
TEACHING LITERACY THROUGH PLAY: PERSPECTIVE FROM FILIPINO EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

The role of play is critical to the learning process in early childhood education settings. International researches indicate the advancement of children's learning when engaged in active play. However, little research has been conducted in the Philippine settings on the use of play in teaching literacy in elementary education classrooms. This small qualitative study explored teachers' conceptualizations of play in the literacy teaching and learning process in Alambre Elementary School, Toril, Davao City. The study addressed three research questions: what are the perceptions or experiences of elementary school educators in regard to the use of play as a medium of delivering instruction to advance literacy? what kinds of plays do teachers think are suited to advancing literacy? and what programs can teachers do to improve literacy skills among elementary learners? Data was obtained through ten (10) live one-on-one, one-hour in-depth interviews from teachers in an elementary public school institution. Analysis of the data revealed that teachers agree on using play as a tool in teaching literacy concepts. Furthermore, different kinds of play were enumerated addressing the different aspects of children's development. These teachers showed the use of play in their current approach in teaching, showed knowledge in play with literacy and development and different kinds of play used in their classroom.

Keywords: Play, literacy, Filipino elementary teachers, childhood, teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

In early childhood education settings, the role of play is considered critical to children's learning. Research indicates that active engagement in play results in the advancement of children's learning, making play an integral part of early childhood programs also affirms play as a primary means for the expression of ideas, feelings and beliefs in early childhood settings. Combined with this centrality of play in early childhood education is the importance of acquiring language and literacy skills. Individuals with higher levels of literacy have better opportunities for social and economic success.

In the Philippines, as part of that country's attention to UNESCO's Education for All goals, there has been a focus on early childhood education. However, there has been little research undertaken on early childhood education in the Philippines. In light of this context, we suggest that understanding how Filipino early childhood teachers view play, literacy and the place of these in children's learning is important.

An early childhood education setting should be a place where children discover a love for learning through a variety of play experiences. Current research shows how play has changed and even been eliminated in many early childhood settings. The benefits of play are crucial to allowing a child to develop appropriately. Children's early years should be about fostering and developing their curiosity through a wide variety of play experiences. Understanding why play is important in early childhood development allows individual to understand the true meaning of play. The history of play has changed and decreased throughout the decades. This decrease in free play has caused children to struggle academically. Through daily play, young children are able to gain valuable life experiences through a variety of roles that will support growth and ultimately translate into necessary adulthood skills. According to research, play is an essential aspect of the development; key skills including social, behavioral, language, and cognitive are all experienced through play opportunities. These skills developed through play as young learners will grow into adulthood. Families, educators and administrators need to become advocates for the importance of play for early learners.

Pursuant to the "Kindergarten Education Act of 2012" (Republic Act No. 10157) and the K to 12 law on the "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013" (Republic Act No. 10533), Kindergarten education provides equal opportunities for all children to accessible, mandatory and compulsory kindergarten education that effectively promotes physical, social, cognitive, and emotional skills stimulation and values formation offered to all five (5)- year old Filipino children to sufficiently prepare them for Grade One. It is highlighted in the said laws that "Kindergarten education is vital to the development of the Filipino child for it is the period when the young mind's absorptive capacity is at its sharpest".

Section 3c of the Republic Act 10157 of 2012 states that "Kindergarten education shall be understood in the Act to mean one (1) year of preparatory education for children at least five (5) years old as a prerequisite for Grade 1", which is adopted in item III 6A of DepEd Order No. 47, s. 2016 – Omnibus Policy on Kindergarten Education and item #2 of

DepEd Order No. 20, s. 2018. Kindergarten education aims to make education responsive to the needs, circumstances, and diversity of learners, schools, and communities using developmentally-appropriate and culturally-sensitive practices. It is anchored on the principles of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) which immerses the learners in meaningful experiences thru engaging play-based, and child-centered activities. The Mother Tongue of the learner shall be the primary medium of teaching and learning.

