type of thinking they are using.]**

Student: Look closely [**Students know the use of a magnifying glass.**]

Teacher: When I take this out I can look closely at the attributes. [**Teacher talks about analytical thinking in student friendly words.**]

Teacher passes out magnifying glasses and tells them to look closely and analyze their thumb. When I look closely I see a lot of things that I may not see without it. [**Gives an example of analytical thinking in a practical thinking way.**]

Students begin to work with their partners and look closely at their thumbs. They have smiles on their faces. They pass the magnifying glass around.

Teacher: What is something you see when you look closely at your thumb? [**Teacher asks an analytical question to help the children make a connection to the type of thinking.**]

Students: I see my nail.

Teacher: Let's see if you can see the wrinkles.

Students: I see the wrinkles.

They continue to look at their thumbs. [**Exploration through guided observation. Students are engaged.**]

Thinking is necessary for students to make connections and to be intrigued by knowledge. Students need to understand how they are thinking. When students understand their thinking and learning processes the management of play and learning is evident. Thinking can be enhanced through the use of students using developmentally appropriate materials. "In all of the settings where children play, we can provide access to open-ended materials" (Stalk, 2012, p.137). Thinking allows students to be managed when:

1. Students are able to use their imagination with creative thinking.
2. Students see the usefulness of what they are doing through practical thinking
3. Students are able to be engaged in their learning when they use analytical thinking to compare and evaluate what they are learning.
4. Students are able to prove something with their research and reasoning.

Mrs. Kent knows that thinking is a key component of play and learning. However, she is still a novice at using thinking strategies to promote play. Students are beginning to use higher level thinking strategies, but the play is not evident. Students need to have opportunities to use exploration and to be prompted to think about the learning experience while still being directly involved in a play situation.

### **Summary of Analysis**

Through the synthesis of data collected through questionnaires, interviews, lessons taught, observations and reflective journals, the three teachers were so similar across their responses that one composite teacher emerged. My findings demonstrated that there are positive changes in teacher's perceptions and attempts to incorporate of play in their teaching and classroom environments once they are introduced to the National Board Standards regarding play. However, the changes were not as significant as anticipated. In Chapter 5, I will discuss my findings as it pertains to an accomplished teacher versus the observed teachers. The composite is factual representations of learning and implementation of learning that took place within the learning experience.

The main characteristic of the research that I contribute to their enhanced belief in the value of play is the unveiling of what Early Childhood National Board Standards says about play in an early childhood classroom. In this study none of the three teachers were aware that there are advanced standards of quality that incorporate play into lessons in the classroom. By the end of the study the teachers indicated they valued play more and used it more readily in their daily instruction. However, their actions observed did

not really move far from direct instruction. The similarities and differences that were noted in teaching prior to being introduced to these standards versus post-introduction of standards include the following:

1. how play was incorporated in the classrooms;
2. materials provided for children to play;
3. the amount of time play was incorporated in the classrooms;
4. the amount of time teacher direction was given;
5. the learning environment ( teacher-directed environment versus a more learner-centered environment);
6. students' interaction and enthusiasm in their learning experience.

Based on the daily journals the teachers kept, their participation in professional development lessons and my classroom observations in their rooms, I worked with each teacher to help her understand that play is a vital part of the Early Childhood Curriculum, according to the Early Childhood National Board Standards. The teachers investigated what the Early Childhood National Board Standards say about play and they observed one another model how to incorporate play. They were observed as they tried to implement various educational play strategies with children.

These differences were attributed to the teacher's knowledge of play, how to incorporate play and how to deliver the instruction in a way that also meets the demands and expectations of the new rigor of expectations in teacher instruction, student achievement and assessment.

## **Chapter 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, FURTHER RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

Within this chapter there are five components: summary of the study, conclusions, implications, further research and recommendations for future studies. Through each component my intent is to situate the findings from this study within the literature and describe the potential implications for Early Childhood education.

#### **Summary of the Study**

Current kindergarten classrooms are taught based on different standards and expectations than in previous decades. Through this case study, I investigated the perceptions of teachers regarding the concept of play and how they use it to teach in their classrooms. This chapter presents findings of teachers' perceptions of play-based learning.

The data for this qualitative study was collected in the Fall of 2011. Three kindergarten teachers agreed to participate. They filled out a questionnaire, participated in trainings regarding Early Childhood National Board Standards, and kept a reflective journal. They were systematically observed and interviewed over a period of three months. Data were analyzed according to Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) model of research as a collaborative document through the telling of a story by both the researcher and participant. Hatch's (2002) model of using an interpretive framework was utilized throughout the analysis.

## **Conclusions**

### **Research Question 1**

Question 1: How do Early Childhood National Board Standards used by non National Board Certified Teachers impact teachers perceptions of what teacher-initiated educational play is and how they view it is taught in their classrooms?

In the study, there were five noteworthy areas of emphasis that related to teacher's perceptions of play in their own classrooms that included:

1. Teachers defined play as a developmentally appropriate practice.
2. The lack of understanding of how to incorporate play into structured classrooms prevents teachers from utilizing play.
3. The knowledge of mediated play as supported by Early Childhood National Board Standards allows teachers to feel more confident in incorporating play into their lessons.
4. Through play students can be held accountable for learning in all content areas.
5. Teachers have the foundational knowledge that play is a developmentally appropriate practice that should be incorporated in their lessons, but do not know how to put this knowledge into action.

Finding 1: Teachers defined play as a developmentally appropriate practice.

In the initial interviews, questionnaires and observations, each participant had her own definition of play. Each teacher took time to think about what they believed play to mean. The simple question of "What is your definition of play?" seemed to be quite complex. The teachers' original definitions

varied, reflecting their own experiences as a child and a teacher's perspective both culturally and academically (Kieff & Cashergue, 2000). Later in the study, teachers reported that they each saw how to incorporate play and think of play differently after they were introduced to the Early Childhood National Board Standards. Teachers stated that play was an effective tool that can be used on a daily basis in all learning activities. Despite their stated beliefs, however, observations of practice revealed that they were not incorporating their knowledge into their teaching. The teachers tried to differentiate the types of play, but they tended to use more teacher-initiated play than any other type of play. I concluded that teachers were very hesitant to let their control shift within their classrooms. The teachers seemed to be scared of the classroom behavior management issues that they anticipate would occur with child-initiated play.

All three teachers had an initial idea of what constituted play based upon their own childhood experiences. Teachers defined play while conveying ideals of the impact play has on student achievement. As teachers were introduced to Early Childhood National Board Standards, all three teachers reported revised perceptions of how play can be incorporated in their own classrooms.

These three teachers were all new to the Early Childhood National Board Standards and the data indicated their reactions, responses, adaptations in teaching and perspectives were all similar. Due to these similarities, a composite teacher was created to represent a teacher who is a veteran to teaching but a novice in incorporating National Board Standards into their teaching. This composite teacher is Mrs. Kent.

Mrs. Kent defined play as something that traditionally helped children to expand their horizons with creativity and imagination. She believed that play was used in traditional kindergarten classrooms (through the use of kitchens, blocks, and puppets) in order to develop a child's social skills. Throughout the study Mrs. Kent refers to using manipulatives in her classroom. Manipulatives are concrete objects that can be used in any learning activity to assist students in connecting their ideas through the use of tangible objects. However, Mrs. Kent did not believe she used play in her own classroom in concert with her own traditional definition. Instead she felt play is to be used in a purely academic form. Falk (2012) shared that play and active learning are disappearing from classrooms and activities are leading more towards sedentary work. He stated that stakeholders in education have a notion that paper-pencil activities are geared more towards test preparation. "This transformation is happening in schools everywhere, but it is especially prevalent in low-income communities, where it is often assumed that the children will lag behind their more well-resourced peers" (Falk, 2012, p.5). According to my own observations, Falk's thoughts did coincide with the actions of the teachers. In my perception the teachers used paper-pencil activities to have evidence of what the students know and show accountability that the students were actually working. This evidence seemed to be their safety net to prove that they were "teaching."

Finding 2: The lack of understanding of how to incorporate play into structured classrooms prevents teachers from utilizing play in a meaningful way.

Through further explanation of what Mrs. Kent meant about play in traditional classrooms, she described that kindergarten is now more like first



grade. She felt that play was not encouraged in her own classroom because it was not seen as academic or as a tool to get her students where they needed to be academically. She described the difference between what the general public thought of kindergarten as not necessarily the norm now. Mrs. Kent stated, "Kindergarten is not just free exploration, nap time, and arts and crafts. Now, kindergarten is bound by state standards and school expectations in which the teacher is held accountable to ensure student achievement and child readiness in all areas of academia." "A wide spread belief is that schools should be solely devoted to academics and play can occur outside of the educational system" (Flaxman, 1999, p.1).

The required use of scripted curricula on a daily basis is a factor in learning that is unable to be ignored. As teachers are given detailed scripts of what to say and do during a lesson, making learning meaningful, interesting and accommodating for various types and levels of learners is not incorporated with the script. Accomplished teachers know how to add to or modify, even ignore these scripted curricula in order to appropriately adapt lessons for the various levels of learners. Although Mrs. Kent was an experienced teacher, she did not necessarily make the connection that students need more than a few short activities to become proficient in the content areas. According to the 5 Core Propositions, teachers need to know their students' needs and how to improvise lessons in an effort to ensure student understanding and achievement. Although improvising and adding on to the scripted curricula is necessary to ensure student success, it may not be interpreted this way by a teacher still in an emergent level of understanding regarding the powerful learning play provides young children. This raises the question about the teacher preparation of these teachers. Early Childhood

teacher preparation has a stronger focus on the nature of the child than on the content to be acquired by children. The opposite has traditionally been characteristic of preparation in Elementary Education. Should more pedagogical knowledge and child development be considered in all teacher preparation programs, as some assert?

Finding 3: The knowledge of and emphasis on mediated play which is supported by Early Childhood National Board Standards allows teachers to feel more confident in incorporating play into their lessons and classrooms.

Mrs. Kent continued to describe how her own kindergarten classroom of second language learners would benefit through experiencing teacher-initiated educational play in order to guide children to interact socially with their peers to develop their language. After understanding teacher-initiated play, Mrs. Kent embraced a new definition of educational play by explaining it is an essential strategy to help kids academically and socially through exploration. Previously she thought play to be something separate from academics. Mrs. Kent now feels professionally supported by knowing play is incorporated in the Early Childhood National Board Standards. Mrs. Kent learned how to direct play on a daily basis through the materials she uses in her classroom.

Mrs. Kent initially perceived play as activities that are done without accountability. She did not feel that she used play in her classrooms because it was not allowed as part of the school-directed curriculum. Mrs. Kent explained how she is held accountable for student achievement and was told that play in the form of coloring, the use of blocks, dress up, or the kitchen center did not contribute to helping students to achieve academically.

After being shown that play is supported in the Early Childhood National Board standards as a developmentally appropriate practice, Mrs. Kent began to see that play can be incorporated through more than just a kitchen or dress up center. Mrs. Kent explained how through the Early Childhood National Board Standards she saw that play is incorporated: it is done through the choice of materials used and how she encourages students to explore, learn and develop their own understanding of concepts with an academic purpose in mind. This statement fits with research which promotes the use of play as suited to the unique needs of young learners. "By embedding play into math, science, and literacy skills in a fun, meaningful context, learning is enjoyable. If a child grows to dislike school, there will be repercussions for years to come" (Curwood, 2007, p.32).

