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# Examining the Development of Literacy Through Play

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Examining the Development of Literacy Through Play

by

Rachael Doberstein

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State  
University of New York at Brockport in partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Science in  
Education

### Abstract

This study explores the ways in which children develop literacy skills through play, and investigates the teacher's role in this literacy related play. Specifically, it focuses on the ways that preschool children develop literacy through free play and structured play, and how the level of teacher involvement in this play affects the children's literacy development. This study took place over a nine week period, focusing on three preschool age focal children during observations of the children's play sessions in the preschool room of a daycare located in and affiliated with a church in a rural town in Western New York. The collected data included field notes, interviews with children, and transcripts of videotapes.

Findings suggest that children do develop literacy skills through both free play and structured play, and that the level of teacher involvement in the children's play affects the children's development of literacy skills. Many different types of play and play contexts are conducive to the development of literacy skills in preschool children. Recommendations for future research include exploring how literacy-related play differs for children of different ages, genders, or socioeconomic statuses, investigating how the addition of reading props affects literacy-related play, and observing the children's free play after teacher-directed play activities to determine if those activities would have any impact on the literacy-related play activities in which the children would engage in during free play.

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### Chapter One: Introduction

*Me: What do you think happened next, Ben?*

*Ben: He dumped his Valentines in the puddle.*

*Me: Ben thinks he dumped his Valentines in the puddle. Oh no! (to another child)*

*What do you think comes next?*

*Child: He got stuck. He was stuck in the mud puddle.*

*Me: He was stuck in the mud puddle. Sam, what do you think happened next?*

*Sam: He got pulled out.*

*Me: Oh, Sam said he got pulled out. Who pulled him out?*

*Katie: The white truck.*

*Sam: What? That's the mail truck. He doesn't have...*

*Me: Oh, what kind of truck would pull him out?*

*Sam: A digger!*

*Me: Maybe a digger.*

*Sam: Maybe a digger put his tray down and picked him up. Or maybe he stopped  
right*

*here and maybe the thing went under and he lifted up.*

The preceding vignette is an excerpt from a conversation between me, the researcher, and a group of preschool children as they created their own Valentine's Day story.

### Problem Statement

As we have been driven to a more standards based system of education, the role of play in the classroom has been greatly reduced in favor of skills based instruction. There have been many studies indicating the importance of play in child development, and linking play to social,

emotional, and cognitive benefits for young children (Christie, 1991; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2001; Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002; Liu, 2008; Morrison, 2003; Paley, 2004; Piaget, 1962; Roskos & Christie, 2007; Vygotsky, 1966; Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004). There is also evidence to show that play deprivation in early childhood can have a negative impact later in a child's life (Frost, et al.). As a substitute teacher, I have been in many classrooms in which play is not prominent activity in the classrooms, and often is used as a part of a reward/punishment system. I have also had the opportunity to work in a private daycare setting in which I have been able to witness firsthand the importance of play for young children. There is much research on the link between play and the development of emergent literacy, in particular, with several studies indicating that play contributes to the development of a broad range of literacy skills (Christie, 1991; Isenberg & Quisenberry; Liu; Morrison; Roskos & Christie; Zigler, et al.). As play has been shown to be valuable to child development throughout history (Frost, et al.), it is important for teachers to find a way to incorporate play into their early childhood classrooms within the framework of current educational policies.

### **Significance of the Problem**

There continues to be an achievement gap among early childhood students from low socioeconomic statuses (SES) (Neuman, 2006), and the gap is widening (Reardon, 2011). Since play has long been viewed as the root of literacy learning, beginning with theorists Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1967), and as there is much evidence supporting play as being advantageous to literacy development, it may be worth examining play as a way to bridge this gap in early childhood classrooms. The implementation of policies such as No Child Left Behind and Reading First has placed a strong emphasis on teaching literacy skills to young children, resulting in an increase in skills-based instruction and a decrease in the amount of time set aside

for play (Zigler, et al., 2004). With so much evidence demonstrating the use of play as a vehicle for the development of young children, particularly in the area of literacy, during a time in which the frequency of play in the early childhood curriculum is currently declining, it is important for teachers to understand how to incorporate play into their classrooms in an effective and efficient way (Saracho, 2004; Walker & Spybrook, 2011) so that it can be viewed as a valued practice in the education of young children (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Since literacy is everywhere, it is important for students to develop adequate literacy skills. The new Common Core Standards have been created as a way to help make sure that students are college and career ready when they leave school and a part of that plan has included more rigorous literacy standards (Common Core Standards, 2010). Literacy encompasses not only reading and writing, but listening, viewing, and speaking as well. In the introduction to the Common Core English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, the characteristics and skills of a person who is literate in today's world are described, "In short, students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language" (Common Core Standards, 2010, p. 3). It is important then that as teachers we make sure that our students are reaching these standards and that we begin at an early age. As play has long been used as a way to help children develop literacy skills (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1967), incorporating play into learning may be a viable method to help children meet the new Common Core Standards.

In this study I have examined two research questions: 1) How do children develop literacy skills through play? and 2) What is the teacher's role in literacy related play? In a time

when teaching literacy is so crucial and when play is losing its place in the classroom, it is important for early childhood educators to understand how to use play to promote literacy growth effectively, and to understand their role in this play.

### **Study Approach**

This study was conducted using a qualitative, ethnographic research approach. As a participant observer in a church daycare setting in a rural town in Western New York, I observed and interacted with preschool age children during play. I observed the children's literacy behaviors during play, what influences those literacy behaviors, and how the teacher contributes to these literacy behaviors during play. My study was divided into three separate parts. During the first section I observed the children in an environment with few literacy-related props or materials, and with little input from the teacher. In this way, I was able to observe the children's natural tendencies to incorporate literacy into their play. During the second part of my study I provided the students with a more literacy-rich environment, with little teacher input as I observed the ways in which the children incorporated literacy-related materials into their play with little guidance. The third part of my study involved more literacy-related teacher support during play so that I could observe the effects that this support had on children's literacy development, as well as which supports were effective in promoting literacy growth. I collected my data through the use of field notes of observations, interviews with three focal children, and transcripts of videotapes. I used this data to determine how the ways in which play is structured contributes to the development of emergent literacy, as well as to determine what the teacher's role in play should be in order to promote the development of emergent literacy skills.

**Rationale**

Throughout my undergraduate and graduate coursework I heard over and over again that there are many benefits of play for young children, and through my graduate coursework especially the benefits that play has on emergent literacy were pointed out. I did not find it clear, however, how it is that we as teachers are supposed to structure play, if at all, to promote the development of early literacy skills. Similarly, as a daycare teacher I often found myself wondering what my role is in preschool play. Should I intervene with more structure during free play, or should I simply allow children to learn from one another? Is free play or more purposeful, structured play more conducive to early literacy acquisition? In determining how children develop literacy through play and what the teacher's role is in literacy-related play, I was also interested in learning if children have any natural tendencies toward incorporating literacy into their play. Are there literacy-related behaviors that children naturally exhibit that a teacher could incorporate into instruction? Do children benefit from a literacy-rich environment without teacher support, or is that support necessary for literacy development?

I am also hoping through my study that I can begin to explore and develop the skills necessary to become a lifelong classroom researcher. It is important to me that I am continually asking questions about my students and determining the methods of teaching and learning that work best for them. Through this study I am hoping to gain the knowledge and experience that I need to be able to inquire and investigate in my classroom on a daily basis.

**Summary**

The world of education is one that is continually changing. The acquisition of early literacy skills is seen as essential for students even earlier in their educational years. Although the many benefits of play have been explored and demonstrated throughout history, this mode of

learning has been pushed aside in recent years in favor of a more skills-based curriculum. With a widening achievement gap and evidence of the benefits of play in literacy development (Neuman, 2006; Reardon, 2011), it is important that teachers continue to use play in their classrooms, but that they do so in a way that acknowledges the requirements of a standards-driven world. Through observations of three preschool children in a daycare setting, this study examined the ways in which children develop literacy through play, and the teacher's role in literacy-related play to help educators better understand how to promote children's literacy development. This study not only helped me to become a better researcher, but the results give teachers a clearer understanding of how to promote literacy development through play.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Much research that portrays the connection between play and literacy and the benefits of teacher involvement in sociodramatic play. However, less research has been conducted to learn about how play influences literacy experiences and how literacy experiences influence play, or how teachers should be involved in literacy-related play. Common themes have been revealed in the research conducted over the past twenty years regarding play and literacy. The following literature review discusses important research and findings in the following areas: the connection between literacy and structured play, the connection between literacy and free play, and the teacher's role in literacy development through play.

### **Connection Between Literacy and Structured Play**

Some studies report on the development of literacy skills in structured play settings (Boyle & Charles, 2010; Peck & Virkler, 2006; Welsch, 2008). Welsch investigates the positive effects of book-related pretend play on children's development of literacy skills. Peck and Virkler explore the connection between the development of literacy skills and Reader's Theatre. Boyle and Charles discuss the use of socio-dramatic play in the development of a child's writing skills.

Welsch's (2008) study explores book-related pretend play among 33 four-year-olds in two veteran preschool teachers' classrooms. Over the six-week period one fantasy book was introduced each week, along with props to accompany the story. Both teachers read the book and introduced the props on Monday and read the book aloud again during each remaining day of the week. The book and a prop set were then available to the children during pretend play. A daily log was kept by the teachers to record which students played with the props, and Welsch

observed in each classroom three mornings each week, listening during the read-aloud sessions, tape recording play sessions, and taking notes at the book-related play center.

Welsch (2008) found that the students engaged in eight book-related pretend play behaviors of two types, play within text and play beyond text, and that every child in the study participated in book-related pretend play. This meant that all the children were able to experience the benefits associated with pretend play. For example, the texts provided a script for play within text, allowing less skilled or less experienced students to be able to participate in book-related play. Play beyond text allowed students to expand the original story by adding new elements. Welsch found that the stories and the props provided a foundation for the students' play, and provided a scaffold for making extensions beyond the story as well as creating a personal meaning from the text. Welsch also found that students' development was connected to these book-related play behaviors and later experiences with books and reading may be positively affected by these behaviors.