Age qualification for Kindergarten learners in both public and private schools should be five (5) years old by June 1 of every calendar year. However, the school may consider learners entering Kindergarten who will turn five (5) years old by the end of August on the condition that the Philippine Early Childhood Development (ECD) Checklist must be administered to the learner prior to the start of the opening of the school year, to ensure that the learner is capable of meeting the expectations of the grade level. Parents may provide documentation and/or certification of the learner's previous Early Childhood Education (ECE) experiences (i.e., preschool, day care, pre-Kindergarten) in addition to the results of the Philippine ECD Checklist.

For schools commencing their school year beyond June, the requirement that Kindergarten learners should be five (5) years old by June 1 and the extension period ending on August 31 shall be adjusted. For schools commencing their school year in July, Kindergarten learners should be five (5) year sold by July 1 and the extension period shall be until September 30. For schools commencing their school year in August, Kindergarten learners should be five (5) years old by August 1 and the extension period shall be until October 31."

This study includes specific and clearly defined instructional goals and objectives regarding content coverage, classroom activities and their corresponding learning materials. According to the National Kindergarten Curriculum Guide for Teachers, the aim of kindergarten education is to develop children in all domains of learning development, cognitive, physical, emotional and social, preparing them for the high demands of formal education at school. Section 2 of the Kindergarten Act of 2010 described Philippine's kindergarten curriculum as focused on 'school readiness'.

In this context, where school readiness is considered key to early childhood education, space for children to play can be overlooked in the everyday work of the classroom. In the review of literature section we note some of the research about the importance of play for literacy learning in the early years.

This study investigates Filipino teachers' ideas about the use of different kinds of play in their classrooms and how they perceive play as important, or unimportant, in teaching literacy. This study will first present an introduction to the place of early childhood education in the Philippines; it will then briefly discuss some literature in the field of play and literacy. Finally, the study presents the research and discusses the data generated.

The study involved teachers of Alambre Elementary School of Alambre, Toril, Davao City of kindergarten to grade 6 levels. Learners from these grade levels are into play and their teachers, and other adults are also into play as participants and observers of play.

This study examined kindergarten teachers' experiences, perceptions and conceptualizations of the importance of play in the literacy teaching-learning process in early childhood education settings in the Philippines.

Specifically, this study investigated on the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of elementary teachers to the use of play as a medium of delivering instruction to advance literacy?
2. What kinds of play do elementary teachers think are suited to advancing literacy?
3. What programs or projects can teachers do to improve play to advance literacy skills among elementary learners?

The importance of early childhood education in the Philippines was recognized with the passage of Early Childhood Care and Development Law enacted in 2000 (UNESCO Philippines, 2019). The National Coordinating Council for the Welfare of Children was then established as a requirement of this Law.

This council oversees a range of issues related to the delivery of services for young children and their families, including regulation, resourcing and monitoring. Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is delivered through center-based, home-based, school-based and clinic-based services. Provision of these services falls within the remit of the Department of Social Work and Development as the agency responsible for early childhood education (Early Childhood and Family Policy Series N°4, 2002). On January 20, 2012, Republic Act No. 10157, otherwise known as the Kindergarten Education Act, was approved by the Philippine Government under the Department of Education.

The Kindergarten Education Act integrated kindergarten as part of the existing elementary education system, which forms part of the larger K-12 basic education system. Section 2 of the Kindergarten Education Act further states that the provision of mandatory kindergarten education should promote the development of children across all aspects, in preparation for formal elementary education. This is in accordance with the Philippines' progress towards accomplishing their Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015. Teachers in Philippine kindergartens are mandated to use the National Kindergarten Curriculum Guide for Teachers (DepEd Memorandum No. 25, s. 2012).