Finding 4: Through play, students can be held accountable for learning in all content areas.

Play is a necessary component in all content areas. The choice of materials is a way teachers can incorporate play into every learning experience. Through play, literacy skills are developed as students are able to choose the books they read, who they read with, and develop their own activities to go with the stories such as acting out parts of the story. Students can also use play to enhance their knowledge in science. When students are encouraged to explore, hypothesize, test and draw conclusions, they are using their playful nature to make sense of the learning experience.

Having students being held accountable through play is the ideal situation. Mrs. Kent had the perception that this occurred in her teaching. She felt that play was used on a regular basis and integrated throughout all subject areas. However, from my observation there was no evidence that

was apparent to support this claim. The use of play was limited and therefore could not attribute to student accountability.

Mrs. Kent then redefined her definition of play again to include how students are held accountable for their learning through the planned use of exploration and manipulatives. By encouraging exploration, students investigate as a way to learn. She believes students develop social skills as they interact with one another, and they develop their own perspectives through play.

Mrs. Kent had preconceived notions of play as children playing outside with toys and of children not thinking about what they were doing. She explained that she did not feel play was used in current kindergarten classrooms, and that play is thought of as something that occurs during recess time. Mrs. Kent explained that play was viewed as a child's own free time and classroom time is academically driven and a time where learning takes place.

Mrs. Kent adapted her definition of play as more than just outdoor play after she examined how play can be created in a developmentally appropriate way to build understanding of content. She explained how play is the free exploration time children receive so they can think about, see and feel what they are learning through a hands-on approach. "That's because play, whether in the classroom, or at recess, or outdoors, is all about discovering and practicing in order to understand. Children form an understanding of social, emotional, moral and intellectual concepts to which they are introduced at every turn as they rapidly develop" (Flaxman, 1999, p.2). Her new definition described how play can be incorporated in classroom experiences when children figure out and learn through their exploration.

She views play differently: she now recognizes the use of free exploration with manipulatives can help the students to think about what they are doing and as a way to guide them through the learning process.

Finding 5: Teachers have the foundational knowledge that play is a developmentally appropriate practice that should be incorporated in their lessons, but do not know how to put this knowledge into action.

Mrs. Kent voiced noteworthy changes in her perceptions of play. However, although she was able to see and understand play in a different perspective, it was another hurdle to appropriately include this new knowledge into her own teaching. Through the weekly professional development lessons, Mrs. Kent was able to acknowledge the validity of including play within learning experiences. However, the implementation of incorporating play is something that takes practice and planning. This theory-to-practice conflict between understanding the value of play and actually implementing play seemed to raise a question of job-embedded quality professional development. If Mrs. Kent were to have an exemplary teacher-mentor to demonstrate how play is incorporated as a daily learning strategy, she could view the materials that were used, how students were able to be assessed. She could also observe how students engaged in play learned content. This would be helpful to ensure successful implementation of play strategies in her own classroom. Such modeling is not something that is readily available to early childhood teachers. Therefore, some support system needs to be created in order to ensure that what is being taught is being correctly implemented with young learners in the classroom.

There is a noticeable gap between the theory teachers state they know regarding how child initiated play impacts learning and the actual

implementation of child initiated play in early childhood classroom settings. Teachers need to have multiple experiences practicing implementation of child-initiated play according to the theory that they have learned. Once teachers are comfortable using child-initiated play, teachers can then begin to use child-initiated play in conjunction with the common core standards. Just as in the saying “practice makes perfect”, this situation requires many opportunities to “practice” using child-initiated play. When this is used on a regular basis the teachers will better be able to understand how to implement play and can use this understanding to incorporate the requirements of the standards and content at their grade level.

## **Research Question 2**

Question 2: How does implementing Early Childhood National Board Standards in teaching impact how teachers incorporate play in their lessons?

In this analysis, four critical areas were revealed regarding the incorporation of play in lessons:

1. Teachers feel that by using manipulatives they are allowing students to play.
2. Designing play in learning experiences takes practice and careful consideration.
3. Mediated play and mediated work are both necessary as it allows both teacher and student to work together in each learning experience.
4. When teachers are shown how to incorporate play in learning experiences they know what should be done, yet are at the novice level of actual implementation.

The composite teacher created from this study recognized that play should be incorporated into her daily lessons. However, the basic lessons that were delivered to teach how to incorporate play into teaching was not thorough enough to impact how play was used in daily lessons.

The incorporation of Early Childhood National Board Standards in teaching impacts how teachers incorporate play in their lessons because they now know there are standards that support play. Play is described in Early Childhood National Board Standards as being a powerful facilitator of growth, development and learning across all developmental domains. The Early Childhood National Board standards guide teachers in selecting play materials, designing play and learning activities, and planning for flexible grouping. They also provide examples of how to engage students, how to help children develop communication skills and how to model listening skills. The standards describe how teachers can facilitate problem-solving experiences which include strategies that are teacher-directed and child-selected. Teachers encourage use of play as a vehicle to help children process emotions and develop social skills, and to develop cognitive skills and promote social development. When teachers are taught what the standards say and how accomplished teachers viewed play into their learning environment, play is incorporated differently than before this understanding takes place.

Finding 1: Teachers feel that by using manipulatives they are allowing students to play.

Mrs. Kent began this study by stating she uses manipulatives and puzzles in her classroom in order to allow her students to play. She stated that she utilized play when it allowed her to enhance specific academic skills. Yet, she could not verbalize exactly how play was implemented in a way that

related to the standards or how it would to increase student learning or achievement. Eisenberg describes how most people do not see an academic value in play as play is not as obvious as concrete learning strategies. The “academic value is also missed due to current standards of preschool and elementary education that are defined quite narrowly through the lens of counting, phonics, etc” (Eisenberg, 2007, p.136). This appeared to mirror the situation with Mrs. Kent, who still does not take children’s work with manipulatives beyond their initial use as “time fillers” until more directed teaching resumes.

Finding 2: Designing meaningful play and learning experiences takes practice and careful consideration.

Through analyzing Mrs. Kent’s reflections on the instruction she was given regarding what the Early Childhood National Board Standards said about play, Mrs. Kent was able to verbalize how she would design her classroom to create a safe and inviting environment where playful learning and social interactions could occur simultaneously. After the professional development sessions, she wrote how she incorporates adequate time and space to engage in play within her lesson plans. She now has a specific purpose for each material she chooses and a specific intent on how it will be used in each learning experience.

Mrs. Kent noted that she now pays close attention to how she plans and designs play activities. She knows play is a vital component of a child’s learning by stating, I think about how I can incorporate the child’s interests into all the subjects she teach.” Helpful teachers “use their skills of observation and communication to be alert to what is working well for



children in a play setting and what may need some attention for change”  
(National Children’s Bureau, 2004, p.4).

Finding 3: Mediated play and Mediated work is necessary as it allows both teacher and student to work together for each learning experience.

Mediated play is a combination of students being purely in charge and free to play by their individual choice and having adult and peer collaboration. Mediated work is the combination of purely assigned tasks with modeled work that involves teachers and peers. Both mediated play and mediated work are the middle ground of a purely play or work experience.

Mrs. Kent reflected upon her teaching and stated that she refined her teaching to teach with a specific purpose regarding play in her classroom. Mrs. Kent stated that, “I feel I provide time for the students to create, explore, use their imagination, experiment with and nurture their curiosity towards the learning goals set by school expectations and standards through using free exploration. Mrs. Kent continued to state how she felt her students now had a teacher-directed experience in a more learner-centered environment. She felt her students are more frequently in charge of their learning as they are guided by her to think about why they are choosing an activity and how doing what they are doing will bring about an outcome. Below is an excerpt where Mrs. Kent guided the students to think critically and examine their own experience in hope of increasing their understanding of the content.

Teacher: You were just able to explore and look at attributes. You guys were finding lots of different attributes. I want you to look at my sorting mat up here. (She has the sorting mat on the easel.) What do you notice here?

Student 3: It has the same number.

Teacher: “Oh, I have the same number of magnets on each side. What is a number attribute you see? Tell me a characteristic about my mat.”

Student 1: "It is yellow."  
Teacher: "I want you to watch me. When you were at the bug center, were all the bugs the same?"  
Student 1: "No."  
Teacher: "What did you notice?"  
Student 1: "They were blue and other colors."  
Teacher: "What else?"  
Student 2: "They had green, red, blue."  
Teacher: "So there were all different colored bugs. Were they all the same size?"  
Student 1: "No. The butterflies were blue and red."  
Student 3: "No, but I saw a spider and a butterfly."  
Teacher: "And they were not all the same sizes?"  
Student 3: "No, because the spider has legs and mouth and the ladybug had smaller legs and the butterfly had wings, and antenas."

This example is an inquiry-based discussion, requiring children to think about what they are learning. The excerpt shows that although the teacher guided the students with a specific purpose in mind, the interactions did not reflect that play was used. Within this situation, children created their own understanding through an inquiry experience and by collaborating with their peers to figure out the sorting characteristics.

Finding 4: When teachers are shown how to incorporate play in learning experiences they know what should be done, yet are at the novice level of actual implementation.

Mrs. Kent feels as if she now incorporates play in her classroom while following what the Early Childhood National Board Standards say about play. She uses educational play to enrich the students' learning. "The role of play in young children's learning has always been considered to be of primary importance. Thus early childhood programs have been characterized by curricula that provide plenty of opportunity for young children to play and interact with materials, ideas and people" (Yelland, 1999, p.217). Mrs. Kent strives to incorporate play into her daily lessons whereas before she did not. She now has awareness of research and standards to back up play as directly

linked to a student's development and understanding of academic concepts. Mrs. Kent stated that on a daily basis she now uses dramatic play and integrates play into all subject areas through the use of specific materials in which students have multiple opportunities to explore.

In the beginning of this study Mrs. Kent stated that she used manipulatives to allow her students to play. However, she said the manipulatives were not necessarily a tool to play; instead it was just something the students did after completing a teacher-directed activity. She was anxious about admitting that she allowed play in her classroom because she felt that she was not allowed to do so in her school.

Throughout the process of learning about how play is incorporated in the Early Childhood National Board Standards, Mrs. Kent explored how the arrangement of her classroom supports an organized, safe and inviting environment that promotes productive play. In the post observations I saw that Mrs. Kent made changes to her learning environment by adding more student created work to the walls. The students also knew where to find specific materials for a lesson which showed me that they had previous experiences with the materials. She described how she now thinks about how to incorporate enough time and space for her students to engage in play within the math groups. Through rotation of independent and teacher-directed stations, students are more able to choose the materials they use and are encouraged to interact with the materials and peers in a more child-initiated way. In order to give students a choice of materials, Mrs. Kent puts materials such as beans, unifix cubes, cotton balls, beads and small erasers at each learning station. Her students are able to use any of these materials they choose to assist them with their learning. "When adults provide real

choices, children can build the trust they need to cope with solving physical problems and negotiation emerging interpersonal play” (Bergen, 2009, p.429). Mrs. Kent realized that when she makes materials that pairs with her student’s interests and relates to the academic standards, not only does it incorporate play but it also actively engages the students in their learning experience. This is shown through the students being active participants in activities dealing with the smart board. In the pre-observation phase, the smart board was primarily used as an overhead projector for students to see their worksheets. In the post-observation students were able to come to the smart board and interact as they respond to questions. The students showed evidence of intrinsic motivation through their engagement and on-task behavior so that they would have their own turns.