Reader's Theatre is another way to provide a more structured play experience for children by engaging children in a fun and motivating literacy-related play activity. Peck and Virkler (2006) performed a study in which they extended the idea of Reader's Theatre to have their students create a shadow-puppet theater. The study took place over three weeks in a rural second-grade classroom. The students worked in groups to collect facts and information about a symbol associated with Flag Day. They then created their own shadow puppets and developed a play to be performed at the school's Flag Day assembly to teach other students about their Flag Day symbol. Student reading levels, strategy use, and fluency were evaluated at the beginning and the end of the study so that progress could be monitored. Virkler, the classroom teacher, and Peck, a university professor, kept reflective journals during the study and made audio recording

of the students and a video recording of the student performance. The researchers also collected artifacts for their data analysis such as graphic organizers, scripts, and the puppets that the students made.

A comparison of the assessments given to the students at the beginning and end of the study indicated that the students made gains in fluency, comprehension, decoding skills, and oral reading confidence (Peck & Virkler, 2006). An increase in expressive reading, the amount of time that students spent reading, and the variety of purposes for reading was also observed. Due to the repeated readings of their script as they practiced for their performance, the students were able to become more fluent and confident readers. The second grade students were able to include characterization, setting, sequence of events, voice, and dialogue into their own scripts based on examples provided earlier in the study. The puppets encouraged literacy development as they allowed students to get creative and move beyond the limitations posed by human performance. The puppets also provided the children with a way to safely and confidently convey their meaning, as well as allowed them to build upon their scripts by adding a visual feature.

The process of gathering information about their symbols and creating a script helped students to develop comprehension skills as they had to gather and understand the information they used to find facts about their symbols (Peck & Virkler, 2006). The project allowed the students to take control of their own learning as they had to turn to their classmates and teachers for clarification of content or expectations. This was a highly motivating activity that provided students with a meaningful way to become immersed in many different kinds of literacies. The project even prompted them to independently create additional puppets and scripts.

Play can provide a supportive environment for emergent writers to further develop their writing skills. Boyle and Charles (2010) explore the use of socio-dramatic play to support a

beginning writer. The subject of their study was a five-year-old boy, Daniel, from a Liverpool school who began the study as a pre-alphabetic speller. The study took place over five 25-30 minute sessions. The researchers made observations and analyzed Daniel's behaviors during the sessions as well as the work that he produced. At the beginning of sessions one, two, and three, Daniel was introduced to a character that he then drew and created a story around. During sessions four and five Daniel expanded on the stories of the characters from sessions two and three.

The analysis of the data indicated that Daniel's writing progressed over the five sessions, with evidence of writing development between each of the sessions. Through socio-dramatic play Daniel was able to learn that writing represents the spoken language, and he was able to begin to demonstrate the ability to map sounds to the correct written phonemes. This student centered activity was based on fun and enjoyment, allowing Daniel a good environment to further develop his literacy skills.

### **Connection Between Literacy and Free Play**

Some studies report on the ways that literacy develops from play in a free play setting (Cohen & Uhry, 2011; Elizabeth Grugeon, 2005; Han, 2007; Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Rowe, 2007). The following studies indicate the connections between literacy and free play in relation to book related dramatic play (Rowe), the play environment (Neuman & Roskos), individual differences in play styles (Han), block play (Cohen & Uhry), and outdoor play (Grugeon).

Rowe conducted two related studies regarding the book-related dramatic play. The first nine month study took place in a preschool twice a week with 16 two- and three- year-old children. Data was collected using field notes, video recording, and through the collection of artifacts. Rowe was a participant observer and assumed the role of assistant teacher during her

time at the preschool. She observed and guided the children's play at the many different play centers, particularly at the book center where she was frequently stationed. Rowe's second study was a 13 month home-based case study of her son Christopher, who was two at the start of the study. Through field notes of her observations, Rowe had the opportunity to record literacy events in a variety of settings, including both indoor and outdoor play, car rides, doctor visits, and bath time (Rowe).

The results of the two studies revealed several patterns in the types of children's book related play. Rowe found that through their play the children made connections between books and related toys and props, had personal responses to books, assumed the role of characters while reading, reenacted books, discovered the author's meanings, examined characters, and made personal inquiries based on the books.

The play environment can have an effect on how children engage in literacy-related activities during play, as demonstrated in a study by Neuman and Roskos (1990). To determine how a literacy-enriched play environment affected children's literacy behaviors during play, the researchers rearranged two preschool classrooms serving 37 four- and five-year-old children. Before any changes were made, the children were observed during their free time on four occasions for a duration of ten minutes. The researchers recorded each child's actions and language during this time. During four other sessions, play activity was videotaped for thirty minutes in the housekeeping, book corner, and art/drawing areas. After the two rooms were rearranged, the researchers again observed and videotaped the children using the same procedures.

Out of 37 play frames that were analyzed from the data, 7 took place before any changes were made to the classrooms, and the 30 took place after. After the play environment was

enriched, literacy in play became more purposeful, more situated, more connected, more interactive, and more role-defined (Neuman & Roskos, 1990). The results of the study indicated that a literacy-enriched play environment allows children a meaningful context for exploring reading and writing, and allows them to extend upon what they already know.

In a later study by Neuman and Roskos (1997), the researchers looked at the ways in which authentic contexts and social interactions with peers affected children's emergent literacy learning. The seven month study involved thirty 3- and 4-year-old children who were a part of an Even Start program intended to serve children from non-English speaking or low-income homes. Neuman and Roskos, together with the three classroom teachers, began by rearranging and altering the children's play environment by taking into consideration four design factors: organization, familiarity of objects and operations, meaningfulness of activity, and social resources. When finished, the play setting included a post office area, a restaurant area and a doctor's office area. Several remote control cameras and microphones were located near the three play areas to capture the students' play. In addition to videotapes, data was collected through observations by the researchers and weekly conversations with the classroom teachers and the telecommunications specialist.

The results of this study came from a three part analysis conducted by the researchers. The first analysis revealed five critical features of literacy in practice, including the presence of people, feedback from others, access to tools and related supplies, multiple options for activity, and problem-solving situations. The second analysis revealed that children brought context-specific knowledge to literacy-related events in these authentic settings, and that, using literacy to assist them, the children used strategies to problem solve within these settings. The third analysis showed that the children enhanced their literacy knowledge and understanding using six

strategy domains: sharing information, making transactions, authenticating information, remembering, making choices, and organizing activity. According to this study, children exhibit authentic reading and writing behaviors before they receive formal instruction.

Han (2007) conducted a study designed to see how individual differences in children's play styles might influence their play preferences in literacy-enriched play settings. In this study two child characteristics, play style and literacy ability, were considered, and three environmental factors, play settings, teacher interaction, and literacy activities, were explored. This study was conducted in two phases, the first of which focused on identifying the focal children from the pool of 58, low-income three- to five-year-olds from four Head Start preschools in the Southwest. Four focal children, (one low-literacy dramatist, one high-literacy dramatist, one low-literacy patterner, and one high-literacy patterner), were observed for four months during the second phase of the study.

Differences were observed in the children's choice of play setting. Patterners spent more time at the block and computer areas. Surprisingly, they also spent a significant amount of time at the sociodramatic play area, although they may not have been engaged in dramatic play while there. Dramatists spent more time at the art and dramatic play centers than the patterners. The high-literacy dramatist also had more interaction with the teachers during literacy activities.

Lastly, differences in proximal literacy activities were also found between dramatists and patterners. During free play, both dramatists participated in interactive reading with teachers or peers, while patterners did not. The patterners preferred to read alone and also engaged in more emergent reading activities, such as reading environmental print (Han 2007). Dramatists also exhibited narrative activity, while patterners did not.

In their study, Cohen and Uhry (2011) specifically focused on block play and its connection to emergent literacy development. During their 18 days of observing nineteen 4-year-old children in a preschool in the northeastern United States, the researchers voice recorded, photographed, and interviewed the children to understand how different levels of symbolism were used in their block play, and how they used blocks to name and portray meaning about their own experiences (Cohen & Uhry).

The 77 block structures that were analyzed in the study were categorized as second level, real world symbolism, or third level, imaginary symbolism. Seventy-four percent of the structures were labeled as second level symbolism while twenty-six percent were labeled as imaginary symbolism, showing that the children were representing mostly real life experiences in their block play. The researchers also found evidence of emergent literacy tendencies in block play as children used language and symbols to convey meaning, thoughts were separated from the objects during block play, and the children engaged in “memory, recall of factual knowledge, communication, and the ability to represent meaning” (Cohen & Uhry, 2011, p.85). This study also noted the impact of popular culture on emergent literacy development in young children, with seventeen percent of the block structures observed in the study dealing with elements of popular culture.

Literacy development can take place not only in the classroom, but on the playground as well. Elizabeth Grugeon (2005) reports on work done by a group of 70 student teachers at a university in England as the student teachers examined the effect of children’s informal language outside of the classroom on literacy development in the classroom. The student teachers’ research took place over 40 playgrounds. The student teachers observed, took field notes, videos,

and photographs of the children, and conducted interviews with the mainly four- to nine-year-old students.

The results of the student teachers' research indicated that the playground is a rich environment for the development of emergent literacy skills, and that careful observation of students' literacy behaviors on the playground gives teachers a basis for developing their classroom instruction (Grugeon, 2005). The student teachers observed dramatic play and role play among the students that involved complicated dialogue and the use of a complex vocabulary. They were also able to see that the children were able to create meaning using multiple modalities. The playground also provided the perfect environment for children to participate in this imaginative play on their own, away from the direct presence of an adult.

Like Cohen and Uhry (2011) in the study previously discussed, Grugeon reported that the student teachers also found that popular culture played a large role in students' literacy development through play. They observed the children participating in imaginative reconstruction of games based on popular toys as well as textual appropriation and manipulation of popular media texts. Through observation, some of the student teachers were able to see that the range of texts students are exposed to outside of school can be incorporated into teaching. The children were also observed playing with language by imitating the type of language that would be used by the judges and contestants of a popular reality show.