Play creates a zone of proximal development in a child. During play, children tend to behave above their average age and above their daily behaviors. When children are given opportunities to play, the child improves in every developmental aspect (Berk, 2021). The ideas of the Russian developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky, who early in this century forged an innovative theory granting great importance to social and cultural experience in development (Berk, 2021). His research supports the idea that adults and peers naturally scaffold young children's play while nurturing situations that allow creativity and imagination throughout the preschool years and into early childhood. Vygotsky believes that play has two critical frameworks that when integrated together during playtime play an important role in early development (Berk, 2021). First, all representational play creates an imaginary situation that allows children to fulfill subliminal desires, such as playing in a parenting type role with a doll. Vygotsky believes that fantasy play occurs when children learn to postpone gratification of impulses. During fantasy play children realize that certain desires will remain unsatisfied during play situations (Berk, 2021).

As young learners age, acquire new skills and experiences they begin to be able to adjust to situations accordingly much easier. As they learn to adjust through play, such as taking turns and other socially accepted behaviors. Other important behaviors learned through play involve safety, respect for property, self-care (such as hand washing) and learning everyday routines. Vygotsky's research also indicates that imaginary play allows children to fulfill desires not satisfied in real life. Imaginary and representational play contains rules for behaviors that children must follow to successfully act out the play scene: "Whenever there is an imaginary situation, there are rules" (Berk, 2021). A child cannot behave in an imaginary situation without rules. Imaginary situations during play allow rules to organically support the play appropriately. According to Vygotsky, "play supports the ability to separate thoughts from actions and objects as well as the capacity to renounce impulsive actions in favor of deliberate self-regulatory activity" (Berk, 2021).

According to Education Sciences Journal, when asked to define play, children ages 3 and 4 described play as an activity that involved their participation in doing something, being with peers, and having agency and ownership of ideas. Play is a universally known concept and observed as a fundamental requirement for children's development. Many young children associate play as a recognizable activity that extends over their lifespan, from early childhood experiences into adulthood, and across a variety of cultures (Theobald, 2019). Play is most often associated within an educational setting, fostering the development of cognition, social development. Play is a critical element of early childhood curriculum standards. Play influences growth in social emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Allowing children to play encourages students to gain communication skills that allow them to communicate needs and emotions, as well as sharing prior knowledge of the world around them while gaining new experiences. Play is motivating and free of expectations.

Play is an essential part of early childhood development. Play contributes to cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being of young children. Allowing children time to play provides an opportunity for parents to engage with their child. Unfortunately, due to family's hectic lifestyles, young children are experiencing a reduction in the amount of playtime allowed. According to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, play should be a daily occurrence and is right for every child. Many children are being raised in an increasingly hurried and high-pressure lifestyle that limits child-driven play. Every child deserves the opportunity to develop to their own unique potential, and the opportunity to play is an integral role in reaching that potential (Ginsburg, 2021).

Children, who are provided opportunities to play, tend to use their creativity while continuing to develop their imagination, dexterity, as well as physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is essential to brain development. It is through play that children begin to engage and interact with the world around them, while being able to create and explore the world they are able to master and conquer their fears. As children begin to master the world around them, they begin to develop new competencies that can lead to enhanced confidence and resiliencies that they will need to face future challenges (Ginsburg, 2021).

When young children have the opportunity for undirected play, this opportunity allows children to learn how to work in a group together, to share, negotiate, resolve conflicts, and learn self-advocacy skills (Ginsburg, 2021). When the play is allowed to be child driven, children practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest and are able to ultimately engage fully in the passions of their choice. "Perhaps above all, play is a simple joy that is a cherished part of childhood". Play also helps young children build active, healthy bodies and lifestyles.

A survey conducted by the National Association of Elementary Principals found that 96% of surveyed school systems had at least one recess period, but nearly a decade later around 70% of students had one recess period. Currently, many school age children are given less free time and fewer physical outlets throughout the school day (Ginsburg, 2021). Because students have experienced a decrease in free time, implications on the child's ability to store new

information has also decrease. Reduced time for daily physical activity is a major contributing factor to the disconnect occurring in academic abilities especially between boys and girls (Ginsburg, 2021). This drastic decrease is in response to the No Child Left behind Act of 2001, by reducing time committed to recess, the creative arts and even physical education teachers have more time to focus on reading and mathematics. This extreme change has shown many implications on children's ability to store new information. Children's cognitive capacity is enhanced by clear-cut significant change in activities. Between 1981 and 1997, the amount of time children spent playing had dropped by 25%. During this same time period, children ages 3- 11 lost twelve hours a week of free time and spent more time at school, completing homework, and shopping with parents.