While Mrs. Kent reflected on the lessons regarding play, she was re-introduced to the vital concept of designing play to develop social, cognitive, linguistic, physical and emotional skills. Problem solving was the key component in which Mrs. Kent saw play as a catalyst to enhance the student’s development in all the above stated areas. In one of Mrs. Kent’s lessons she was teaching her students the best way to work as a team member by sharing roles and materials. Her students had a great time playing and learning as well as developing life skills –socializing, thinking, effectively communicating, working together and problem solving. “Through play interactions children have the opportunity to increase in social understanding and develop the concept of reciprocity. This is important, because reciprocal experiences foster effective communication as well as understanding of others” (Newman, 1996, p.62). Mrs. Kent had the revelation that “play is a natural process in which there are multiple teachable moments.” She states

that she provides time for students to play because it develops their higher-order thinking skills. Students who are taught how to use divergent and critical thinking are able to better understand complex content. "Divergent thinking is the ability to think of different possibilities and alternatives outside the well-worn path of conventional thinking." (Steele, 2009, p. 210).

Once Mrs. Kent understood how to look at play from the perspective of the Early Childhood National Board Standards, she began to implement play in her classroom differently. She described how her students now have more purposeful play yet there is accountability for student learning. Data and themes in her post-observation and reflective play logs show that she values free and guided play to help promote social skills, exploration and communication while learning the standards for kindergarten in math, science and reading. Mrs. Kent feels that she has more support using play than she previously did because it is supported in the National Board Standards. Mrs. Kent stated that she "now uses play because I use it with the standards in mind to back up the academics, teaching, the way I teach, and the way I want the skills of my students to be developed." Mrs. Kent explains that through play her students now learn so much more than what the Common Core standards state. Prior to being introduced to what the Early Childhood National Board Standards say about play, Mrs. Kent thought, "that play was something separate from academics and was not backed by any type of standards. I was thinking that if I wanted the students to play it needed to be separated from academics and during non-allocated academic instruction time." Through the post-observations, I was able to see that students are learning about fairness and equity in working with their peers. Mrs. Kent developed activities that were age appropriate, and that accommodated

various learning styles while promoting questioning and thinking strategies for higher levels of thinking and understanding.

Mrs. Kent continued to share that before the National Board Standards were introduced that she did not use play in her classroom because her classroom was geared towards academics and learning. She did not feel that play supported a student's learning of academic goals. Mrs. Kent had previously stated, "Administration supports play only if it helps increase academics. At my school, we are held accountable for all the things that we do and play is not seen as a tool that will increase my student's achievement as it is not seen as academic. I do not use play in my classroom because my classroom is geared towards academics and learning. And I believe play is geared more towards the non-thinking part of a child's brain."

In contrast, after studying the Early Childhood National Board Standards, Mrs. Kent began to think of how she incorporates play into her classroom according to what she learned. She reflected on the lessons by writing that she now organizes her classroom in a manner that the students feel safe and responsible for their own behavior. She feels that she spends more time planning her lessons to incorporate learning-directed play and uses manipulatives such as dice, counters, stamps, blocks, books, self-directed games and learning puzzles. "The best kinds of materials have more than a single use but can be modified by interaction with others and elaborated with imagination" (Bergen, 2009, p.429). She allows more time for exploration of a new skill through age appropriate activities that match the student's cultural backgrounds, abilities and learning level. Mrs. Kent thought thoroughly about the grouping of her students to ensure their development. She grouped students in multiple ways depending on the activity. She found that the more

the students were able to touch and feel the manipulatives, the better they would learn and retain the information for the future. Mrs. Kent stated that she modeled her expectations while then allowing her students to explore freely in the form of directed play. She stated that "due to the free exploration her students are able to ask one another higher level questions that allow their peers to really think about what they are doing and learning from one another through their play and exploration."

At the conclusion of the lessons regarding play and examination of the incorporation of play within the Early Childhood National Board Standards, Mrs. Kent viewed play in her classroom differently. She stated that she does use play now and that she has found that the students are more engaged and that they are learning at a higher rate. "I can't help but see a positive increase in my students through the evidence in my own classroom when I teach through play. For example, yesterday the students were exploring with sorting. I just sat back and was smiling because they were so engaged; they were so excited to tell me the different attributes that they saw with the materials I put out. And it made me feel like, you know what, this is important to keep doing. I need to keep using play in my classroom on a daily basis and like I said before, I am more confident because now I know there are standards that back up play." Through the use of play she provided time for her students to explore, manipulate and think about the specific topic. Through the use of guided teaching and a lot of exploration centers, her students were able to figure concepts out on their own. "With guidance from an observant teacher, kindergarteners can use play to make sense of the world around them – and lay the critical groundwork for understanding words and numbers" (Curwood, 2007, p.30).

After introduction to play strategies in National Board Standards, Mrs. Kent had a positively changed impression regarding play and how it is used in her classrooms. Mrs. Kent incorporated play in different ways because she learned how to effectively implement play in a way that was more developmentally appropriate and yet followed the standards required to be taught to the students. Mrs. Kent saw that there was support to implement play and that the outcome of this implementation was beneficial to students.

Post-interview responses and surveys show Mrs. Kent scored herself very high in regard to her knowledge of play in relation to the Early Childhood National Board Standards. She also spoke positively about how she now incorporates play into her daily lessons.

In contrast to the reported changes Mrs. Kent's stated responses did not harmonize with what I observed in her post lesson observations. Authority expectations seemed to be an over-riding factor regarding how teachers perceive and report their teaching versus the reality of their teaching. We had spent a semester focused on learning to incorporate play, yet implementation of these strategies were scarce. It is my stance that this difference was due to teacher's fear of incorporating what they feel is best in teaching while trying to meet the expectations of authority.

Through the interviews Mrs. Kent voiced her concern that classrooms are micromanaged and teachers are expected to teach according to the exact specifications of their administrator. Teachers are evaluated in multiple areas and are given scores to indicate their proficiency as a teacher. If a teacher is not seen as teaching according to these prescribed conditions, their score is decreased. Therefore, Mrs. Kent seemed to have an internalized vision of what effective and accomplished teaching is. Her responses seemed to be



given because that was what she thought was expected of her. She wanted to be known as an accomplished teacher.

## **Discussion**

In analyzing results of this study, it clearly showed that she was closer to a novice teacher as she was still struggling with the key piece of honest reflection about her own professional performance. Through practice, an understanding of expectations and careful self reflection, inspired teachers can be developed. Steele describes an inspired teacher as:

“Inspired teachers are inspired learners. They make curiosity their constant companion. They wonder, inquire, read, listen, demand, hypothesize, challenge, and question-themselves and others. Becoming an inspired teacher is a journey that takes years or even decades. It requires both self-analysis and interaction with other skilled practitioners who offer suggestions and support.” (Steele, 2009, p. 230).

Not only does Steele describe an inspired teacher, but this also suggests that children can become inspired learners. Through learning activities when children are able to explore through play and use their thinking to challenge themselves, they are learning through practice and experience. Self-reflection is a skill that teachers are able to aide their students through modeling how to think about what they have done and what they can improve in future lessons. With practice and the support of teachers and peers, students are able to be inspired learners.

The National Board process is a way for teachers to deeply reflect upon their own learning, their student’s learning, and to continue to develop as a teacher. This drastic change does not occur overnight. Many times it does not occur during a year’s time or even longer. Mrs. Kent is similar to many novice teachers in today’s educational society. Early childhood teachers want

to be the best and want to teach in a way that will help to increase student achievement. However, they do not have access to professional development and support which will allow them to accomplish this goal. Novice teachers believe they are teaching in the best form possible and that they are delivering content in a developmentally appropriate way. These participant-teachers may have been introduced to the Early Childhood National Board Standards, but may not have had sufficient time or known how to use the key component of reflection. The teachers could also be viewed as dwelling between local school expectations and mandates and the contradictory stance of early childhood research and the position stated in the Early Childhood National Board Professional Teaching Standards.

The field of early childhood is itself struggling to clarify the work/play learning dilemma. In an effort to differentiate play-based pedagogy in early childhood practice, Ranz-Smith (2011) provided definitions of how strategies can vary across teacher activities, yet, provide a balance between play and work. Similarly, Graue (2011) addressed the same pedagogical issue which confronts early childhood teachers. Ranz-Smith (2011, p.87) shows the different qualities of play, mediated play, mediated work and work in the chart below.

#### Resolving Dilemmas of Research-to-Practice

Teacher's Behaviors	Ignore----Non-Directive----Mediating-----Directive ("Laissez faire", but observing) (emergent, negotiated) (didactic)			
Means	PLAY	MEDIATED PLAY	MEDIATED WORK	WORK
DEFINITION	Undefined	Undefined to Semi-Defined	Semi-Defined to Defined	Defined
PURSUITES	Individual Pursuits Shared Pursuits	Shared Pursuits (Collaborative, Interactive)	Shared Pursuits (Collaborative, Interactive)	Individual Pursuits Shared Pursuits

		Group Times)	Group Times)	
PURPOSE	Fulfill Learner's Expressed Inquiry and Interest	Brief/Debrief PLAY	Brief/ Debrief WORK	Fulfill Teacher's Specific & Appropriate Goal Statements
ACTIVITY	Self-Chosen Tasks Initiated Processes Created Products Expressed Ideas	Modeled Play With Discussions involving Adults and Peers	Modeled Work With Discussions involving Adults and Peers	Assigned Tasks Observed Protocol Created Products Expressed Ideas
NEEDED PREPARATIONS	Safe, Open-Ended Environment and Materials	Materials for Recording Students' Thoughts and Materials for Implementing or Staging of Student Ideas	Plans and Materials to Foster Skills for Literacy, Numeracy, Inquiry in Fun, Engaging Ways	Materials for Direct Instruction and Testing of Student Understandings
INTERACTIONS	Child-Generated and Articulated	Co-Authored and Co-Led by Students & Teachers	Co-Authored and Co-Led by Students & Teachers	Led and Articulated by Teacher
Foundational Expression for all: Ethical and Respectful Minds				

Ranz-Smith (2011, p.89) stated "teachers of the preschools, kindergartens, and early grades can activate play within classrooms in keeping with DAP and in line with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation." To me this means that an equal amount of play and work is necessary to have a balance in pedagogical Early Childhood Education. The balance of play and work allows the children to engage in an activity that is meaningful to them while it is also building their foundation of knowledge of skills and concepts that they will use throughout their educational careers.

Mrs. Kent's teaching most often aligned with the directive teacher behavior and work categories of instruction. Mrs. Kent has a specific goal and purpose in mind with each assigned task. She used specific materials in order

to deliver direct instruction led by the teacher alone. Mrs. Kent is very disciplined to teach with a purpose. To her, paper and pencil activities (eg (“work”) for students) showed concrete evidence of what they know or lack in understanding. This directive approach does not have a balance in what is known about how early childhood students learn best.