Based on the results of the preceding studies, free play supports the development of literacy skills in children as they participate in different types of literacy-related free play. The development of their literacy skills through free play is affected by the differences in children's learning styles, children's social interactions during play, and the environment in which they engage in free play.

### **The Teacher's Role in Literacy Development Through Play**

It is important to recognize the teacher's role in supporting literacy development through play. In the Neuman and Roskos (1990) study described above, the teacher's role was to create a literacy-enriched environment to facilitate children's literacy-related play. The researchers began their redesign of the play environment by dividing each of the play centers to distinguish them from one another. They also increased labeling and created play centers that reflected the children's own experiences to encourage creative literacy behaviors. Literacy props were also added to the play environment based on several considerations, including appropriateness, authenticity, and utility of the props. Through these careful considerations for play environment design, the researchers saw an increase in the number of literacy related activities, as well as more purposeful and sustained activities.

In a six-month study conducted in a kindergarten class at Levinski Teachers College in Tel-Aviv, Israel, Korat, et al. (2002) explored the teacher's role in literacy development through sociodramatic play. The researchers examined 32 middle class children, ages 3.5 to 6.5, 30 of whom were born in Israel and spoke fluent Hebrew. The three researchers used observations, field notes, anecdotal records, photographs, and collected samples of children's emergent writing to gather and analyze their data.

Two sociodramatic activities were described in the report of the study, the first of which described two children playing in the office corner of the classroom. In this activity the teacher started the play experience by asking the children, Gal and Roy, to find her a nanny for her baby. The children asked the teacher a series of questions related to the expected responsibilities of the nanny, and the teacher walked away to another group of children. Gal and Roy soon left their office to talk to the teacher because they forgot some of the information the teacher had told

them. She asked Gal and Roy if there was a better way to remember the information without having to leave the office to ask her, which prompted the children to write down the information. When Gal presented the problem that she did not know how to write all of the words, the teacher asked her if there was another way she could record the information, prompting Gal to draw pictures to help her remember. The researchers' analysis of the interaction between the teacher and the children in this case resulted in the finding that the children were able to feel satisfaction in using symbols to convey a message because the teacher was able to set up the play situation, provided them with information they needed to carry out the activity, and appropriately scaffolded them in their zone of proximal development by asking an essential question. Her main concern was to understand the play, and she helped them move forward without pushing them to engage in formal writing, which she felt they were not quite ready for (Korat, et al., 2002).

In the second sociodramatic activity described, a group of children were pretending to work at a grocery store (Korat, et al., 2002). The teacher in this situation acted as a guide. She was able to affect the kind of solutions the children developed to fix their problems by "bringing focus to the communication issue", and helping them to look at alternative possibilities. By using what they already knew about grocery stores, the teacher was able to help the children discover that writing can help to solve problems. For example, when the teacher asked one of the boys in the study, Shalom, why he was shouting that his store was open, he responded that no one was coming to the store. The teacher asked Shalom how you usually know a store is open. A boy listening nearby, David, suggested that they put a sign on the door, notifying customers that the store was open. By bringing the children's attention to the fact that shouting was not the most effective means of communication in this situation, she was able to help them discover that writing a sign was a more efficient way to solve their problem. Overall, the study found that the

teachers can aid literacy development through play by using children's interests and what they already know to guide children while allowing them to work out their own solutions.

Saracho (2004), in her five month study, more specifically identified six different roles that teachers assume during literacy related play. She observed and videotaped five kindergarten teachers' interactions with their classroom children during play. Based on transcripts from videotapes and her observations, Saracho determined that teachers assume the roles of Constituent, Promoter, Monitor, Storyteller, Group Discussion Leader, and Instructional Guide of children's learning. As a Constituent, the teacher participates as an equal member of the literacy activity with the children. As Promoter, the teacher uses the children's interests and needs to select props, stories, dialogue, and other resources to assist the children in understanding the concepts being taught. As Monitor, the teacher guides the children's learning by making sure they are learning the appropriate concepts. As Storyteller, the teacher reads or tells a story and asks the children questions to encourage the children to become engaged in the story. As Group Discussion Leader, the teacher introduces or reviews concepts by facilitating a discussion with the students. As Instructional Guide, the teacher guides and facilitates the children's learning through play by setting up the play environment and increasing the children's awareness of objects in a particular setting. Saracho's (2004) research suggests that teachers are able to support emergent literacy development through play. Saracho found literacy development among the children was observed as the teachers assumed each of these roles. The results of this study imply that teachers should be aware of the environment provided in which literacy-related play takes place, they should recognize and understand their role in developing emergent literacy through play, and they should be able to create literacy programs that are able to develop literacy learning through play.

## Summary

Research indicates that both structured and unstructured play effectively support literacy development in young children (Boyle & Charles, 2010; Cohen & Uhry, 2011; Grugeon, 2005; Han, 2007; Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Peck & Virkler, 2006; Rowe, 2007; Welsch, 2008).

Structured play activities, such as book-related play, Reader's Theatre, and scaffolded writing activities supported by sociodramatic play, support the literacy development of children (Boyle & Charles; Peck & Virkler; Welsch). For example, Welsch's study found that book-related play provides a scaffold for making extensions beyond the story and creating a personal meaning from the text, and that later experiences with books and reading may be positively associated with book-related play behaviors. Peck and Virkler found in their study that Reader's Theatre lends to children's literacy development in several ways as they observed gains in the children's fluency, comprehension, decoding skills, oral reading confidence, expressive reading, the amount of time that students spent reading, and the variety of purposes for reading. Finally, in their study Boyle and Charles found that a child's writing development can be influenced by socio-dramatic play. The student in their study was able to learn that writing represents the spoken language, and was able to begin to demonstrate the ability to map sounds to the correct written phonemes through writing during socio-dramatic play.

Similarly, free play activities, such as book-related dramatic play, block play, and outdoor play support the development of children's literacy skills (Cohen & Uhry, 2011; Grugeon, 2005; Rowe, 2007). Rowe found that through book-related dramatic play children's literacy skills were developed as they made connections between books and related toys and props, had personal responses to books, assumed the role of characters while reading, reenacted books, discovered authors' meanings, examined characters, and made personal inquiries based

on the books. Cohen and Uhry found evidence that block play contributes to children's literacy development as they observed children using language and symbols to convey meaning and separating thoughts from objects. In her study, Grugeon found that literacy development occurs on the playground as well as the children engage in complicated dialogue and use complex vocabulary as they engaged in dramatic play and role play. The children also used multiple modalities to create meaning on the playground. Authentic contexts and social interaction with peers during free play, as well as the individual differences in children's play styles affect the development of children's literacy skills as well (Han, 2007; Neuman & Roskos, 1997). Han discovered that differences in play styles affected the type of literacy-related play that children engaged in, as well as who they interacted with during play. Neuman and Roskos' analysis of the literacy environment during free play indicated that children enhance their literacy knowledge and understanding using six domain strategies, and that children exhibit authentic reading and writing behaviors before they receive formal instruction.

Teachers should be aware of their role in literacy related play as well. Research indicates that teachers assume many different roles to support literacy development during play depending on the play situation and the amount of planning and structure behind the play (Korat et al., 2002; Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Saracho, 2004). For example, Neuman and Roskos indicate in their study that the teacher's role in facilitating literacy-related play is to create a literacy-rich environment. Korat et al. suggest a more active teacher role in children's literacy-related play through careful planning of play activities in order to meet the teacher's prepared goal of the play activity, as well as to scaffold the children's play through careful questioning. Finally, Saracho suggests teachers play an active role in children's literacy-related play by acting as an equal member of the play group by taking on a range of roles, including Constituent, Promoter,

Monitor, Storyteller, Group Discussion Leader, and Instructional Guide of children's learning. It is important for teachers to create a play environment that fosters literacy development, and to be available as a guide as needed during play. Depending on the type of play being carried out, teachers may need to be more actively involved in preplanning and during play (Korat et al., 2002; Saracho, 2004), but it is important that teachers allow children to make their own discoveries in order for play to have the most potential to support literacy development (Korat et al.; Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Saracho).

### **Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures**

This study was designed to explore the ways in which children develop literacy skills through play, as well as to determine the teacher's role in this literacy related play. In this section I describe the participants, context, and procedure of the study and my positionality as a researcher. I also discuss the data collection and analysis and the limitations of the study.

#### **Research Questions**

I explored the following research questions:

- How do children develop literacy skills through play?
- What is the teacher's role in literacy related play?

#### **Participants**

I conducted this study in the preschool room of a daycare located in and affiliated with a church in a rural town in Western New York. The classroom in which I conducted the study consisted of ten children, five four-year-olds and five three-year-olds, and four boys and six girls. Two two-year-old boys who moved up to the preschool room during the time of the study were present as well. The boys transitioned in at the time of the study and spent one day a week in the preschool room until they turned three. Five of the children were enrolled in Universal Pre-K programs at local school districts and only spent half of the day at the daycare, and there was one boy who attended Rainbow Preschool and also only spent half of the day at the daycare. Not every child spent every day at the daycare.

Although the daycare serves many families who receive services from the Department of Social Services, the children who were in the preschool room at the time of the study and participated in the study were not included in the population of families who received services

from the Department of Social Services. Most of the children in the study came from white middle class families; however there were two bi-racial boys, one of whom was adopted into a white middle class family. A lead teacher was in the room as well as three different aides who rotated in the room.