Teachers need to focus on providing necessary materials that will spark a child's interest. It is important for early educators to remember that the purpose of preschool is to encourage children to explore, wonder, create, fail, discover, manage conflicts, solve problems, try, persevere, help, and learn to love to learn through a variety of experiences through play. Teachers need to reflect on their own experience with learning and providing play experiences in their classroom (Saracho & Spodek, 2019). There is a variety of appropriate approaches that are often implemented in an early childhood setting. One of these approaches is teacher-based instruction. This approach focuses on teaching specific skills sets to children. As best practices and new research are discovered and shared, many early childhood programs have begun to develop student-centered and play- based instruction, in place of teacher-directed instruction (Saracho & Spodek, 2019).

In classrooms where student-centered instruction is occurring, students become involved in the investigation and discovery of their own knowledge and learning (Coolahan, Fantuzzo, Mendez & McDermott, 2020). Students in student-based classrooms become active participants in cooperative learning. Student-center learning is similar to play-based learning and overlap in a variety of aspects. Many preschool programs implement play-based learning because the primary focus is on the individual child's play and learning. This type of learning allows the child to build and extend their prior knowledge and experiences, as they are able to interact with their environment. Play-based learning allows students to create, adapt, explore, experiment, learn, communicate, socialize and problem solve in a familiar environment with peers and individually (Vygotsky, 1978).

Sjoedrma (2019) conducted a study in several Midwestern schools, that included a group of early childhood educators; preschool teachers, transitional kindergarten teachers and kindergarten teachers, as well as elementary administration. The survey was sent to twenty-five schools and forty-two educators responded to the survey. The participants that responded were thirteen preschool teachers, and three preschool administration, five transitional kindergarten teachers, thirteen kindergarten teachers and eight elementary administrators. Fifty-seven percent of the participants have eleven or more years of teaching experiences, twenty-one percent have five to ten years and, 9.5% have three- to five-year experience.

This study was designed to determine the attitudes and beliefs towards play-based instruction in preschool. The surveys were based on the three early childhood teaching approaches; teacher-directed instruction, student-centered instruction and play-based instruction. There were twenty-four statements on the survey. Eight of the statements were teacher-directed, eight were student-centered, and eight were play-based. All answers were analyzed and compared within each grade specific group. Results of the play-based statements was 57% of educators strongly agreed that hands on learning experiences are best for students and should be used 90% of the time. The best learning environment must promote discovery and exploration agreed 76.92%. Students learn best through, tasting, touching, smelling, hearing and seeing according to 54%, the best learning activities are guided by student interest according to 50% of participants. Fifty percent agreed that students, rather than teachers should find their own answers to their own questions. Student's experiences are essential to build understanding 57% agreed with this statement (Sjoedrma, 2019).

Play-based instruction and student-center instruction overlap. Many preschool classrooms are specially geared towards play-based instruction where play is the focus. This teaching method allows children to learn cooperatively with their peers, the teacher is a facilitator and guide to individualized learning, while allowing children to be directly involved in their own discovery and knowledge (Sjoedrma, 2019).

An influential scholar named Maria Montessori was an Italian educator who believed that play is "child's work," meaning that children are working when they are learning to eat with utensils. They are playing when they are provided the opportunity to create their own utensils out of a variety of materials (wood, glue, string, tape). In many preschool classrooms, center time is also called work time. When children are learning a variety of new skills, they are at work. When children are building knowledge, values, and additional skill sets this is considered work (Elkind, 2021). According to Elkind, play truly becomes play when the activity of play has no other aim except for the sole pleasure of the activity. Researchers know that play builds stamina for future life skills. Play can also become a form of therapy for many young children, using materials for outlets when language skills are lacking. Using a toy to

release feelings of frustration does not mean that the child will grow up to have anger issues rather that the child has found a productive way to express their emotion. These types of actions are not considered play because the actions have a deliberate goal where real play does not have any goals attached to the action.