As a current kindergarten teacher who understands what the Early Childhood National Board Standards say about play, my classroom falls in the realm providing a combination of mediated play and mediated work. My teacher behavior is mediated as I work with my students to help them develop their own foundation and understanding of concepts. In doing so, my students learn independence and thinking on their own rather than relying on someone else to tell them what needs to be done. With this practice my students are able to work collaboratively and interact in group and partner situations. There is a purpose to each activity as students are learning concrete information in a combination of work and play. This allows the students to enjoy the learning experience while it still embeds mandated content. The students are able to model to their peers and use materials for a specific purpose of recording their thoughts, implementing their ideas and being engaging through inquiry. Teachers work with the students to lead each interaction.

It is my belief that there needs to be a carefully balanced combination of mediated play and mediated work in all Early Childhood classrooms. Too much play or too much work alone will not allow the students to achieve the independent learning and foundation of knowledge they will need to build upon for their future. The balance of mediated play and work allows students to create their own understanding and truly develop their knowledge in the

content areas. At the same time, it allows early childhood teachers to engaged children in attaining meaningful understanding of required content and skills.

In the past decades kindergarten was viewed as a place where children played freely. "Guided by knowledge of human development, kindergarten teachers were interested in children rather than curriculum content" (Graue, 2011, p.1). As accountability arose, demand for content learning also increased in kindergarten. Today's kindergarteners do differ from children in past decades as they are technology inclined and have different interests. The reality is that teachers are now required to focus more on academic achievement and how to get the kindergarteners at this level. The challenge is to do this in a manner that is developmentally appropriate.

As a practicing kindergarten teacher, I strongly believe that we cannot forget the fundamental needs of our kindergarteners. We must remember that although the stakes are high for student achievement, our students are still five and six years old. The paper and pencil worksheets do show evidence in what the students are learning. However, evidence can also be seen through work produced in portfolios or authentic assessments such as journals and projects. Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences differentiates intelligences into various components. Through this theory we know that students learn best in multiple ways and demonstrate their learning through various lenses (8 intelligences) and not just through sedentary work.

Students should be able to learn through play as it is developmentally appropriate. Students will have a stronger interest in the content, make

sense of the learning and be able to showcase their knowledge through multiple means, including journal entries about what they know and learned (Taylor, J., 2010, p.196). The documentation of a “paper and pencil” task is there to show the evidence of learning over time.

Graue (2011, p. 5) describes a hybrid kindergarten classroom. I believe this is what today’s should look like. Kindergarten should have a balance of various groupings with both teacher and student directed activities. Teachers should follow the state mandates of the content required of students to learn. However, the learning should occur in a manner that is developmentally appropriate for the students. Rather than telling children the content and requiring pre-made worksheets to complete, teachers need to design lessons that involve inquiry and exploration. When students are able to come to their own conclusions and learn through an engaging experience, they are better able to grasp and remember the content they learned. This re-defined integration of play and work must be taught to pre-service and practicing teachers. Teachers need to know how to best use and balance mediated play and work in a way that is beneficial to young learners.

While reflecting on the intervention I provided to the teachers in this study to prepare them to understand what Early Childhood National Board Standards said about play and how to use it in classrooms, I utilized the Reflective Prompts as Entry Points. In this graph “teaching is supported by the three components: Essential Knowledge, Critical Dispositions, and Performance” (Standards Continuum Guide for Reflective Teaching Practice 2011, p.11). When I mentored the teachers with regard to play in the Early Childhood National Board Standards I gave a vague overview of the essential knowledge component in play. Teachers came into the learning experience

with their own attitudes and beliefs about play. Although the exposure to National Board Standards did change their mind in regard to play, it was not sufficient. In addition, without a strong knowledge base regarding play and without providing them specific examples mediated play in my classroom, the teachers were unable to create environments in their own rooms in which play was evident.

The teachers were able to reflect on their performance, on essential knowledge and on critical dispositions. At first it seemed that teachers reflected in a way that they thought they “should” respond to me. Further reflection allowed me to see that the teachers honestly did feel they used play in their classrooms and that they incorporated play in a developmentally appropriate way. I attribute this to the interventions I gave in a setting that was not optimal. An optimal environment would require their engagement in the National Board Certification process. In this case, teachers choose on their own to learn about the National Board Standards, embed the standards into their teaching and constantly reflect over a year’s time. NBC candidates have an intrinsic desire to become an accomplished teacher. They know this will ultimately impact student achievement. Rather, the interventions I gave were not teacher driven. The teachers saw a purpose but were not intrinsically motivated on their own.

Ultimately child initiated play is in danger of disappearing from public school kindergarten classrooms, if it has not already done so. What many teachers perceive to be included as play in their daily lessons is far from accurate. Below you will find a table of the average amounts of play I saw evident in the kindergarten classrooms I observed. On a typical day there are 55 minutes out of 395 minutes that offer opportunities for children to play.

Interestingly enough even during the Specials period (Music, PE, Library, Computer) a lot of the time is spent in teacher directed activities rather than in child-initiated play.

#### Actual Play in Kindergarten Observations

Time	Activity	Play? Yes/No	Amount of Play
7:40-8:00	Breakfast/Morning Announcements	No	0
8:00-9:00	Reading Groups	No	0
9:00-10:00	Reading Whole Group	No	0
10:00-10:15	Recess	Yes	15
10:15-10:50	Writing	No	0
10:50-11:10	Lunch	No	0
11:10-11:25	Recess	Yes	15
11:25-12:00	Calendar	No	0
12:00-1:10	Math/Science	Sometimes (varies)	10
1:10-1:40	Specials	Sometimes (varies)	15
1:40-2:15	Homework/Pack Up	No	0

When interviewing Mrs. Kent regarding her post-observation, she believed that play was evident throughout her lesson. Mrs. Kent claimed through her journal log that what she considered her new definition of play was also shown in every math lesson she had taught. She claimed that the length of time play was incorporated was at least throughout half of the lesson. My observation of the lesson showed that materials were used. However it was used primarily in the teacher directive mode and work category. This led me to believe that Mrs. Kent still assumed that by using materials and telling students to explore that she was allowing them to play. In coming to this conclusion, I used the criteria from Ranz-Smith's chart (2011, p. 87) to distinguish play from work.

At the early childhood age children are developmentally inclined to play. Children love to explore and through their exploration they make



meaning of the world around them. It is still true: Children make connections and build a foundation of understanding of many concepts through each child-initiated, free play experience. With the purely academic push in early childhood education, I fear that children will have a gap in their learning and may develop an adverse disposition to school and learning. I sense academic-only curriculum is a dangerous path that seeks to inject too much academic content in ways that is developmentally inappropriate and often inaccessible to children's understanding of child-initiated play.

### **Implications**

This study contributes to a growing body of research around play in early childhood education. Mandates and expectations are raising concerns about a children's academic achievement in kindergarten. This study is meaningful as I show how play is receding but a necessary component in the learning and development of young children. This study undergirds the need for researchers to explore further what practices best prepare young learners for academic success.

Data suggested that authority played a key factor in the exhibition of how teachers presented content and the materials they used in their lessons. Teachers that were classified as novice teachers tended to not display as much positive interaction through both verbal and non-verbal communication and did not allow children to use materials in their own way. Instead these children were guided to use the materials in a way that the teacher expected. The teacher verbalized that they allowed the students to explore. However, there was not much child initiated play. Instead the teacher guided the students to play in a way that she expected them to.

Through the entire data analysis, it has shown that authority impacts teacher's perceptions of play, how play is incorporated in their classroom and how play is initiated. An assumption was made that through experience and as we have authority figures critiquing how we teach, teachers tend to teach according to what is mandated and/or expected rather than finding ways to provide learning activities that are the best developmentally appropriate practice for the students. Overall the data analysis attempted to provide data that showed how authority perceptions impacted how teachers incorporate play in their classrooms.

Teachers need to understand their own teaching. They need to claim authority of their practice and be able to refute authority (in schools) when it does not match learner's needs. This is not a simple task and can be quite frightening for a teacher. However, it is what is necessary to ensure we teach according to how our students will learn best.

A solution to enhance teacher's ability to apply what they know about incorporating child initiated play into learning experiences would be to have on-going professional development training. Within this training teachers would need to first identify what child initiated play is and what it looks like from both the child's perspective and the adult/teacher perspective. The teacher's would then write a script of how they will set up the learning experience with materials and what they will say or do in order to allow the child initiated play occur. After this script is created, the teachers would read it to their colleagues. The colleagues would then offer constructive feedback on how this learning experience could be enhanced or improved. The teachers would then be required to go back into their classrooms and apply the lesson script into their teaching. The teachers would record their teaching

and the students learning experience. After the learning experience, each teacher will then view their video and write a reflection about if they saw child initiated play occur. Finally the teachers will view their colleagues videos and critique what they see in regard to child initiated play. The colleagues will have a discussion about what they saw and what they can adapt in future instruction to ensure that child initiated play occurs. This professional learning experience will enhance the teacher's understanding of how to plan for and accommodate child initiated play.

Authority was also a factor in regard to teacher perceptions. Depending on the activity, interactions among students were impacted. Authority plays a significant role in the aspect of how interactions are made. Authority differentiation was apparent throughout multiple units of analysis. It is important for teachers to experience how to give children responsibility for their own learning. Mrs. Kent assumed that because she had multiple materials and called the students working with the materials exploration, that the students were exploring on their own. Instead, the reality was the students were not exploring. They were using specific manipulatives to complete an objective that Mrs. Kent conveyed. It was difficult for Mrs. Kent to truly allow the students to explore without any type of direction given. Therefore the play aspect in the lessons was more a use of manipulatives to complete the teacher's lesson's objective.

Through the research and interpretations, I reflected upon the biases which may have contributed to the findings of the investigation. One of the biases is that as a teacher who strives to be accomplished, authority is a factor in regard to being taken seriously and to judge how well we teach. Another bias is that in being a researcher, teachers want to be seen as an

accomplished teacher and due to human nature will tend to give idealistic or expected answers in order to be perceived in a high regard. As a practicing National Board teacher, my interpretations may also be biased in the fact that I know the difference between truly using the Early Childhood National Board standards and just conforming to what is expected. Through being an accomplished teacher another possible bias is the way I interpreted reactions and interactions of students in each learning setting and what each verbal or non-verbal communication meant from each person in the situation.

### **Further Research**

Although my findings are not intended to suggest that all teachers perceive the concept of play as not being supported in their Early Childhood classroom, it does indicate that this is a major concern and thought of Early Childhood Educators. I believe my results of this multi-case qualitative study suggests the need for further investigation as to why Early Childhood educators feel a disconnect in the need to implement play in their classrooms.

Further research is also needed to link the various types of play with student learning. Through past research and in my literature review I showed evidence that play is a developmentally appropriate practice for Early Childhood students and that play positively impacts a child's development. However, more in-depth research is necessary to see if each type of play impacts student learning independent of the other types of play. It will also benefit to see how the combination of multiple types of play impacts student learning versus using one type of play independently.

Further evidence needs to be collected on the training that teachers in Pre-kindergarten to third grades receive and what they are taught regarding

play and how to implement play in their classrooms. Research is also necessary to examine once the educator gets into the classroom, what mandates and school administrators state regarding what they expect play to look like or not look like in their classrooms.

Further research is necessary to investigate how many teachers in Early Childhood classrooms believe that play is not supported in their classroom in the form of standards and expectations. Particular attention should be directed towards how play is directly initiated and implemented in the Early Childhood classrooms.