### **Context of the Study**

The room in which the study took place contained two tables on one side where the children participated in crafts and activities, and ate snack and lunch. The other half of the room was covered by a carpet where play, naptime, and sometimes story time took place. One of the walls next to the carpet was lined with two large bookshelves that contained several toys, including cars, dollhouses and dollhouse accessories, medical kit toys, stuffed animals, dolls, tools, and action figures. Also near the carpet was a small children's table with two chairs, a small bookshelf containing books related to the theme of the month, a long white bench, a play tool bench, a play kitchen, and a TV. A row of coat hooks hung along one wall with shelves containing a basket for each child to put their belongings. Across from the two tables were a chalkboard and a bulletin board containing a calendar, alphabet cards, job charts, and posters containing colors, numbers, and shapes. On the wall opposite the bulletin board was a shelf, a sink, and several storage cupboards. One of the cupboards contained art supplies, one contained puzzles, and one contained coloring books and coloring pages. Above the sink was a bulletin board that usually incorporated the theme of the month, and generally represented the children in some way.

Each day generally began with breakfast followed by free play for approximately an hour at the carpet as the children arrived. Then the children gathered around the bulletin board for calendar time where they went over the date, the alphabet, numbers, shapes, and colors.

Generally, one child was chosen to assist with each category. The children then participated in show and tell if they had brought an item to share or if they had a story to share with their friends. The children then moved to the tables for a lesson related to the theme of the month followed by a craft or activity. Next, the children ate snack and, weather-permitting, they played outside, took a walk, or both for about an hour to an hour and a half. It was then time for lunch and naptime.

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

At the time of the study, I had been employed at the daycare for a year and a half. I was the lead teacher in the preschool room this past summer, 2012, and I continued to work there as a substitute teacher and on an as needed basis. I graduated in May 2011 with teaching certifications in Childhood Education, Students with Disabilities (1-6), Early Childhood Education, and Students with Disabilities (Birth-2). I did not have a permanent teaching position at the time of the study, but I had been a substitute teacher in districts near my home for two years prior to my study. I began working towards my master's degree in Childhood Literacy at the College at Brockport since the fall of 2011.

I most closely identify with the ideas and pedagogical practices associated with a progressive philosophical viewpoint (Parker, 1894) as I value child focused education, experiential learning, collaborative learning, and democratic ideals in the classroom. I believe that literacy is the foundation for all other learning and is found in all aspects of life. I believe that children learn through collaboration, one of the components of progressive education. Frances W. Parker, a leader of progressive education, dubbed "the father of progressive education" by John Dewey, criticized rote learning and strived to educate the whole child, (Zilversmit, 2005). He states, "The social factor in school is the greatest factor of all;...That

which children learn from each other in play or work, though the work be drudgery, is the highest that is ever learned” (Parker, 1894, p. 421). Children’s learning is enhanced when they are given opportunities to learn with and from one another, including their literacy learning (Vygotsky, 1966).

### **Data Collection**

I collected the data for my research through the use of field notes of observations, interviews with the children, and transcripts of videotapes.

**Field notes.** I recorded my observations of the children’s play using field notes. I specifically recorded the instances in which the children demonstrated literacy skills or tendencies, as well as the actions and roles of the teacher during play. Field notes were recorded as anecdotal records, with reference to two self-created observation charts, the first regarding the type of literacy-related play that children engage in (Appendix A), and the second regarding the type of social support used in literacy-related dramatic play (Appendix B). Transcripts of events were recorded in a journal.

**Interviews with children.** Throughout the study I conducted interviews with the children asking them about their play activity in an effort to determine how they use literacy in their play. I wanted to determine if previous literacy experiences, such as a book read-aloud, influenced their play, or if their play influenced their literacy activities. The questions for these interviews were self-created and were recorded on a self-created interview protocol (Appendix C).

**Transcripts of videotapes.** I videotaped three twenty-minute segments of the children’s play sessions, one at the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end of my data

collection, and wrote transcripts of the recordings in order to collect further examples of the literacy events that occurred during play.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed my field notes, the interviews with the children, and the transcripts of the videotapes to try to answer my first research question: How do children develop literacy skills through play? Using the constant comparative method, (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I looked for trends among the data that demonstrated how children develop literacy skills through play. I analyzed my field notes and video transcripts after each observation to gather information to answer my second research question: What is the teacher's role in literacy related play? I again used the constant comparative method to find commonalities among the data that indicated the influence of teachers on children's acquisition of literacy skills during play.

### **Procedures**

This study took place over a nine week period focusing on three focal children. Focal child one, Anna (pseudonym), was a three year old girl who attended the daycare two or three times a week during the time of the study. On these days she spent between eight and nine hours at the daycare. Focal child two, Lily (pseudonym), was also a three year old girl who attended the daycare five days a week for approximately eight hours during four of those days. On the remaining day, she only attended a half day for about four hours. Focal child three, Sam (pseudonym) was a four year old boy who attended a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program in the morning before he comes to the daycare in the afternoon, for a total of between five and six hours at the daycare, four days a week. During that time I observed and interacted as a participant observer with the children during their free play and during their playtime and outside play after their daily lesson. These observations/interactions took place during visits to the

daycare twice a week. The student interviews took place throughout these observation times. I began writing transcripts of each of the videotaped observations at the completion of the observation. When I completed my study, I again reviewed the video recordings to complete the transcriptions and to ensure that I had recorded all of the literacy experiences demonstrated. I then compared all of my data sources to find connections and trends among the literacy skills that students demonstrated during play as well as the role of the teacher in these experiences.

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

In my study there was triangulation of data as I used field notes of observations, student interviews, and transcripts of three videotaped play sessions. The study will consist of prolonged engagement with and persistent observation of the child participants. The validity of my research was verified through the description of my research design, which portrayed dependability of the study. Confirmability was demonstrated through careful analysis and interpretation of the data. Based on past research regarding the link between play and emergent literacy, the results of engaging in the research process to answer my research questions reflected the utility of the results.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study involved some limitations. At the time of the study I was not the lead teacher in the classroom, although I acted as a teacher during my visits to the daycare. The change between teachers from day to day may have affected the students' behaviors that I observed during playtime. Another limitation is that not all of the children were at the daycare at the same time or on the same days, so I did not have the same amount of data for each child. Since the children were not all present at the same time, each child was not exposed to the same literacy experiences throughout the day, such as story time or the lessons taught each day. The children

being present at different times affected the type of play that they engaged in, and the interactions between themselves and their peers. For example, Lily was not present for the play sessions during the final section of my study, so she did not participate in teacher-directed play activities, while Sam and Anna did.

### **Summary**

In order to answer my research questions regarding play and emergent literacy skills, I engaged in a nine-week study of preschool children at a daycare located in a church in a rural town in Western New York. I observed and interacted as a participant observer with the children during their play time and collected data through the use of field notes of my observations, student interviews, and transcripts of videotapes of the play sessions. I used the constant comparative method to analyze my data, and I maintained the validity of my study through the triangulation of data. Although this study had some limitations, the utility of the study was demonstrated through careful analysis of the data.

### Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of the research was to investigate how young children develop literacy through play, and how the teacher's role affects literacy-related play. I conducted my research in the preschool room of a daycare in a rural town in Western New York. I collected data as a participant observer through observations, interviews, and videos during thirteen play sessions over a nine week period, focusing on three focal children. Focal child one, Anna (pseudonym), is a three year old girl who attended the daycare two or three times a week during the time of the study. On these days she spends between eight and nine hours at the daycare. Focal child two, Lily (pseudonym), is also a three year old girl who attends the daycare five days a week for approximately eight hours during four of those days. On the remaining day, she only attends a half day for about four hours. Focal child three, Sam (pseudonym) is a four year old boy who attends a Universal Pre-Kindergarten program in the morning before he comes to the daycare in the afternoon, for a total of between five and six hours at the daycare, four days a week.

My research was divided into three parts, the first of which I observed the children's play without providing any props or teacher-directed play. During the second section of my research, I provided the children with several literacy props with a few suggestions as to how the children could incorporate them into their play. The final portion of my research involved much more teacher-directed play with the introduction of more props to be used in primarily book-based play.

In order to answer my first research question: How do children develop literacy skills through play, I used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), color-coding the data to make patterns visible. Several different types of literacy-related play in which the children engaged emerged, including book-based play, block play, pretend play, reading

activities, writing activities, self-play, collaborative-play, word play through music or rhyme, using background knowledge or prior experience when engaging in play, and speaking to convey a message through play.

In order to answer my second research question: What is the teacher's role in literacy related play, I used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) once more to distinguish the roles I as the teacher played in the children's literacy-related play. These roles or supports included providing props, providing experience with print, preparatory experiences, peer talk, teacher talk, prompting, engaging in music or rhyme with the children, and I also noted when the children asked for teacher support during play.

My analysis of observations and video transcriptions revealed many different types of literacy related play in which children engage, many of which are similar to those discussed in previous research included in the literature review. These included book based play (Rowe, 2007), imaginary play, block play (Cohen and Uhry, 2011), reading and writing activities (Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Neuman & Roskos, 1997), using background knowledge or prior experience in play (Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002), speech development as a result of teacher modeling, and word play through music and rhyme, and each was carried out in the context of self play or collaborative play. The impact of teacher involvement in the children's literacy-related play also became evident through my analysis of observations and video transcriptions.

### **Literacy Skills Are Developed Through Play**

It was observed throughout my study that the children developed literacy skills through play. In the following sections, I will discuss the children's development of reading, writing, and speech skills through play.

**Writing.** Writing activities were incorporated frequently through free play in this study, a finding supported by Neuman and Roskos (1997) in a previous study. The children often chose to color or draw both in indoor and outdoor play settings.

While observing an indoor play session, Sam came to the table and chose a number writing paper. After a few minutes he proudly exclaimed, “Look at that! I made my six!” His exclamation demonstrated that he was not only recognizing the print on the paper, but he was also able to recreate it and showed pride in his work. During an observation of another play session, Anna came to the table where I was sitting and picked up my pen and began scribbling on the paper on which I was taking notes. When Lily said, “I want to draw my name”, I asked the girls if they wanted to go to the table to color. They both said yes, and Anna stated that she wanted to use markers. Anna chose a *P* paper and asked Lily, “Hey, can you make a circle like this?” She demonstrated drawing a circle on her paper, but Lily ignored her. Lily chose a letter paper as well, and then colored a Winnie the Pooh picture. Through their writing activities, the girls again demonstrated their choice of incorporating writing into their free play. They also revealed their interest in writing materials, and Anna demonstrated her desire to share her knowledge of drawing with her peer.