The availability of time and space for play is decreasing due to the increasing use of technology. According to studies conducted by Pathways, Social changes and new technologies have greatly affected the way children play and the amount of free time they are given. Children's playtime continues to decrease because of these new technologies; thirty percent of all American kindergarteners no longer have recess time. Children between the years of 8 to 10 are spending eight plus hours a day engaging on a variety of different media devices; seventy-one percent of children have technology available in their bedrooms. Researchers have found that children under the age of thirteen spend less than thirty minutes outside a week. Only twenty percent of all US homes are located within a half-mile of a park, and ninety-four percent of parents' express safety concerns with their child playing outside. Between 1998 and 2019, the amount of time children spent playing dropped by twenty-five percent. During this time period, children ages 3-11 lost twelve hours of free time and spent more time at school, completing homework, and shopping with parents.

Teachers must also have a realistic view on how play should look in their classrooms. In order for teachers to become effective play-based teachers, it is important for each teacher to connect with their own experiences with play. Sandberg, Samuelsson and Pramling (2021) conducted a study with a group of preschool teacher's exact number unknown, asking the preschool teachers to relate their personal play experiences to students play experiences than and now. The researchers asked teachers to recall their memories of play as a child, perceptions of children play today and compare their own childhood experiences as well as their classroom perspectives. Groups of teachers were interviewed during this study. Many of the teachers believed that children's play today is no different from the play that they experienced. They believed that the play is expressive and may look different during a variety of situations. All teachers need to understand the value of play. All children want and need play.

Play is fun! It is an important part of child development. Children's play usually comes naturally, but for some, the concept of recreation needs to be enhanced, guided, or taught. This important occupation builds strength, balance, coordination, motor planning, cognitive development, and important social skills in young children. Socially, play works on building confidence, problem resolution, turn taking, sharing, frustration tolerance, waiting, and about fifty other important skills.

The basis for learning is through play age and stage by stage. There's a reason why early childhood education is centered around play as a learning tool. It's through pretend play, use of toys, and interaction with others that the work of the child is developed.

Mildred Parten's Six Stages of Play

Parten proposes that children develop or learn skills in steps through play. Mildred Parten-Newhall's play theory was part of her dissertation in 1949. Through observing young children, Parten Newhall created a framework for understanding how children's play becomes more complex as they age. Of course, when I say complex, I do not mean to diminish the incredible brain development of infants and toddlers. Their play may seem simple, but they are actually soaking in all the information about the world around them that they will then apply to more complex play.

Infants and young toddlers are focused on their own sensory experiences. As they grow, their play becomes more social and interactive with peers. Other theories look at overall play as a mechanism for learning, relying on culture and social skills. The Six Stages of Play are:

1. Unoccupied play. This stage is typically babies and toddlers. They are relatively still, and their play is scattered. Children in this stage of play are typically exploring their environment, trying to make sense of their surroundings and their own environment.
2. Solitary play. This type of play occurs when children entertain themselves without any other social involvement. Children in this stage might not notice others around them. This worries adults, however this is a normal stage of development. Worry is warranted when a child does not move past this stage to engage socially with others. Solitary play allows children to explore, master new skills, and practice before adding a difficult social element.
3. Onlooker play. Children in this stage learn by watching others play. They are people watchers and this is a tool in their own learning. This is a natural stage of development where information is gathered about materials, social play, and their environment. These are the children who often look as if they are not learning, then suddenly sing all of the songs once they get home.
4. Parallel play. Children in this stage play near each other, but not with each other. It can seem as if they are playing together, however they are often playing the same type of game, but not interacting socially. Again this is a

normal stage of development to be learned and moved through. Read about the development of parallel play in more detail.