### **Recommendations**

Teacher's perceptions of play-based learning were revealed through this multiple case study. Participant kindergarten teachers expressed support for- and interest in- understanding play in compliance with their state standards. Therefore, educators must first have similar understanding of what play is, how it is incorporated in Early Childhood classrooms and the benefit it has for a child's development both academically and socially.

My recommendation is for teachers to have a clear understanding of what play based learning is and looks like. Although National Board Certification is not mandatory, it is held in high regard in the Education society. Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to review the standards in their academic area. While reviewing the standards, Early Childhood teachers should place a strong emphasis on what the standards say regarding play and the implementation of play in all subject areas.

National Board Certification is a voluntary process. However, the results of achievement of students who are taught by National Board Certified

teachers are higher than those students taught by non-National Board Certified teachers. We all know that most teachers will not go on their own to review the National Board Standards. Therefore it is necessary to have professional development in schools that allow teachers to review these standards and to work in professional learning communities to help them implement what these standards say accomplished teaching is into their own classrooms.

This type of professional development can be done through the involvement of Principals knowing what the Take 1 and National Board Certification is. Take 1 is a professional development in which professional learning communities are developed within a school setting. Each member of the professional learning community will participate in "one preselected video portfolio entry from any of the current certificate areas of National Board Certification. A teacher can later transfer the score if he or she pursues National Board candidacy within two years" (Take 1 Flyer). Through the Take 1 teachers begin to make the connection of how student achievement is directly correlated to the teaching process. Teachers are also able to begin to use the key concept of reflection to better their own teaching. In having this reflection piece a part of daily teaching, teachers will be able to learn how to transfer from a novice teacher to an accomplished teacher. They will be working with teachers in a learning community to better their teaching practice. Teachers will see their knowledge transform and their perception of their true teaching will appear. They will then see and learn to analyze their own perception of their teaching. They will be able to articulate what an accomplished teacher is, what an accomplished teacher knows and incorporates in each teaching lesson.

Principals and school districts should also become aware of what National Board Standards say. With the new Common Core standards that are being adopted and the increase in accountability for teachers, principals and districts in regard to student achievement, it is important to look at the strong correlation between what the National Board standards say in implementing developmentally appropriate practices in conjunction with play and academics within the early childhood classrooms. Principals and School Districts need to understand that there are needs which are unique to students in the early childhood age range. These children require instruction that matches their level of understanding and learning. Early Childhood (Pre-kindergarten to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade) Teachers should be given training to understand that play can be used as a valuable tool for teaching and learning (Stipek & Byler, 1997, p.18).

In addition, Principals and Districts need to work with Universities and teacher preparation programs to align their expectation to what is taught regarding play and developmentally appropriate practices. Universities, Districts and Principals should be on the same page regarding how play in an Early Childhood setting should look. In many states, there are a growing number of second language learners. Therefore, we need to be on the same page while looking at evidence to support how play is conducive to language development in a learning environment. Teachers need to be taught through professional development, how the incorporation of play in all subject areas can be incorporated and valuable to the early childhood student.

Finally, parents need to be aware of the new mandates of teachers. Parents need to be advocates for their child to ensure they are taught according to what is developmentally appropriate as well as ensuring the

quality of their child's education. Parents need to know their child's rights and advocate ensuring their child is getting the education their child is mandated to receive.



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**APPENDIX A**  
**RECRUITMENT SCRIPT**

## **RECRUITMENT SCRIPT**

I am a Early Childhood Education Ph.D. student in Mary Lou Fulton's Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting research to investigate how the incorporation of Early Childhood National Board Standards impacts teacher's perceptions of play and how play is used in their classrooms.

I am recruiting individuals to take part in filling-out a survey, pre and post study interviews, 2- one hour observations and completion of a reflection journal. The survey and interviews should last 15-30 minutes each. The reflection journal should take a maximum of 5 minutes a day for a two month period.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. The observations will be video-taped and the interviews will be audio recorded. If you decide to participate in the study, there will be a consent form for you to sign. In addition, each student in your classroom will also be given a consent form for their parents to sign if they would like them to participate in the observation. During the duration of the study the videotape, audio tape, survey's, journals and all transcriptions will be kept secure in a locked cabinet in Dr. Surbeck (Principal Investigators office.) At the conclusion of the study the audiotape and videotape will be deleted and all written paperwork will be shredded. Your name and student's name will not be used. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (480) ###-####. Thank you,

Shannon Riley



**APPENDIX B**  
**CHILD ASSENT FORM**

**CHILD ASSENT FORM**

I have been informed that my parent(s) have given permission for me to be watched and videotaped learning lessons. I want to watch you learn because I would like to see how your teacher lets you play in your classroom.

You do not need to do anything different. You will do what you normally do when you listen to your teacher. I will visit your classroom two times for an hour each. You will also be videotaped so I can remember what I saw during my visit.

From watching you learn, I may learn something that will help teachers to better teach other children.

You do not have to join this study. It is up to you. You can say okay now and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell us you want to stop. No one will be mad at you if you don't want to be in the study or if you join the study and change your mind later and stop.

Before you say **yes or no** to being in this study, we will answer any questions you have. If you join the study, you can ask questions at any time. Just tell me that you have a question.

Signing here means that you had this form read to you and that you are willing to be in this study.

Signature of student\_\_\_\_\_

Student's printed name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C**  
**TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE FORM**

## TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE FORM

October 17, 2011

Dear Kindergarten Teacher:

My name is Shannon Riley. I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Elaine Surbeck within the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College and Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh within the School of Engineering Matter Transport Energy at Arizona State University. I am conducting research to investigate how teachers using National Board Standards impacts how they incorporate play into their classrooms. I am inviting you to complete the attached questionnaire, which should take approximately 15 minutes of your time. In doing so, your responses will provide information to include in my dissertation as well as help to improve teaching strategies that teachers use in their classrooms.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to skip questions. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty. Please be advised that your responses will remain confidential. The results of this study will only be shared in the aggregate form via reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Dr. Elaine Surbeck, the co-principal investigator, at [esurbeck@asu.edu](mailto:esurbeck@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####, or Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh the co-investigator at [tganesh@asu.edu](mailto:tganesh@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####, or Shannon Riley, the co-investigator, at [Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu](mailto:Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Chair of the

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

Return of the questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate.

Thank you and I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Shannon Riley, M.Ed., NBCT

**APPENDIX D**  
**TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE**

## TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Number\_\_\_\_\_

In considering the statements it is important to remember that you are responding in a way which best describes your thinking about your teaching <i>right now</i> , not how you'd like to be.				
	4= Most of the Time		3= Some of the Time	
	Ever	1=Never	2=Hardly	
1. I value play as a powerful facilitator of growth, development, and learning across all developmental domains.	4	3	2	1
2. I organize and manage safe and inviting environments to promote productive play.	4	3	2	1
3. I provide adequate time for children to engage in play.	4	3	2	1
4. I take age, ability and cultural backgrounds into consideration when selecting materials and equipment for play.	4	3	2	1
5. I use culturally reflective play materials in my teaching.	4	3	2	1
6. I select play materials that can be adapted to different age and ability levels.	4	3	2	1
7. I make necessary accommodations and adaptations for play by children with exceptionalities.	4	3	2	1
8. I provide a variety of equipment and materials that stimulate imagination, language development, independent activity, and social interaction.	4	3	2	1
9. I design play activities that help children process life experiences and understand content across the curriculum.	4	3	2	1
10. I design a dramatic play area that offers opportunities for young children to develop socially, cognitively, linguistically, physically, emotionally, and ethically.	4	3	2	1
11. I design activities in ways that ensure equitable participation for diverse learners.	4	3	2	1
12. I devise learning activities that can be differentiated to accommodate all learning styles.	4	3	2	1
13. I design learning activities that are coherent and connected.	4	3	2	1
14. I design and select activities that move learners from less to more complex levels of thinking.	4	3	2	1
15. I encourage discovery, problem-solving, and critical and creative thinking.	4	3	2	1
16. I use a variety of resources including print and non-print media resources and current and emerging technologies.	4	3	2	1
17. I plan for a variety of flexible grouping strategies, from whole-class to small group, partner and individual activities.	4	3	2	1
18. I find ways to increase children's engagement in learning.	4	3	2	1
19. I help children to develop communication skills, teaching and modeling the importance of listening carefully and responding thoughtfully to the topic at hand.	4	3	2	1

20. I help children to formulate questions, think through their ideas, pose additional questions, unscramble confusions and develop their own hypotheses.	4	3	2	1
21. I facilitate problem-solving experiences that promote children's critical thinking skills.	4	3	2	1
22. I help children to take turns speaking one at a time, listen and repeat what others have said as a means of developing group social skills.	4	3	2	1
23. I group children according to personalities, how they get along and learning styles in order to maximize children's productive engagement in learning.	4	3	2	1
24. I use a variety of strategies to foster children's learning and development.	4	3	2	1
25. I use strategies including explicit and indirect, formal and informal, inductive and deductive, and teacher-directed and child-selected.	4	3	2	1
26. I closely monitor the learning environment and modify or change plans in the moment.	4	3	2	1
27. I am skilled at orchestrating play and helping children to make connections with past ideas, experiences and bodies of knowledge.	4	3	2	1
28. I understand that play enhances all areas of young children's development and learning.	4	3	2	1
29. I provide ample opportunities for various kinds of play throughout the school day.	4	3	2	1
30. I use play as a vehicle for processing emotions and for developing social skills such as cooperation and communication.	4	3	2	1
31. I use play to help children develop cognitive skills, such as perceiving connections among curricular areas, making their first attempts at symbolic representation, solving problems, and developing higher-order thinking skills.	4	3	2	1
32. I am aware of the role of play in social development.	4	3	2	1
33. I help children manage frustration when they play.	4	3	2	1
34. I guide children to use resources in ways that promotes positive outcomes.	4	3	2	1
35. I understand children's creativity and curiosity may lead them to use materials in ways that are novel and unexpected but just as productive as more typical uses. I allow this to occur in my classroom.	4	3	2	1
36. I use materials in flexible and innovative ways.	4	3	2	1
37. I find creative ways to draw on children's imaginations to create resources.	4	3	2	1
38. I establish and maintain constructive procedures for using instructional resources.	4	3	2	1
39. I make certain that children know how to use materials safely, and monitor the learning environment.	4	3	2	1
40. I restate the rules for using particular materials and revisit the reasons for such rules.	4	3	2	1
41. What is your definition of play?				



42. Tell me about your experience using play in your daily lessons.
43. Do you feel supported to use play in your classroom? Why or Why not?
44. Do you feel that the Kindergarten Arizona State Standards include play as a teaching strategy?

**APPENDIX E**  
**INTERVIEWS**

## **INTERVIEWS**

October 17, 2011

Dear Kindergarten Teacher:

My name is Shannon Riley. I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Elaine Surbeck within the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College and Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh within the School of Engineering Matter Transport Energy at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn how teachers using National Board Standards impacts how they incorporate play into their classrooms. I am inviting you to complete an interview with me, which should take approximately 15 minutes of your time.