Many writing activities occurred as the children wrote letters, notes, and cards to their friends, parents, and teachers after literacy props were introduced into the classroom. When I first introduced the literacy props, the children were very excited to begin exploring. Katie chose an envelope from the writing basket to write on and asked me how to spell *Rachael*. I orally told her the letters and she repeated each one after me. Before I told her the last letter, she already knew it was an *l* and she said *Rachael* with an emphasis on the *l* sound. She demonstrated the

ability, not only to write letters, but she also showed beginning knowledge of the alphabetic principle through the use of literacy props in her play.

In another session, Sam grabbed a paper and pencil out of the basket. When another child asked him to play elsewhere he replied, “Hang on, I’m writing a note to my mom.” Shortly after, Sam told another child that he was writing her a note before making a few scribbles on a paper, rolling it up, putting it in envelope and giving it to the child. In engaging in this writing activity, Sam demonstrated that he not only was choosing a writing activity over another free play activity, but that he understood that writing has a purpose.

Writing activities were observed during restaurant pretend play as the children wrote their peers’ and teachers’ orders. For example, after several minutes of playing during one of the play sessions, Lily walked to the writing basket and took out a yellow tablet and a pencil. Anna followed suit and took a notebook and a pencil. Anna asked another child seated at the little table, “What do you want to eat?” Lily also came over and asked, “Hi. You want?” Before the other child answered, Anna asked, “Do you want pizza?” The other child ordered and Anna wrote her order in her notebook before asking again, “What you want to eat?” The other child again gave her order while Anna wrote it before saying, “Ok”, and walking to the kitchen area with Lily to prepare the order. This exchange showed that Anna and Lily incorporated an authentic use of writing into their play.

**Reading.** Many reading activities were observed throughout my study, a finding supported by a similar finding in Neuman and Roskos’ (1997) study. The children engaged in reading activities during free play such as when Ben looked at the Christmas story book that accompanied the nativity play set that he was playing with. By choosing the Christmas story book, Ben demonstrated that he was not only choosing to engage in a reading activity during his

playtime, but he was making a connection between the book and his toys. In another instance, Anna brought a stack of books wrapped in her blanket to the table. She chose *Curious George Goes Fishing* and began reading out loud. On a page that showed Curious George fishing on a dock, Anna read, “George is going sledding.” Although she was not actually reading the words, or matching her words to the picture, she demonstrated that she was able to use book language and follow the pattern of the book during this reading activity.

During restaurant pretend play the children engaged in reading activities when reading the menus. Each item on the menus had a picture to accompany the words, so children who were unable to read the words could identify the items.

The children also observed and read the word cards that I hung up, labeling objects around the room. After I finished hanging them up, Sam asked me why I did not make a label for the garbage. When I told him that I would make another label to bring back with me the next time I came, he gave me a list of several more labels he thought were needed as well. These included labels for their baskets, the bulletin board, the windows, the microwave and the oven on the kitchen play set, the door, the closet, and the sink. The fact that Sam asked me to create more word labels showed me that he was enthusiastic about creating a print-rich environment, and that he was becoming aware of the print around the room.

Similarly, Anna and Lily engaged in a reading experience that demonstrated that they were noticing the environmental print around them and incorporating it into their play. At the beginning of this session, Anna was standing near the calendar bulletin board pointing to the numbers and words on one of the charts and saying each one to herself. She then walked to the other bulletin board where there were ladybugs hung up that each child had made the previous day. She asked me, “Which one is mine?” Since the ladybugs had the children’s names on them,

I asked her if she could find the one with her name on it. The other teacher told her that she was making name tags to put next to each ladybug. After the name cards were hung, I asked Anna again if she could find the one that had her name. She was able to find her ladybug and pointed to another one asking whose it was. The following is an exchange between Lily and me after I told Anna that it was Lily's ladybug:

Lily: What's in my name?

Me: What does your name start with?

Lily: L

Me: Then what?

Lily: L

Me: What comes after L?

Lily: I don't know.

Me: I-L-Y

This whole interaction showed me that Anna is noticing her environmental print, is able to recognize her own name, and is curious about reading her peers names as well. Lily also demonstrated her curiosity by asking about the letters that make up her name. She exhibited that she was aware of the first letter of her name and wanted to learn the following letters.

Finally, the children engaged in several reading activities during teacher-directed play in many ways. The children listened to and reenacted books that were read aloud to them. The following is an excerpt from the children's reenactment of *The Little Red Hen* by Jerry Pinkney, with Sam acting as The Little Red Hen, Lily as the dog, Anna as the rat, and Katie as the pig:

Sam: Who will help me eat the bread?

Katie: I will!

Me: I will, said the pig. Dog and rat, will you help eat the bread?

Anna and Lily: Yes.

Me: “I will”, said the rat. “I will”, said the dog. But what do you say, Little Red Hen?

Sam: You did not help cut the – You did not help plant the seeds, you did not help cut the wheat, you did not help take it to the miller, you did not help bake the bread, so you will not help eat the bread.

Me: I will eat it...

Sam: I will eat it all by myself with my chicks!

In this reenactment, the children demonstrated their ability to recall the events of the story as well as their understanding of the characters in the book. This play experience also revealed that play provided the children a context in which to self-monitor their reading activities. Sam indicated that he was self-monitoring as he was retelling the story when he started to say the events in the wrong order before stopping to correct himself.

The children also read and matched words during the Valentine’s Day activity that I planned after we read the two books *Dumpy’s Valentine* by Julie Andrews Edwards and Emma Walton Hamilton, and a nonfiction text, *We Need Mail Carriers* by Lola M. Schaefer. For this activity, I hid around the room Hershey® Kisses with Valentine’s words taped to the bottom. I asked the children to each find two and bring their words back to the carpet where we could match them with the words I wrote on a Valentine’s Day poster. When the students had each found two candies, they began to examine the words taped to the bottom. Katie exclaimed, “This one says Anna!” She was able to correctly match it to Anna’s name when I asked her if she could find it on the poster. I then began asking the children what each word was on the poster and if anyone had the word card to match. They were able to recognize most of the names of their

friends, with Katie and Sam shouting out the majority of the names. Ben and Anna were more interested in finding and having more word cards than actually noticing the words. Through this activity, the children demonstrated their ability to use play as a way to practice identifying letters and words, as well as their beginning knowledge of the alphabetic principle as they were able to identify their peers' names based on beginning letter sounds.

The children in this study also participated in reading activities during the teacher-directed rhyming and word parts extension activities after reading *The Little Red Hen*. After asking the children to retell the story to refresh their memories, I told them that I wanted to play a game to see if they could remember all of the characters in the story. I informed them that I would be saying the beginning and the ending of a word and they had to listen and tell me which animal name I was saying. After saying /h/ /en/, /h/ /en/, Katie was able to correctly guess that the word was 'hen'. After showing them a picture of a hen to confirm that she was correct, I moved onto /d/ /og/. After repeating it once more, Sam was this time able to correctly guess that the word was 'dog'. This pattern continued with another child correctly guessing 'rat', Katie correctly guessing 'chicks', and Sam correctly guessing 'goat'. This play activity demonstrated that play can be used to help children learn and practice phonics concepts, including segmenting and blending words. It revealed the children's understanding that words can be broken into separate parts as well as their ability to put the word parts together to form a word.

**Speech.** Speech development occurred as a result of indirect teacher modeling. Several children were observed using appropriate speech to communicate with their peers rather than physical communication. For example, after yelling at Anna to stay off of her drawing in the dirt and putting her hand out to physically stop her from doing so, Katie listened to me calmly ask Anna to step off of the picture. When Lily then walked over the picture, Katie calmly said,

“Walk around my picture”, instead of yelling or physically restraining her. Katie’s change in handling the situation indicated that my indirect modeling of appropriate speech affected the way in which Katie responded differently to Lily than to Anna. Rather than yelling and taking a physical approach as she did in the first confrontation with Anna, Katie was able to demonstrate a more appropriate and effective reaction in her second interaction with Lily after observing my own speech with Anna.

The idea that speech is developed through play as a result of teacher modeling was revealed in another exchange between Anna and Sam. The children were seated at the table playing with musical toys. The children played independently for several more minutes before Sam became bored. He got up and moved toward where Anna was playing with a magnadoodle, a magnetic writing board. Sam tried to push one of the buttons that makes noise on the magnadoodle, which did not make Anna happy. When he tried to do it again, she said, “No, Sam. I’m gonna write a note to ya mom!” Anna was demonstrating the idea that teacher modeling is a contributing factor to speech development, as this is a phrase that is often repeated to Sam by his teachers. Speech development as a result of teacher modeling was not reported in any of the studies in the literature review. Using the Education Research Complete database, I used a combination of the search terms, “speech”, “modeling”, “speech development”, and “social speech development” and did not find any appropriate studies.

### **A Wide Range of Literacy-Related Play Activities Support the Literacy Skills That Children Develop**

**Outdoor Play.** The playground as an environment for the development of literacy skills was observed during my study. The children engaged in writing activities and had an opportunity to practice speech development while practicing outside. This conclusion is supported by

findings from Grugeon's (2005) study that indicated that the playground is a rich environment for the development of literacy skills.

During my observation of an outdoor play session, Anna and another child, Katie, drew pictures with a stick in the mud while playing, indicating that children choose to engage in writing activities during play in a variety of settings. It was during this play session as well that Katie demonstrated the impact of teacher modeling on speech development during play, as she was writing in the mud with a stick.