5. Associative play. This is the shift from playing near another person, to engaging with them. Children start to become interested in the other players, and test the waters by engaging with them. This is not the final stage, as it is not organized and perfected yet.
6. Cooperative play. The last stage is about cooperative play between people. Interestingly, much of the play between young learners is anything but cooperative! Part of the learning involves conflict, turn taking, sharing, disagreements, learning the rules, reading body language, and social cues. During this stage, young learners may need guidance in understanding and navigating critical social skills.

These are stages of play development, however learners do not always move in the same direction as their peers, or stay in one stage. A well-developed child who is mastering cooperative play, may often find themselves being an onlooker at times, or engaging in parallel play. Adults do the same. This is expected, as long as learners are mastering all of the stages rather than becoming “stuck”.

2. METHODOLOGY

An interpretative and descriptive qualitative research is the design of this study. A qualitative study was undertaken because this technique allows researchers with ways and means to consider different views of the research subject (Miller & Glassner, 2019) therefore producing rich, in-depth and elaborate data. This study of the teacher’s conceptualization of the use of play in literacy teaching and learning in their classroom would give the avenue for the teachers to speak out their ideas and opinion on their respective teaching styles.

All the participants hold a university or college qualification, a bachelor degree in elementary education or a secondary education degree. All participants were experienced teachers, with teaching license, having each taught for between 7-18 years, holds a regular status in teaching position, and resident of the locality or nearby barangay. Ten (10) teachers are involved in this study.

All teachers were either teaching in Kindergarten or any of the elementary grade level in Alambre Elementary School at the time of the interviews. Children in these classes are aged four to twelve years.

An in-depth interview method was used because it allowed the researcher the chance to gather original and firsthand information from the respondents, observe the different body language and expression of the respondents and do follow up questions and inquiry of their given statement. A semi-structured interview strategy opted as it gave the researcher the opportunity to make follow up question and ask for further explanation on the respondent’s statement. Though an interview protocol was set and, the follow-up questions mentioned are for purposes of clarification or further explanation. As such it will also be advantageous in gaining additional data needed.

Each teacher took part in a single one-to-one interview lasting between 40 to 60 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and then reviewed and approved by the teachers. The researcher also took written notes during the interviews. Teachers were asked about the children’s play in their classroom, the views of the teachers regarding the effect of this play on children’s literacy, and the teacher’s perception on the use of playing in literacy teaching.

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The interviews were analyzed through extensive reading for emerging themes; the themes were then coded and further analyzed to make sense of the data. A key theme emerging from the interview data addressed the kinds of play the teachers used and valued in their teaching of early literacy. The final phase in the interview design process is that of interpreting the data that was gathered during the interview process. During this phase, the researcher must make “sense” out of what was just uncovered and compile the data into sections or groups of information, also known as themes or codes (Creswell, 2013, 2019). These themes or codes are consistent phrases, expressions, or ideas that were common among research participants (Kvale, 2019). How the researcher formulates themes or codes vary. Many researchers suggest the need to employ a third party consultant who can review codes or themes in order to determine the quality and effectiveness based on their evaluation of the interview transcripts (Creswell, 2019). This helps alleviate researcher biases or potentially eliminate where over-analyzing of data has occurred. Many researchers may choose to employ an iterative review process where a committee of nonparticipating researchers can provide constructive feedback and suggestions to the researcher(s) primarily involved with the study. Among qualitative analysis methods, thematic content analysis is perhaps the most common and effective method. It can also be one of the most trustworthy, increasing the traceability and verification of an analysis when done correctly.

3. RESULT

Perceptions of elementary teachers in the use of play as a medium of delivering instruction to advance literacy Filipino teachers use play to promote literacy learning. The teachers drew on dominant developmental discourses to describe the social, emotional, physical and intellectual benefits of play, especially in terms of the children's literacy learning. They used different kinds of play as a mode or tool for literacy teaching and learning. These different kinds of play were described and categorized by the teachers as: active play, exploratory, manipulative or construction play, music play and dramatic play, or cooperative play.