I would like to audio record the interviews in order for me to review the conversations. You will only be recorded if you give permission. If you give permission to be taped, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped at any time. The audio recording and the transcription will be kept securely in my personal possession until approximately May 31, 2011, at which time the audio files will be permanently erased and the transcriptions will be shredded. In doing so, the interviews will provide information to include in my dissertation as well as help to improve teaching strategies that teachers use in their classrooms.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose to skip questions. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty. Please be advised that your responses will remain confidential. The results of this study will only be shared in the aggregate form via reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Dr. Elaine Surbeck, the co-principal investigator, at [esurbeck@asu.edu](mailto:esurbeck@asu.edu) or (480)

###- ####,, or Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh the co-investigator at [tganesh@asu.edu](mailto:tganesh@asu.edu) or (480) ###- ####,, or Shannon Riley, the co-investigator, at [Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu](mailto:Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu) or (480) ###- ####,.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate within the study:

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

By signing below, you are agreeing to be digitally audio recorded:

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

Thank you and I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Shannon Riley, M.Ed., NBCT

**APPENDIX F**  
**SEMI-STRUCTURED PRE-INTERVIEW**

## SEMI-STRUCTURED PRE-INTERVIEW

Participant Number \_\_\_\_\_

In an effort to gather quality information regarding teacher strategies it is essential to have input from teachers as they reflect upon their own teaching practices. Please feel comfortable to be completely honest as you answer these questions.

1. What is your definition of play?
2. Do you think play is used in typical kindergarten classrooms?
3. Do you use play in your classroom? Why or Why not?
4. What type of play do you use in your classroom?
5. How do you use play in your classroom?
6. In which subject area do you feel you implement play the most? Why?
7. Do you use play on a daily basis in your classroom?

8. Do you feel the Principal and Administration supports play in your classroom? Why or Why not?
9. Do you feel parents support play in the classroom? Why or Why not?
10. Do you feel play positively or negatively impacts a child's academic achievement? Why or Why not?
11. Do you have other thoughts, comments or concerns you would like to add?

Over the next few months we will meet as I introduce you to the Early Childhood National Board Standards and I will help you to become familiar with the standards and observe your classroom teaching. You will be asked to participate in a follow up interview. I would like to take the time to say Thank You for participating in this research study. Your input and participation is valued and appreciated.

**APPENDIX G**  
**SEMI-STRUCTURED POST-INTERVIEW**



## **SEMI-STRUCTURED POST-INTERVIEW**

Participant Number \_\_\_\_\_

In an effort to gather quality information regarding teacher strategies it is essential to have input from teachers as they reflect upon their own teaching practices. Please feel comfortable to be completely honest as you answer these questions.

1. What is your definition of play?
2. Do you think play is used in typical kindergarten classrooms?
3. Do you use play in your classroom? Why or Why not?
4. What type of play do you use in your classroom?
5. How do you use play in your classroom?
6. In which subject area do you feel you implement play the most? Why?
7. Do you use play on a daily basis in your classroom?

8. Do you feel the Principal and Administration supports play in your classroom? Why or Why not?
9. Do you feel parents support play in the classroom? Why or Why not?
10. Do you feel play positively or negatively impacts a child's academic achievement? Why or Why not?
11. Did the Early Childhood National Board Standards change your perception of what play is? Why or Why not?
12. Did the Early Childhood National Board Standards change your perception of the importance of play as a useful strategy for child learning? Why or Why not?
13. Do you have other thoughts, comments or concerns you would like to add?

I would like to take the time to say Thank You for participating in this research study. Your input and participation is valued and appreciated.

**APPENDIX H**  
**PARENT PERMISSION LETTER**

## **PARENT PERMISSION LETTER**

October 17, 2011

Dear Parents of Kindergarten Students:

My name is Shannon Riley. I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Elaine Surbeck within the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College and Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh within the School of Engineering Matter Transport Energy at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn how teachers using National Board Standards impacts how they incorporate play into their classrooms. I am inviting you to have your child participate in activities in the classroom while I observe how the teachers instruct your child. In doing so, the observations I make will provide information to include in my dissertation as well as help to improve teaching strategies that teachers use in their classrooms.

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to have your child not participate, there will be no penalty against you or your child. If you decide to have your child not participate, your child will be sent to another kindergarten classroom during the time that your child's class is observed and videotaped. Please be advised that all observations will remain confidential. The results of this study will only be shared in the aggregate form via reports, presentations, or publications, but neither your child's name or image will be used. Videos will be erased when the study is finished.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Dr. Elaine Surbeck, the co-principal investigator, at [esurbeck@asu.edu](mailto:esurbeck@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####, or Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh the co-investigator at [tganesh@asu.edu](mailto:tganesh@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####, or Shannon Riley, the co-investigator, at [Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu](mailto:Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####. If

you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below, you are agreeing to allow your child to participate and be videotaped during the class lessons:

Your Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

The return of the signed forms will be considered your consent to allow your child to participate. Thank you and I look forward to this process.

Sincerely,

Shannon Riley, M.Ed, NBCT

**APPENDIX I**  
**RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS - TEACHERS**

## **RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS – TEACHERS**

October 17, 2011

Dear Kindergarten Teachers:

My name is Shannon Riley. I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Elaine Surbeck within the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College and Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh within the School of Engineering Matter Transport Energy at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn how teachers using National Board Standards impacts how they incorporate play into their classrooms. . I am inviting you to participate in teaching while I observe the strategies you use to instruct your students as well as how you incorporate play in your classroom. In doing so, the observations I make will provide information to include in my dissertation as well as help to improve teaching strategies that teachers use in their classrooms.

I would like to video record you teaching in order for me to review the interactions, how and when you incorporate play and observe the body language and facial expressions of you and the students. You will only be recorded if you give permission. If you give permission to be taped, you have the right to ask for the recording to be stopped at any time. The video recording and the transcription will be kept securely in my personal possession until approximately May 31, 2011, at which time the video files will be permanently erased and the transcriptions will be shredded. In doing so, the observations will provide information to include in my dissertation as well as help to improve teaching strategies that teachers use in their classrooms.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty against you. Please be advised that all observations will remain confidential. The results of this study will only be shared in the aggregate form via reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Dr. Elaine Surbeck, the co-principal investigator, at [esurbeck@asu.edu](mailto:esurbeck@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####, or Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh the co-investigator at [tganesh@asu.edu](mailto:tganesh@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####, or Shannon Riley, the co-investigator, at [Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu](mailto:Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate within the study:

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

By signing below, you are agreeing to be videotaped during the class lessons:

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

The return of the signed forms will be considered your consent to participate.

Thank you and I look forward to this process.

Sincerely,

Shannon Riley, M.Ed, NBCT



**APPENDIX J**  
**RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS**

**RESEARCHER OBSERVATION**

Observation #:

Purpose of the Observation:

Date:

Location:

Start and Stop Time:

Attendees:

Researcher Role:

Time	Play Incorporated/ Not Incorporated	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

**APPENDIX K**  
**REFLECTIVE JOURNAL FORM**

## REFLECTIVE JOURNAL FORM

October 17, 2011

Dear Kindergarten Teacher:

My name is Shannon Riley. I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Elaine Surbeck within the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College and Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh within the School of Engineering Matter Transport Energy at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn how teachers using National Board Standards impacts how they incorporate play into their classrooms. I am inviting you to participate in keeping a daily reflective journal. In doing so, you will record the date, lesson you taught, length of lesson, if you think you incorporated play, how play was incorporated and how long play lasted in the lesson. Your reflective journal will provide information to include in my dissertation as well as help to improve teaching strategies that teachers use in their classrooms.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will be no penalty against you. Please be advised that all observations will remain confidential. The results of this study will only be shared in the aggregate form via reports, presentations, or publications, but your name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Dr. Elaine Surbeck, the co-principal investigator, at [esurbeck@asu.edu](mailto:esurbeck@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####, or Dr. Tirupalavanam Ganesh the co-investigator at [tganesh@asu.edu](mailto:tganesh@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####, or Shannon Riley, the co-investigator, at [Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu](mailto:Shannon.J.Riley@asu.edu) or (480) ###-####.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact the

Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU  
Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate within the study:

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

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in keeping a daily  
reflective journal:

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

The return of the signed forms will be considered your consent to  
participate. Thank you and I look forward to this process.

Sincerely,

Shannon Riley, M.Ed, NBCT

**APPENDIX L**  
**REFLECTIVE JOURNAL**

**REFLECTIVE JOURNAL**

Date	Lesson Taught	Length of Lesson	Was Play Incorporated? Yes/No	How Was Play Incorporated?	Length Play Lasted

**APPENDIX M**

**INTRODCUTION OF PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD NATIONAL BOARD**

**STANDARDS: STANDARD VI**



**INTRODUCTION OF PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD NATIONAL BOARD  
STANDARDS LESSON PLANS: STANDARD VI**

Standard VI: Managing the Environment for Development and Learning

Managing Play in the Learning Environment

**Attendees Sign in:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Overall Goal:**

By the end of the intervention utilizing Early Childhood National Board Standards, teachers will implement play into their daily lessons and learning activities.

**Weekly Goal:**

By the end of the week, teachers will effectively implement indicators of play from the Early Childhood National Board Standards as measured by their own reflection and research observations of classroom instruction. During this week, teachers will work on demonstrating proficiency in the areas of managing play in the learning environment.

**Meeting Outcome:**

What will I learn? By the end of the meeting, teachers will delve into the descriptors for Managing the Environment for Development and Learning. Specific attention will be given to content knowledge and subject-specific strategies. Teachers will look at "current reality" and determine what changes they would make in their classrooms specific to this standard.


**Standard:**



Accomplished early childhood teachers value young children's play as a powerful facilitator of growth, development, and learning across all developmental domains. Teachers thoughtfully organize safe and inviting indoor and outdoor environments, managing them to promote productive play. Because play has a central role in achieving a balance among the cognitive, emotional, and physical areas of the curriculum, accomplished teachers provide adequate time and space for young children to engage in play.


Accomplished early childhood teachers take into consideration children's ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds when selecting materials and equipment for play. Teachers know that culturally reflective play materials will help young children understand the values of their communities, and teachers are


Careful to avoid stereotypes in all materials. Accomplished teachers select play materials that can be adapted to different age and ability levels because they understand that developmental differences across one year can be vast. Teachers also make necessary accommodations and adaptations for children with exceptionalities. For example, a child with a wheelchair can partner with another child when returning equipment to a shelf or bin. Accomplished teachers provide a variety of equipment and materials that stimulate imagination, language development, independent activity, and social interaction.


Accomplished early childhood teachers provide adequate time, materials, and equipment for large muscle play in order to give children opportunities to express their emotions and to develop muscle strength, coordination and balance. Accomplished teachers equip the play environment with materials from a wide variety of sources: commercial, found, and teacher-made. They select and arrange a variety of materials that allow for a range of uses, from basic to increasingly complex.