**Dramatic Play.** The children were able to use dramatic play in many play contexts that helped them learn that writing represents spoken language. This understanding that writing represents spoken language was seen not only through their writing down their peers' orders when playing restaurant, but when writing notes, letters, and valentines to their friends, families, and teachers. This understanding was demonstrated during a play session after we had read the books, *Dumpy's Valentine* and *We Need Mail Carriers*. I had just provided the children with Valentine's Day paper and a play mailbox with the word, 'POST' written on the front. Sam folded up one of his Valentine's Day papers that he wrote on, placed it inside an envelope, and put it in the slot of the mailbox. He then took the mailbox over to Katie and said, "Here you go Katie, I made a valentine for ya!" As Katie opened up the envelope, I asked Sam what he wrote. He told me it said "Happy Valentime's Day". This interaction between Sam and Katie demonstrated their knowledge that writing has a purpose, as well as their connection between the books that we read previously and their use of literacy props in their play.

Katie even demonstrated the ability to map sounds to letters when she wrote my name on an envelope and recognized that it ended with 'l', a finding supported by the results of Boyle and Charles' (2010) research. In this case, dramatic play helped her to practice this skill as she

engaged in an authentic writing experience during play by writing a letter and addressing an envelope to me.

Dramatic play also allowed the children to gain a better understanding of the sequence of events of a story as they engaged in reenactments of *The Little Red Hen* by Jerry Pinkney. These reenactments are described in further detail previously in the Reading subsection. The reenactments are also described later under The Teacher's Role Impacts Children's Literacy-Related Play section of this paper.

**Block Play.** Some block play (Cohen and Uhry, 2011) was observed during this study but occurred minimally and only during free play by all three focal children. In one such case, Anna and Lily sat on the carpet building with Megablocks. The children were very quiet while building, and there was very little conversation. As they played, the other teacher in the room pointed out block colors, and after she finished building, Lily whispered to herself, "I made a tower." This block play demonstrated a little bit of symbolic play by Lily as she used the blocks to represent a tower. The interaction with the other teacher indicated that block play can be a context for vocabulary development through learning and associating color names with the colors they represent.

**Background Knowledge.** The children's application of their background knowledge or prior experiences within their literacy-related play (Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002) was observed in my study. They incorporated their background knowledge in many different play contexts, including free play with and without the addition of literacy props and during more structured, teacher-directed play activities. Ben demonstrated the use of background knowledge during a play session when he used his crane to lift people onto the roof of one of the dollhouses to work on the roof. He stated, "Look, Baby Jesus is up there! He's listening". When asked what a blue

foam piece was that he placed on the crane, he demonstrated a sophisticated use of vocabulary when he said that it was a “demolition thing” that he was going to use to knock over the stable. He stated that the people would fall off the roof when he knocked it over and that he needed to knock it over because there would be mixers there. When I asked him who drives the crane, he replied, “Daddy drives the crane.” Without his prior knowledge of construction and equipment, Ben likely would not have had an opportunity to incorporate sophisticated vocabulary into his play.

The use of background knowledge in play was used again during a play session in which Anna was engaging in restaurant pretend play. Anna grabbed a menu, notepad, and a pencil and came over to take my order. Following is an excerpt from the exchange:

Anna: (with a menu, notepad, and a pencil) Do you want pizza or milk?

Me: I would like milk, please.

Anna: (to another child at the kitchen set) Do you have milk for Miss Rachael?

Other child: No

Anna: (to me) We don't have milk so you can have pop.

Me: Ok, thank you.

In this scenario Anna used the literacy props to engage in pretend play as a waitress, to engage in a writing activity as she wrote down my order, and she used her background knowledge when she made the substitution of pop for milk when another child told her there was no milk.

Later on in the play session, Lily came over to me with a legal pad and asked, “What do you want for Christmas?” After she wrote something on her pad of paper, she ran away, came back, and exclaimed, “Ok, I got some!” She sat down and told me it was time to write her list to

Santa. When I asked her what she was going to write, she told me that she did not know and did some scribble writing with a pencil on her legal pad. In this exchange, Lily used her background knowledge while engaging in a writing activity during play. Since it was near Christmas time, it is likely that Lily had recently written a Christmas list for Santa, or at least heard it mentioned.

In one of the final sessions we read the Valentine's Day story, *Dumpy's Valentine* together. In the following play session, I reminded the children that we read the story and I told them that I wanted them to help tell their own Valentine's Day story by having everybody say one line of the story. After the story was established, I asked them to retell their story, this time while acting it out. The children were able to do so with some prompting from me to remind them of the sequence of events. One piece of the children's story involved Dumpy the dump truck getting stuck in a mud puddle. Sam demonstrated his use of background knowledge in play when he suggested that a digger lifted Dumpy up and helped him out of the puddle. As his dad had experience with heavy machinery and Sam was able to ride with him on a few occasions, he was able to directly apply his knowledge to his literacy-related play, setting the basis for his play experience.

**Word Play Through Music and Rhyme.** Word play through music and rhyme was observed frequently throughout the study. The children often naturally incorporated this into their free play, such as when Anna and Lily asked to listen to a music CD and sang and danced around the carpet with their dolls. When the play session began, Anna said, "Let's listen to music" and Lily confirmed the request. When I put on a CD of Bible songs for children, the girls ran around the room in a circle with their stuffed bears. Their request again showed their desire to incorporate music into their play. Anna then asked if she could get the bin of cars out and began playing quietly by herself. As she was playing, Anna began singing along with the song on

the CD, *I Will Make You Fisher's of Men*, again showing that it was natural for her to incorporate music while she was playing.

The children also engaged in music and rhyme during teacher-directed play activities such as during The Little Red Hen rhyming activity. To introduce this game, I asked the children if anyone could give me an example of two words that rhyme. Without hesitation, Katie responded with “cat, bat”. I then told them that I was going to say a few words and that I wanted them to tell me if they rhymed with ‘hen’. If it rhymed, I asked them to cluck like hens. After clarifying what hens sound like, I began with ‘pen’ When they first did not respond, I prompted, “Pen, hen. Do they rhyme?” Katie recognized that yes, they did. She was also able to recognize without any prompting that the next word, ‘cat’, did not rhyme. This activity continued with Sam recognizing that ‘men’ rhymed with ‘hen’, all of the children clucking in recognition that ‘men’ rhymed, and Katie recognizing that the last word, ‘pizza’, did not rhyme. Sam and Anna affirmed her recognition. This literacy-related play experience demonstrated that rhyme can be incorporated into play to help children develop important literacy concepts such as recognizing rhyming words.

To close this same play session, I asked the children to help me act out a song outlining the sequence of events in *The Little Red Hen*. As the children so often incorporated music into their free play without any teacher support, I wanted to include music into more teacher-directed play as well. I began by asking the children to again remind me what the Little Red Hen had to do first in the story. Sam and Katie correctly answered, “Plant the seeds”. I asked everyone to get ready to pretend to water their seeds and began singing, “This is the way we plant the seeds, plant the seeds, plant the seeds. This is the way we plant the seeds, so early in the morning.” We did the same with each of the events of the story – cutting the wheat, taking the wheat to the mill,

making the bread, and eating the bread, with the children joining in the singing with me after the first couple of rounds. Either Katie or Sam recalled each of the events before we sang; however, after Katie recalled that the Little Red Hen cut the wheat, Lily repeated it after her. This activity indicated that music can also be used in play to help children learn reading comprehension skills such as story recall. The children were also given an opportunity to practice sequencing events from the story, an important concept to literacy comprehension as well.

The use of word play through music and rhyme in a teacher-directed context was also seen in a less structured setting during an observation of an early play session. The other teacher in the room began bouncing one of the toddlers on her lap saying, “[Child’s name] is a bouncing jelly bean” in a sing-song voice. This caught Anna’s attention and she declared, “I don’t want to color anymore”, and joined them on the carpet. Lily quickly followed and they each had a turn bouncing on the teacher’s lap. After they each had a turn, Anna asked the teacher to do it with her Mickey Mouse doll that she had brought. This prompted Lily to then ask the teacher to “Do it with Mickey Mouse”, and Lily asked her to “Do it with monkey”. Following this interaction, both girls moved over to the door, stood with their backs facing it, and began bouncing against the door in a rhythm. As the other teacher in the room walked past and saw, she told them they now had to sing a song and began singing *Jingle Bells* with them. This literacy-related play experience indicated that teacher interaction through joining in the children’s play, and even just by prompting, can encourage children to incorporate music and rhyme into their play, contributing to a literacy rich play experience. Word play through music and rhyme was not reported in any of the studies in the literature review. I was unable to find any studies through the Education Research Complete database using a combination of the search terms, “word play”, “rhyme”, “music”, and “literacy”.

**Self Play.** Self play was observed throughout all three sections of my research and was noted to be a viable context for the development of literacy skills. For example, the children would often engage in the same activity in the same area, but would sometimes engage in their own play without interacting with one another. Self play was seen during one play experience in which Anna and Lily played with Megablocks on the carpet. The children were very quiet while building and there was very little conversation. As they played, the other teacher pointed out block colors, and after she finished building, Lily whispered to herself, “I made a tower.” This self play experience allowed the children an opportunity for vocabulary development and to develop literacy skills through symbolic play.

Self play was again observed during a play session in which Anna, Lily, and Ben were seated at the table after Ben asked to write and cut. During this time, Ben cut fringe on the edge of his paper and asked to use a pencil to write. Anna cut strips of paper and made scribbles on her paper with a pencil, and Lily cut her paper and scribbled as well. The children were focused on their own activities and did not engage in any conversation while they were engaging in prewriting activities on their own.

Once again, self play was seen during a play session in which Sam and Lily played with the dollhouses on the carpet. Both were engaged in self play and did not interact at all. They did not engage in many literacy activities during this time, but Sam demonstrated that he was applying his background knowledge during play when he said, “This is where my Nana (inaudible). Under the sink.” His prior experience with his grandmother placing something under the sink impacted his understanding and actions as he played, an important literacy skill, (Korat, Bahar, and Snapir, 2002).

Although the addition of the literacy props to the classroom encouraged collaborative pretend play, the children also engaged in self play to develop their literacy skills when using the literacy props in their play. For example, when I first introduced the props, some of the children chose to explore the items on their own. Sam was very interested in the envelopes in the writing basket. He wrote something for his mom, put it in the envelope, and asked me how to make it stick. After I helped him close the envelope he remembered that he had another paper to put inside, opened the envelope again, and added a second paper. By engaging in this self play experience, Sam was able to participate in a prewriting activity, as well as engage in the routine of writing a letter, demonstrating the role that self play can have on the development of children's literacy skills.