Kinds of play elementary teachers think are suited to advancing literacy We are dedicated to fostering diverse forms of play through our educational play environments. These encompass key categories of play such as physical, dramatic, sensory, nature, music and art, age-appropriate play, functional, symbolic, construction, games with rules, solitary, and parallel plays. These varied play experiences are essential for children as they actively contribute to the promotion of meaningful learning opportunities, aiding in the development of language, motor skills, social interactions, emotional intelligence, and cognitive abilities. The positive outcomes of these developmental milestones are visibly reflected in the classroom, resulting in enhanced academic performance and increased concentration levels.

Programs or projects to improve play and advance literacy skills among elementary learners The following were shared by the teachers: learning through play, play pedagogies, key enabling factors, and playful pedagogies combined with facilitation types.

Analysis

This study was based on qualitative understanding aiming to identify the experiences or perceptions, kinds, and programs encountered in play to deliver instructions to advance literacy by elementary teachers and their opinions about the reasons for improving implementation of play. Ten (10) teachers were involved in the study and were coded as Teacher 1 to10.

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Teachers need to focus on providing necessary materials that will spark a child's interest. It is important for early educators to remember that the purpose of preschool is to encourage children to explore, wonder, create, fail, discover, manage conflicts, solve problems, try, persevere, help, and learn to love to learn through a variety of experiences through play. Teachers need to reflect on their own experience with learning and providing play experiences in their classroom (Saracho & Spodek, 2019). There is a variety of appropriate approaches that are often implemented in an early childhood setting. One of these approaches is teacher-based instruction. This approach focuses on teaching specific skills sets to children. As best practices and new research are discovered and shared, many early childhood programs have begun to develop student-centered and play- based instruction, in place of teacher-directed instruction (Saracho & Spodek, 2019).

In classrooms where student-centered instruction is occurring, students become involved in the investigation and discovery of their own knowledge and learning (Iowa Core, 2020). Students in student-based classrooms become active participants in cooperative learning.

Student-center learning is similar to play-based learning and overlap in a variety of aspects. Many preschool programs implement play-based learning because the primary focus is on the individual child's play and learning. This type of learning allows the child to build and extend their prior knowledge and experiences, as they are able to interact with their environment. Play- based learning allows students to create, adapt, explore, experiment, learn, communicate, socialize and problem solve in a familiar environment with peers and individually (Vygotsky, 1978).

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thirteen kindergarten teachers and eight elementary administrators. Fifty-seven percent of the participants have eleven or more years of teaching experiences, twenty-one percent have five to ten years and, 9.5% have three to five year experience. This study was designed to determine the attitudes and beliefs towards play-based instruction in preschool. The surveys were based on the three early childhood teaching approaches; teacher-directed instruction, student-centered instruction and play-based instruction. There were twenty-four statements on the survey. Eight of the statements were teacher-directed, eight were student-centered, and eight were play-based. All answers were analyzed and compared within each grade specific group. Results of the play-based statements was 57% of educators strongly agreed that hands on learning experiences are best for students and should be used 90% of the time. The best learning environment must promote discovery and exploration agreed 76.92%. Students learn best through, tasting, touching, smelling, hearing and seeing according to 54%, the best learning activities are guided by student interest according to 50% of participants. Fifty percent agreed that students, rather than teachers should find their own answers to their own questions. Student's experiences are essential to build understanding 57% agreed with this statement (Sjoedrma, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to investigate and compare the attitudes and beliefs about play-based instruction in a preschool classroom, among a variety of early childhood professionals (Sjoedrma, 2019). The results of this study were aligned with current research on beliefs on play-based instruction. Kindergarten teachers and elementary administrators have mixed beliefs. Pressure from state standards as well as stress of meeting all teaching requirements influenced how Kindergarten teachers responded. An academic shift where kindergarten has become more academically rigorous and teachers may have felt that preschoolers were not academically ready for kindergarten.