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
 <p>Identify Need (10 minutes)</p>	<p><b>Previous Week Documentation:</b> The researcher facilitates the teacher discussion around how teacher’s perceive they use play in their classroom and student work that demonstrates how play impacted students’ engagement, work, and achievement for a high, middle and low students. The researcher helps teachers make connections between the components of play and student mastery. (Current reality and change)</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> The teachers will discuss the current reality of preparing to teach content including play, selecting subject specific instructional strategies, and adapting for age, ability and background. Next week, they will bring back anecdotal descriptions that provide evidence of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How the teachers organized safe and inviting environments that promote productive play.</li> <li>2. Describe how they create their lesson plans, they provide adequate time and space for students to engage in play.</li> <li>3. Describe how they consider their student’s ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds to select</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher Questionnaire</li> <li>• Current Reality and Change Worksheet</li> </ul>

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
	<p>materials for play activities.</p> <p>4. Describe the types of materials they use in their classrooms and how they use the materials to incorporate play into their lessons to stimulate imagination, language development, independent activity and social interaction.</p> <p><b>Identifying the Need:</b> The researcher assists teachers in identifying the critical attributes in Standard VI. Teachers reflect on how they learned and what they enjoyed learning about? in Early Childhood Settings.</p>	
<p> Obtain new learning (15 minutes)</p> <p> <b>Step Out</b> (Explain to teachers this process)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher provides a segment of new learning – Managing Play in the Learning Environment.</li> <li>• Researcher provides a highlighter so the teachers can discuss/highlight the key words of play in the Early Childhood National Board Standards. Compare and contrast what the standard says with how they use it in their classrooms. (This gets the teachers into the standard, reading it and delving into its meaning. Teachers are able to not just read the standard, but also understand how to implement what it is saying into their own teaching.)</li> <li>• Researcher provides theoretical understanding of the targeted teacher skill involving play in their teaching. The teacher makes a connection to the Early Childhood National Board Standards. Researcher will facilitate this section by having teachers re-read the section of the standard that incorporates play independently first, then share important details with a partner and record it on poster paper and finally the pair will join another pair who has been assigned the same section to share key points to be shared back to the group. (Individual, Pair, Pair<sup>2</sup>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighters</li> <li>• Early Childhood National Board Standards</li> <li>• Poster paper</li>   <li>• Reciprocal Teaching poster (predict only)</li> <li>• Manipulatives: Cubes, Marshmallows, Links, Paper Clips</li> </ul>

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher MODELS Subject-Specific teaching strategy - Reciprocal Teaching – predict. Researcher will model this with a measurement lesson. Teachers will “pretend to be their own students by taking the student role for this activity. This is done so the teachers know the expectations of their students and how the Researcher is facilitating the teacher role. Teachers will have time to explore the various manipulatives (animals.) There will be items on the table for children to use in their exploration. (Marshmallows, links, paperclips). Teachers will predict how many items are needed to measure given items. The teachers will learn how to predict based on knowing the size of the manipulatives they are measuring with. Researcher will give teachers specific directions to measure the items with the manipulatives to see how long each item is. Teachers will then explore with various manipulatives to see what items need more or less of specific manipulatives to measure the same item. Teachers will work in partners and/or with their table to discuss the similarities and differences of measuring with various manipulatives.</li> <li>• Knowing the content well is important in also incorporating the appropriate materials. Teachers need to know grade level content as well as knowing the subject specific strategies in order to incorporate specific materials that allow students to play in various ways.</li> <li>• Teachers ask clarifying questions regarding the strategy &amp; application of the strategy.</li> </ul>	
 Develop new learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher probes for deeper understanding:</li> <li>• Researcher facilitates a “reflective” sheet for teachers to complete with partners.</li> <li>• In the “Current Reality and Change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference to key questions to guide their understanding of Teacher</li> </ul>

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
(20 minutes)	<p>Worksheet” teachers will look at 3 descriptors and will discuss their reality in that specific indicator and then will discuss what they would change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Preparing to provide adequate time and space for young children to engage in play.</li> <li>○ Develop or select play materials that stimulate imagination, language development, independent activity and social interaction.</li> <li>○ How to select and arrange a variety of materials that allow for a range of uses, from basic to increasingly complex.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additionally, during this time, Researcher discusses and supports with each teacher who is having difficulty with the reflective questions.</li> </ul>	<p>Content Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current Reality and Change Worksheet</li> </ul>
 Apply new learning (5 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher will model various uses of materials students can use to play for specific content being taught in math.</li> <li>• Teachers will have 4 minutes to write down as many materials and how they anticipate students can use it to stimulate imagination, language development, independent activity and social interaction. Record these strategies on poster paper and share back with the group.</li> <li>• Teachers deliver materials, in their classrooms, which were practiced during development time that address the critical attributes of Managing Play in the Learning Environment.</li> <li>• Teachers will begin to keep a reflective journal of the amount of play incorporated in their math teaching block.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher Reflective Journal</li> <li>• Poster</li> <li>• Markers</li> </ul>


<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
 Evaluate (5 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers are assigned to bring back anecdotal evidence that shows evidence of how play is organized, planned into lessons and developmentally appropriate.</li> <li>• The teacher’s work will be used to frame the next meeting’s learning and reflect on previous meeting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific examples of what teachers can bring in next week to show evidence of success in managing play in the learning environment.</li> </ul>
	<p><i>During the week, all teachers apply the new instructional strategy (Managing Play in the Learning Environment) with researcher support and they will examine student work for evidence of success and making changes to instructional practice as needed.</i></p>	

Adapted from Perry Montoya

**APPENDIX N**  
**CURRENT REALITY AND CHANGE WORKSHEET**

## CURRENT REALITY AND CHANGE WORKSHEET

1. Discuss with colleagues the current reality in each description.
2. Write down your current reality.
3. Discuss what you would like to change to make it more effective.
4. Write down what you discussed you would like to change.

<b>Description</b>	<b>Current Reality</b>	<b>Change</b> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Preparing to provide adequate time and space for young children to engage in play.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Develop or select play materials that stimulate imagination, language development, independent activity and social interaction.</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How to select and arrange a variety of materials that allow for a range of uses, from basic to increasingly complex.</li> </ul>		

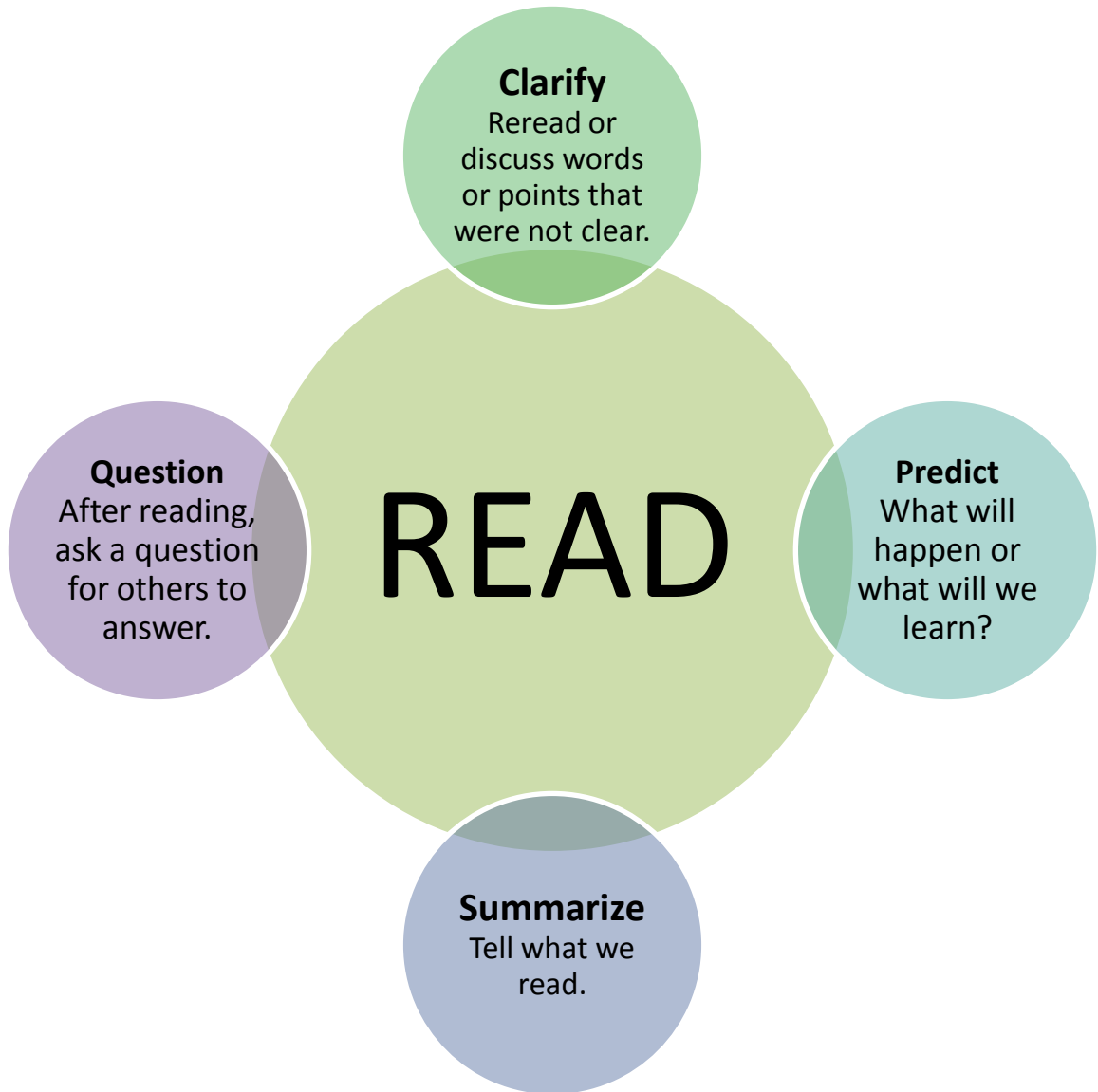
Adapted from Perry Montoya



**APPENDIX O**  
**RECIPROCAL TEACHING POSTER**

## RECIPROCAL TEACHING POSTER

Strategies for Success



Adapted from Soar for Success

**APPENDIX P**

**INTRODUCTION OF PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD NATIONAL BOARD**

**STANDARDS: STANDARD VII**

**INTRODUCTION OF PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD NATIONAL BOARD**


**STANDARDS LESSON PLAN: STANDARD VII**


Standard VII: Planning for Development and Learning  
 Designing and Selecting Activities and Resources



**Attendees Sign in:** \_\_\_\_\_



<p><b><u>Overall Goal:</u></b></p> <p>By the end of the Introduction of Early Childhood National Board Standards, teachers will efficiently and effectively implement play into their daily activities.</p>
<p><b><u>Weekly Goal:</u></b></p> <p>By the end of the week, teachers will effectively implement indicators of play from the Early Childhood National Board Standards as measured by their own reflection and research observations of classroom instruction. During this week, teachers will work on demonstrating proficiency in the areas of managing play in the learning environment.</p>
<p><b><u>Meeting Outcome:</u></b></p> <p>What will I learn? By the end of the meeting, teachers will investigate activities and resources that supports child development, helps children to process life experiences, understand content across the curriculum and opportunities to develop by multiple means.</p>


<p><b><u>Standard:</u></b></p> <p>Since play has a key role in integrating young children’s development, accomplished teachers design play activities that help children process life experiences and understand content across the curriculum. Teachers design a dramatic play area that offers opportunities for young children to develop socially, cognitively, linguistically, physically, emotionally, and ethically. (See Standard VIII- Implementing Instruction for Development and Learning.)</p>
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<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
 Identify Need	<p><b>Previous Week Documentation:</b> The researcher facilitates the teacher discussion around students’ work/teacher structures and how</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poster Boards</li> <li>• Markers</li> </ul>