Once again, the use of literacy props in self play was observed when Lily chose to play with the items in the writing basket, scribbled on papers and put them in an envelope. She handed me the envelope and told me it was a gift. When I opened it she pointed to some of the scribbles and told me that it was my name. She then wrote on another paper and added it to the envelope while singing, "I need to make another gift, I need to make another gift." Through self play Lily chose to bring music into her play, this time making up her own song. She also engaged in a writing activity and demonstrated that she is aware that writing is a representation of oral language.

Though much of the last section of my research consisted of teacher-directed, collaborative play, there were still times when some of the children would wander off to engage in self play during these collaborative play sessions. This idea was observed while the children reenacted *The Little Red Hen*. During our second reenactment, Anna and Lily each became distracted and chose to wander off to play with some of the unfamiliar musical toys around the

room. This not only indicated that Anna and Lily chose self play over collaborative play during this particular time, but that they also naturally incorporated music into that self play. Self play in this instance served as a context for the development of literacy skills through incorporating music into play.

It was again observed that the children chose self play over collaborative play during the Valentine's Day activity while the children were matching their words to the words on the poster. I observed Sam, Anna, and Ben wandering from the group to play with other toys at different times during the activity. Sam and Anna even wandered away from their peers to explore the words on the bottom of their candy on their own, indicating that they preferred or needed a moment to themselves to process their words. They were able to do this through self play.

**Collaborative Play.** Like self play, collaborative play was observed throughout all three sections of my research. Little collaborative play was observed in the first section of the research, but its frequency increased with the addition of the literacy props, and collaborative play was the primary type of play observed during teacher-directed literacy related play activities.

Much of the collaborative play that I observed during the first section of my research revolved around incorporating music into play, such as when the children sang a rhyme with the other teacher in the room in an interaction described previously in the word play through music and rhyme section. Music incorporated into collaborative play was also seen during a play session in which Anna and Lily listened to music together. When the play session began, Anna said, "Let's listen to music" and Lily confirmed the request. When I put on a CD of Bible songs for children, the girls ran around the room in a circle with their stuffed bears. This showed their

desire to incorporate music into their play, giving them an opportunity to incorporate vocabulary development and literary elements such as rhyme into their play. Later in the same play session, with the music playing again in the background, Anna and Lily moved to the carpet and danced around with dolls. As they danced they sang, “And a happy New Year”, and “Frosty the Snowman and the jolly soul”. This did not match the music that was playing in the background, but once again they were incorporating music into their play.

The addition of literacy props into the play environment in the second section of my research encouraged more collaborative play than was observed in the first section of research. The children often collaborated to engage in pretend restaurant play, using literacy props as they did so. Collaboration during pretend restaurant play was observed when the children first began exploring the literacy props as described in a previous section of this chapter. As they collaborated they engaged in a writing activity as they wrote an order, applied their background knowledge of the functioning of a restaurant during play, and engaged in symbolic play as they substituted different types of food for the food items that they were missing.

Although the children did not incorporate literacy props into this particular play episode, collaborative literacy related play was observed in a later play session as the children played together with the food. As the play experience began, both Anna and Sam were waiting on Lily. The children used phrases such as, “You gonna eat that whole one” when one of the children asked for more cake, and “Are you done with this?” as they began to clear the table. Their actions and language indicated that they were applying their background knowledge and prior experiences to their play, possibly drawing on experiences in a restaurant or mimicking phrases heard from their parents.

Collaboration during literacy related play was also observed in my study while the children were playing at the table with musical toys. Anna leaned over to the child next to her who was playing with a musical toy that had letters on it. Anna asked the other child, “Is that your name?” As she pressed each letter, the toy said the name. The other child answered Anna with the correct way to spell her name. Through this collaborative reading activity, Anna demonstrated that she was intrigued by the print on the toy and was interested in knowing how to spell her friend’s name.

The children’s engagement in collaborative play was observed more frequently during teacher-directed literacy related play. For example, during each of the reenactments of *The Little Red Hen* and *Dumpy’s Valentine*, the children engaged in collaborative book related play activities as they recalled and acted out the events of stories read aloud to them. They also collaborated as they participated in the Valentine’s Day words activity as they discovered and matched their words to the words on the poster together. Collaboration in literacy related play was also seen during teacher initiated music and rhyme activities such as a Valentine’s Day song activity in which the children were asked to describe in the song something that a friend was wearing. Their peers then had to make an inference to determine who each child’s Valentine was.

This data regarding collaborative play indicates that this particular group of children needed more guidance and encouragement to engage in collaborative play than they did to engage in self play. Through increased teacher involvement through the addition of literacy props and direct interaction during play, an increase in the children’s collaborative play was observed.

The information from this section, Collaborative Play, indicates that these children are developing literacy skills through play. They demonstrated engagement in a wide range of literacy-related play activities throughout the study. Different play activities occurred at varying frequencies at different times during my research, and the overall frequency of literacy-related play activities also varied from session to session and throughout the three sections of my research.

### **Literacy-Related Props Encouraged More Focused Literacy-Related Play**

The children's engagement in literacy related play became more prevalent and focused after more literacy props were introduced into the classroom. These results were similar to those found by Neuman and Roskos (1990). My interview with two of the focal children, Anna and Lily, before the addition of the literacy props indicated that the girls either were not aware of literacy in their environment or they were not exposed to a literacy rich play environment. Anna noted that she did not see any words on the toys she played with or in the area around where she played, and Lily affirmed that she noticed words on the toys that she played with or in the area around where she played, but she had no response when asked which words she saw. When I prompted Lily to show me the words she said she didn't know and shrugged her shoulders. When asked what they liked to read when they played, both girls pointed to the notebook in which I was making notes. They both gave the same response when asked about what they liked to write or draw while they played. That the girls were not aware of the literacy in their environment or of their own literacy related play before literacy props were introduced indicated that a lack of a literacy rich environment may be a contributing factor to their lack of awareness. When I conducted my interview with Sam, however, he told me that he noticed words on the wall by his bed, but that he did not know what kind of words they were. He told me that he liked

to read a book at home called *Duck* and that he liked to write his name when asked what he liked to read and write or draw while he played. When asked if he liked to pretend that he was a character from a book or movie during play, he responded that he liked to pretend to be all of the characters from the movie, *Toy Story*. This indicated to me that unlike the girls, Sam was aware of environmental print and literacy activities embedded into his play, supporting my own findings and those of previous studies that a literacy rich environment encourages more focused literacy related play (Neuman and Roskos, 1990; Neuman and Roskos, 1997; Saracho, 2004; Welsch, 2008).

By using menus, pencils, and notebooks to engage in sociodramatic restaurant play, the children were given an authentic and meaningful context for engaging in reading and writing activities. Neuman and Roskos (1990, 1997) reported similar findings in their two studies. An authentic context for engaging in literacy activities using literacy props during sociodramatic restaurant play was revealed during a play session involving Anna, Lily, and another child. When Lily walked to the writing basket and took out a yellow tablet and a pencil, Anna followed suit and took a notebook and a pencil. Anna asked another child seated at the little table, "What do you want to eat?" Lily also came over and asked, "Hi. You want?" Before the other child answered, Anna asked, "Do you want pizza?" The other child ordered and Anna wrote down her order in her notebook before asking again, "What you want to eat?" The other child again gave her order while Anna wrote it down before saying, "Ok", and walking over to the kitchen area with Lily to prepare the order. This exchange again showed that the children were applying their background knowledge to play through the routine of taking an order. This play experience also demonstrated that literacy props can provide an authentic context in which to engage in literacy activities during play.

They were also given an authentic and meaningful context for engaging in reading and writing activities as they used the literacy props to write notes, letters, and valentines to their peers, teachers, and parents, as well as when they followed the routine of sending a letter or a valentine using the cereal box mailbox. One instance of using literacy props to write a letter during play occurred during the Christmas season. Lily came to me with a legal pad and asked, "What do you want for Christmas?" After she wrote something on her pad of paper, she ran away, came back, and exclaimed, "Ok, I got some!" She sat down next to me and told me it was time to write her list to Santa. When I asked her what she was going to write, she told me that she did not know and did some scribble writing with a pencil on her legal pad. In this exchange, Lily demonstrated that she was able to use her background knowledge while engaging in a meaningful writing activity during play.

Another demonstration of a meaningful and authentic literacy related play activity took place during a play session in which Sam wrote a note to his mom. After I restocked the writing basket, Sam grabbed a paper and pencil out of the basket. When another child asked him to play elsewhere he replied, "Hang on, I'm writing a note to my mom." Shortly after, Sam told another child that he was writing her a note before scribbling on a paper, rolling it up, putting it in envelope and giving it to the child. In engaging in this writing activity, Sam demonstrated that he was able to use literacy props to engage in a purposeful writing activity.

The literacy props and the addition of stories provided a foundation for the children's literacy based play when they were added to the classroom. This finding is similar to that found in a study completed by Welsch (2008). For example, the addition of the literacy props to the kitchen area provided a foundation for the children to play as if they were in a restaurant. The addition of literacy props allowed the children an opportunity to apply their background

knowledge of situations that arise while ordering from a menu, writing down an order, and they also used the type of language that may be used in a restaurant setting as a result of the literacy props. The following is an excerpt from an exchange between Lily and me as she wrote down my orders while she pretended to wait on me:

Lily: What do you want?

Me: Can I have spaghetti and apple juice?

Lily: Sure. (She returned with pliers and goggles)

This is your spaghetti. What else you want?

Me: Can I have apple juice?

Lily: Yeah! (She returned with a wrench)

Here's your apple juice. What you want?

Me: Can I have some ice cream?

Lily: Yeah, coming right up! (She returned with a Pokémon toy)

I cooked it! What you want?

Me: Can I have a cookie?

Lily: Yeah, coming right up!