The results showed agreement on student-centered statements among all participants. Play-based instruction and student-center instruction overlap. Many preschool classrooms are specially geared towards play-based instruction where play is the focus. This teaching method allows children to learn cooperatively with their peers, the teacher is a facilitator and guide to individualized learning, while allowing children to be directly involved in their own discovery and knowledge (Sjoedrma, 2019).

An influential scholar named Maria Montessori was an Italian educator who believed that play is "child's work," meaning that children are working when they are learning to eat with utensils. They are playing when they are provided the opportunity to create their own utensils out of a variety of materials (wood, glue, string, tape). In many preschool classrooms, center time is also called work time. When children are learning a variety of new skills, they are at work. When children are building knowledge, values, and additional skill sets this is considered work (Elkind, 2021). According to Elkind, play truly becomes play when the activity of play has no other aim except for the sole pleasure of the activity. Researchers know that play builds stamina for future life skills (Elkind, 2021). Play can also become a form of therapy for many young children, using materials for outlets when language skills are lacking. Using a toy to release feelings of frustration does not mean that the child will grow up to have anger issues rather than the child has found a productive way to express their emotion. These types of actions are not considered play because the actions have a deliberate goal where real play does not have any goals attached to the action.

4. DISCUSSION

The availability of time and space for play is decreasing due to the increasing use of technology. Social changes and new technologies have greatly affected the way children play and the amount of free time they are given. Children's playtime continues to decrease because of these new technologies; thirty percent of all American kindergarteners no longer have recess time. Children between the years of 8 to 10 are spending eight plus hours a day engaging on a variety of different media devices; seventy-one percent of children have technology available in their bedrooms. Researchers have found that children under the age of thirteen spend less than thirty minutes outside a week. Only twenty percent of all US homes are located within a half-mile of a park, and ninety-four percent of parents express safety concerns with their child playing outside. Between 1998 and 2018, the amount of time children spent playing dropped by twenty-five percent. During this time period, children ages 3-11 lost twelve hours of free time and spent more time at school, completing homework, and shopping with parents.

Teachers must also have a realistic view on how play should look in their classrooms. In order for teachers to become effective play-based teachers, it is important for each teacher to connect with their own experiences with play. Sandberg, Samuleson and Pramling (2021) conducted a study with a group of preschool teacher's exact number unknown, asking the preschool teachers to relate their personal play experiences to students play experiences then and now. The researchers asked teachers to recall their memories of play as a child, perceptions of children play today and compare their own childhood experiences as well as their classroom perspectives. Groups of teachers were interviewed during this study. Many of the teachers believed that children's play today is no different from the play

that they experienced. They believed that the play is expressive and may look different during a variety of situations. All teachers need to understand the value of play. All children want and need play.

Lynch (2019) conducted a study on kindergarten teacher's views on play-based instruction. This study compares findings from an ethnographic study of seventy-eight discussions boards about play in kindergarten. The results of this study support previous research that kindergarten teachers feel pressures to solely focus on academic goals which has led many kindergarten classrooms to limit and eliminate play (Lynch, 2019). Many kindergarten teachers shared that they valued play-based instruction, but due to the pressures of the required state standards as well as meeting additional requirements many kindergarten teachers felt this method could not be used in their classroom. Kindergarten has become more academically rigorous and teachers feel additional pressures to prepare children for required standardized testing (Bowdon, 2019). Many kindergarten classrooms have eliminated play. The focus has shifted from developmentally appropriate play to focusing on academic proficiency. With pressure from state and district to have 80% of students be proficient. Current research has proven that play is learning, and has multiple effects on early development (Bowdon, 2019). "Play lets children engage in extended interactions that build oral language, imagination, critical thinking, and social skills. And, recent evidence suggest that, at least for some skills, playful learning is more effective for producing student learning than direct instruction" (Bowdon, 2019).

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