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
(10 minutes)	<p>managing play in the learning environment affects student learning and instructional time. The researcher facilitates the discussion and helps teachers make connections between the early childhood National Board Standards and the teaching occurring in the classroom.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> The teachers will develop activities and materials help children connect what they are learning to personal experiences, see how the activity relates to other subject areas and how to create opportunities to use play to develop the student’s social, cognitive, linguistic, physical, emotional and ethical understanding. Next week, they will bring back anecdotal evidence of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How they designed a play activity which allows students to make connections to their interests and various subject areas.</li> <li>2. How they designed play to develop the students socially, cognitively, linguistically, physically, emotionally and ethically.</li> </ol> <p><b>Identifying the Need:</b> The researcher will have teachers list play materials that students are interested in and talk about how they can use these materials into the 6 areas (socially, cognitively, linguistically, physically, emotionally and ethically.)</p>	
 Obtain new learning (15 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher provides a segment of new learning – Designing and Selecting Activities and Resources.</li> <li>• Researcher provides theoretical understanding of the targeted teacher skill and provides research on Activities and Materials. The researcher makes a connection to the Early Childhood National Board Standards. Look at the research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard VII: Designing and Selecting Activities and Resources</li> <li>• Highlighters</li> </ul>

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
 <b>Step Out</b> Discuss variety of thinking           <b>Step Out</b> (Explain to teachers this process.)	<p>specifically talking about interests to students, personal connections, materials that accommodate differences in students socially, cognitively, linguistically, physically, emotionally and ethically.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher provides a highlighter so the teachers can discuss/highlight the key words of Designing and Selecting Activities and Resources. (This gets the teachers into the standard, reading it and delving into its meaning. Teachers are able to not just read the standard, but also understand how to implement what it is saying into their own teaching.)</li> <li>• Researcher uses students' interest of animals and how a play activity can be planned to develop the students in the areas of social, cognitive, linguistic, physical, emotion and ethics. Teachers will "pretend to be their own students by taking the student role for this activity. This is done so the teachers know the expectations of their students and how the Researcher is facilitating the teacher role. Teachers will have time to explore the animals. They will be able to use them in any way they will like and also talk with their peers regarding the animals. Teachers will sort animals by attributes and discuss with peers what they know about animals. They will have stories that have pictures of animals around them to use to guide their thinking. The Researcher picked using animals because the Researcher knows her students and knows that they are interested in animals. The teachers will then be guided to create their own story with the animals talking about the animal characteristics. The teachers will then be guided to write a story or draw pictures about what their animals are doing.</li> </ul>	

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher asks clarifying questions regarding the strategy and application of the strategy.</li> </ul>	
 <p>Develop new learning (20 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher probes for deeper understanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How can you incorporate the various levels of thinking through play in a lesson that is challenging to students?</li> <li>○ What is the connection between the Early Childhood National Board Standards and classroom learning?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Teachers ask clarifying questions.</li> <li>• Teachers develop a “road map” on how they will implement the new learning from the Early Childhood National Board Standards on Designing and Selecting Activities and Resources.</li> <li>• Teachers first reflect on what they currently do and investigate if their activities/materials address the descriptors from the Early Childhood National Board Standards. Then, after reflection, make changes.</li> <li>• Additionally, during this time, Researcher discusses follow-up support with each member.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Learning Road Map</li> </ul>
 <p>Apply new learning (5 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers debrief the process, summarize the learning and make plans for application in their classrooms.</li> <li>• Teachers deliver the lessons, in their classrooms, practiced during development time addressing the critical attributes designing and selecting activities and resources.</li> <li>• Take the list from the beginning of the cluster and look at how there can be changes in the low level choices – how can they change them so they address the descriptors of Activities and Materials.</li> </ul>	

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
 Evaluate (5 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers are assigned to bring back anecdotal evidence that shows the incorporation of student interests, integration of subjects and developmentally appropriate practices.</li> <li>The anecdotal evidence will be used to frame the next meeting's learning and reflect on previous meeting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specific examples of what teachers can bring in next week to show evidence of success in Lesson Instruction and Pacing.</li> </ul>
	<p><i>During the week, all teachers apply the new instructional strategy (Designing and Selecting Activities and Resources) with researcher support and they will examine student work for evidence of success and making changes to instructional practice as needed.</i></p>	

Adapted from Perry Montoya



**APPENDIX Q**  
**NEW LEARNING ROAD MAP**

## NEW LEARNING ROAD MAP

1. Brainstorm your thoughts about the questions.
2. Write down your thinking.
3. Discuss with colleagues how you will implement the questions into your teaching.
4. Write down what you discussed how you can implement the questions into your teaching.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Brainstorm</b>	<b>Implementation Ideas</b>
○ How can you incorporate the various levels of thinking through play in a lesson that is challenging to students?		
○ What is the connection between the Early Childhood National Board Standards and classroom learning?		

**APPENDIX R**

**INTRODUCTION OF PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD NATIONAL BOARD**

**STANDARDS: STANDARD VIII**

## INTRODUCTION OF PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD NATIONAL BOARD

### STANDARDS LESSON PLAN: STANDARD VIII

Standard VIII: Implementing Instruction for Development and Learning  
Facilitating Play

**Attendees Sign in:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Overall Goal:**

By the end of the Introduction of Early Childhood National Board Standards, teachers will efficiently and effectively implement play into their daily activities.

#### **Weekly Goal:**

By the end of the week, teachers will effectively implement indicators of play from the Early Childhood National Board Standards as measured by their own reflection and research observations of classroom instruction. During this week, teachers will work on demonstrating proficiency in the areas of managing play in the learning environment.

#### **Meeting Outcome:**



What will I learn? By the end of the meeting, teachers will be able to demonstrate proficiency in Presenting Instructional Content by identifying critical attributes of play and planning how to implement them in their classrooms.


#### **Standard:**


Accomplished early childhood teachers understand that play enhances all areas of young children's development and learning, and they provide ample opportunities for various kinds of play throughout the school day. Teachers help children use play as a vehicle for processing emotions and for developing social skills such as cooperation and communication. Accomplished teachers also use play to help children develop cognitive skills, such as perceiving connections among curricular areas, making their first attempts at symbolic representation, solving problems, and developing higher-order thinking skills.



Accomplished early childhood teachers are aware of the role of play in social development. They understand the ways in which play can help children begin to deal with issues of justice and fairness, and they know that play provides opportunities for children to practice generosity, fairness, tolerance, understanding, and other key social-development traits. Accomplished teachers help children manage frustration when they play. If a game does not work out the way a child wants it to, an accomplished teacher can help the

child distinguish between a disappointment that needs to be accepted and an injustice that should be remedied.

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
 <p>Identify Need (10 minutes)</p>	<p><b>Previous Week Documentation:</b> The researcher facilitates the teacher discussion around student work and how activities and resources that supports student interests, integration of subjects and developmentally appropriate practices.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b> The teachers will learn how to facilitate instruction by allowing students to learn through play to enhance their social and cognitive skills. Next week, they will bring back anecdotal evidence of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The various opportunities they provided and types of play in their math block.</li> <li>2. How they used play to help students understand symbolic representation, solve problems and develop higher-order thinking skills.</li> <li>3. How they used play to help students deal with issues of fairness, frustration (sharing) and social development.</li> </ol> <p><b>Identifying the Need:</b> Teachers will put together a "teacher stick figure" with the necessary components of implementing instruction through facilitating play for development and learning (sort). Teachers will then discuss their thinking about their thinking process (metacognition). Is how a teacher presents content critical in student development and learning and ultimately student achievement?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sticks w/aspects of presenting instructional content (baggie w/relevant &amp; irrelevant sticks, teacher head &amp; halo)</li> </ul>
 <p>Obtain new learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher provides a segment of new learning – Facilitating Play. "If we have identified a need in how we present instructional content, let's look at critical attributes of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighters</li> <li>• Early Childhood National Board Standards- Standard VIII</li> </ul>

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
<p>(15 minutes)</p> <p></p> <p><b>Step Out</b> (Explain to teachers this process)</p>	<p>presenting instructional content. Attributes are the characteristics that we associate with something or someone. Critical are those pieces that are absolutely necessary.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher provides theoretical understanding of the targeted teacher skill and provides research on Implementing Instruction for Development and Learning. The researcher makes a connection to the Early Childhood National Board Standards. Look at the research specifically talking about interests to students, personal connections, materials that accommodate differences in students socially, cognitively, linguistically, physically, emotionally and ethically.</li> <li>• Researcher provides a highlighter so the teachers can discuss/highlight the key words of Implementing Instruction for Development and Learning (This gets the teachers into the standards, reading it and delving into its meaning. Teachers are able to not just read the standard, but also understand how to implement what it is saying into their own teaching.)</li> <li>• Researcher MODELS the descriptors of Implementing Instruction for Development and Learning in a lesson on facilitating play. Model students working in groups with manipulatives and how students possibly fight with one another. Show how teachers can assign roles for students to hold themselves accountable for their actions. EX: Learner, material distributor, stays on task student, etc.</li> <li>• Teachers ask clarifying questions regarding the strategy and application of the strategy.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher probes for deeper understanding:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher involved in</li> </ul>

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
 <p>Develop new learning (20 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do you decide on the type of materials to use in your lesson?</li> <li>○ How can you provide multiple opportunities for play throughout the day?</li> <li>○ How can you use play as a way for students to develop social skills?</li> <li>○ How can you use play to help students solve problems and develop higher-order thinking skills? What types of play will you use?</li> <li>○ How can you prepare students to manage their frustrations and disappointment in play activities?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teachers develop a “road map” on how they will implement the new learning from the Early Childhood National Board Standards on Facilitating Play</li> <li>● Teachers may practice the application of facilitating play in a specific lesson/content area.</li> <li>● Additionally, during this time, Researcher discusses follow-up support with each member. (Initials – follow-up with each teacher)</li> </ul>	<p>discussion/learning</p>

<b>STEPS</b>	<b>Activities</b> What will I do?	<b>Materials</b> What will I need to bring with me?
 <p>Apply new learning (5 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers debrief the process, summarize the learning and make plans for application in their classrooms.</li> <li>• Teachers deliver the lessons, in their classrooms, practiced during development time addressing the critical attributes of Motivating Students.</li> <li>• Teachers answer the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do you decide on the type of materials to use in your lesson?</li> <li>○ How can you provide multiple opportunities for play throughout the day?</li> <li>○ How can you use play as a way for students to develop social skills?</li> <li>○ How can you use play to help students solve problems and develop higher-order thinking skills? What types of play will you use?</li> <li>○ How can you prepare students to manage their frustrations and disappointment in play activities?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher has questions to ask during the summary of learning.</li> </ul>
 <p>Evaluate (5 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers are assigned to bring back evidence that demonstrates the impact of facilitating play on student achievement, types of play used, and how it impacted students socially and cognitively.</li> <li>• Brainstorm with teachers what this could look like.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain anecdotal evidence of learning they need to bring back.</li> </ul>
	<p><i>During the week, teachers apply the new instructional strategy (Facilitating Play) with researcher support and they will examine student work for evidence of success and making changes to instructional practice as needed.</i></p>	

Adapted from Perry Montoya



## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Shannon Riley is a current Elementary School teacher, National Board Certified teacher and University Instructor. Shannon earned a B.A. in Elementary Education, Masters of Curriculum and Instruction: English as a Second Language, and is a Ph.D. Candidate in Early Childhood Education specializing in Teacher Education at Arizona State University.