Not only did the legal pad and pencil that Lily used to take my order provide a foundation for this play experience, but it was a literacy rich play experience in which Lily engaged in symbolic play and used language she may have heard in a restaurant, such as “coming right up”.

Besides restaurant play, it was observed that literacy props provided the basis for other types of literacy related play as well. During one play session, the children played with stickers together at the table. Looking at stickers with words written on them, Sam asked, “Which one of these says ‘Happy Birthday candles’?” I read him what each of the stickers said – ‘joy’, ‘peace’,

and 'He lives'. Through this reading activity and the use of stickers as literacy props, Sam demonstrated that he was aware of and making attempts at making meaning from the print based on his activity at the time. As another child took some stickers Sam was putting on his paper, he said, "No, don't take all of them!" With the contributing factor of previous teacher modeling, Sam was appropriately using speech. This was a big development as he often had to be reminded to speak rather than physically convey his message.

Additionally, the three stories read provided the basis for several subsequent, teacher-directed play activities, particularly during the reenactments of *The Little Red Hen* and *Dumpy's Valentine* described previously in the chapter in the Reading subsection. Similarly, the stories in conjunction with other literacy props provided the basis for the children's free play involving making and sending valentine's to one another, as well as during the Valentine's Day words activity, also described previously in the chapter.

It was observed in my study that the children made connections between books and related props and that they reenacted the books, a finding also reported by Rowe (2007). Following the read aloud of *The Little Red Hen*, the children made connections between the book and provided literacy props to engage in several reenactments of the story. After listening to it read aloud, the children also loosely reenacted the story, *Dumpy's Valentine*.

Before the introduction of literacy props into the play environment, the children's engagement in literacy-related play activities was generally brief and lacked an authentic purpose. For example, the children often chose to draw or color during their free play, but they generally chose to use coloring sheets or letter or number worksheets to complete rather than engaging in an authentic literacy experience because this is primarily what was available to them. After literacy props were introduced, the children's literacy-related play activities began to

become more sustained and focused, with a more authentic purpose and context for literacy activities.

### **The Teacher's Role Impacts Children's Literacy-Related Play**

Previous studies have indicated that the teacher's interaction with children during their play, through observations, acting as a guide, and providing a literacy rich play environment, impact the children's literacy-related play activities (Han, 2007; Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002; Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Saracho, 2004). The research in my study indicates that the different ways in which the teacher is involved in children's literacy-related play affects the children's focus and engagement in literacy-related play, as well as the type of literacy-related play activities that children engage in.

The results of my research indicated that little or no teacher interaction resulted in student initiated literacy related play activities that were fairly unfocused. During the first section of my research, there was very little teacher involvement either through modifying the play environment or as a direct guide in the children's literacy-related play. Minimal teacher talk and suggestions were observed that did not contribute significantly to the children's engagement in literacy-related play activities. For example, during a play session that took place just before Christmas, Lily played with a nativity set. The following is an exchange between Lily and me while she was playing:

Me: What are they doing, Lily?

Lily: Looking at the baby.

Me: Who is that baby?

Lily: Baby Moses

Me: What are all the animals and people doing?

Lily: I don't know?

I then explained to her that the baby was Baby Jesus. Although Lily used her background knowledge in this play experience, her actions were not affected by the teacher talk in the exchange. In this case, teacher talk served to clarify, for research purposes, what Lily was doing.

In play session one, the other teacher in the room did initiate a rhyme activity with the children that resulted in a fairly sustained literacy-related play experience, described earlier in the chapter. Otherwise, the majority of the literacy-related play activities observed during this section of my research were student initiated and fairly unfocused.

While it was observed that the children in this study engaged in literacy-related play experiences prior to the addition of literacy props to the environment, they engaged in significantly more reading and writing activities and imaginary play experiences when a more literacy rich environment was provided by me as the teacher. The literacy-related play experiences that they did engage in were more authentic and focused as well through their restaurant pretend play and through writing letters, notes, and cards. For example, the play experience described previously in which Katie asked how to spell 'Rachael' so she could write my name on an envelope to give to me provided her with a more meaningful and authentic context for writing than was observed in coloring activities in earlier play sessions.

A rise in collaborative play due to the teacher providing a more literacy rich environment through the addition of literacy props was observed in my research, although self play was still observed as well. An example of a literacy related collaborative play experience that resulted from a more literacy rich environment was observed during a play exchange described earlier in the chapter between Lily, Anna, and another child. The girls demonstrated that they were

applying background knowledge to their play as they followed the routine of taking the other child's order using notepads and pencils that I had provided in the writing basket.

The children were continuously engaged in literacy-related play during the third and final section of my research due to teacher-directed play activities. Some of the types of literacy-related play activities observed changed during these last play sessions. While the application of background knowledge in play, speech development as a result of teacher modeling, and self play were observed in this section of my research, there was much more engagement in book-based play, word play through rhyme and music, reading activities and collaborative play as a result of more direct teacher involvement in the children's literacy-related play. I acted as a guide to the children's play, providing more opportunities for them to engage in different types of literacy related play.

The teacher's role as a guide in encouraging book based play occurred during the children's reenactment of *The Little Red Hen*. The following is an excerpt from the children's first reenactment of the story:

Me: Little Red Hen, first you wanted to what?

Katie: Plant the seeds.

Me: Yes, so you said...who will...

Katie: Who will help me plant the seeds?

Me: Oh, what did her friends say?

Sam: Not I.

Me: Not I, said the rat. What did the pig say, Lily?

Lily: Yes, I will!

Me: No, not yet. Not I said the pig. Anna, what did the dog say?

Anna: (shook her head)

Me: Not I, said the dog. So Little Red Hen, what did you say?

Katie: I will do it all by myself.

Me: Yes, so Little Red Hen go ahead and plant your wheat seeds.

Katie: (pretended to plant the seeds)

By prompting and guiding the children to recall what happened in the story, I encouraged them to participate in this book based play activity.

The teacher's role as a guide to encourage the children to engage in word play through music and rhyme was observed in my study. Following the creation and reenactment of their own Valentine's Day story after we read *Dumpy's Valentine*, I asked the children to stand in a circle and hold their friends' hands. I told them we were going to play a game while we sang a song. While walking around in the circle, I began singing, "Do you know my valentine, my valentine, my valentine? Do you know my valentine, she's wearing a princess dress." I described what Katie was wearing and asked the children if they could figure out who my valentine was. Katie correctly guessed herself and I told her that it was her turn next. This continued until all of the children had a turn choosing a valentine. Through this teacher-directed song activity the children demonstrated an ability to use describing words to describe what their valentine was wearing, as well as to use music to become more familiar with 'valentine' as a new vocabulary word.

One of the biggest roles that I played as the teacher in this final section of my research was to provide the children with books on which many of the subsequent literacy-related play activities were based. For example, to begin our first Little Red Hen play session, I began by reading the book aloud to the children, trailing off some of the sentences and letting the children

fill them in after they recognized the pattern of the story. Allowing the children to fill in the rest of the sentence gave them an opportunity to become familiar with the story structure and laid the foundation for the rest of our literacy related play activities based on this book.

The information presented in this section, *The Teacher's Role Impacts Children's Literacy-Related Play*, indicates that different levels of teacher involvement in the children's literacy-related play impacted their play in different ways. By providing a more literacy rich environment, I gave the children an opportunity to incorporate those materials into their own literacy-related play on their own. This opportunity gave them a foundation for engaging in more authentic literacy activities. By taking a more direct approach and acting as a guide to their literacy-related play, I encouraged the children to engage in a larger variety of more collaborative literacy-related play activities.

### **Summary**

Through my role as a participant observer in the children's play sessions and my interviews with the children, I was able to gain a better understanding of how children develop literacy through play and what the teacher's role is in literacy-related play. Throughout the thirteen sessions I observed that the children engaged in a variety of literacy-related play activities, including reading and writing activities, book-based play, block play, speech development as a result of teacher modeling, applying background knowledge or prior experience to play, block play, word play through music or rhyme, self play, and collaborative play. As summarized in the tables found in Appendix D and E, I noticed that the types of literacy-related play present in the play sessions differed between each of the three sections of my data collection as literacy props were introduced and teacher involvement in literacy related play increased. The social context of the children's play evolved over the three sections from

primarily self play in section one, a fairly equal combination of self play and collaborative play in section two when literacy props were added to the play environment, and primarily collaborative play in the final, teacher-directed section of my research. Similarly, I observed only a few instance of reading and writing activities before literacy props were added and when there was minimal teacher involvement in play. I observed more occurrences of writing activities with the addition of literacy props, and I saw more evidence of reading activities and book-based play with increased teacher input. The children engaged in literacy-related play for a greater portion of the play session in each successive section of my research, and they engaged in more sustained literacy-related play experiences with the addition of literacy props and greater teacher input.

As seen in the summary of each focal child's literacy-related play activities throughout the play sessions in Appendix F, the children engaged in similar literacy-related play activities. I observed however, that Sam, being the only four-year-old focal child and the only one to attend preschool, was more likely to attend to and use print in his play. Although Anna and Lily did as well, they seemed to attend to and use print in their play more in earlier stages of emergent literacy related play, such as imaginary play.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

As indicated in Chapter Four, this study demonstrated the connection between play and the development of literacy in children. The role of the teacher in this literacy-related play was also revealed through my research. My observations and transcriptions of videos of several play sessions, as well as my interviews with three focal children demonstrated that children engage in several different kinds of literacy-related play and the teacher's role influences these different kinds of play. Based on the results of my research in relation to my research questions, in the following section I discuss implications for learning and recommendations for future research.

#### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of my research, I concluded that play is a viable context for the development of literacy skills in preschool children. My research indicated that the type and quality of literacy-related play in which children engage is affected by the play environment and the role that the teacher plays in the literacy-related play. After observing the variety of literacy-related play activities presented in my study as well as the different roles of the teacher, I concluded that many different types of play and play contexts are conducive to the development of literacy skills in preschool children.

#### **Play is a viable context for the development of literacy skills in preschool children.**

My analysis of observations and video transcriptions revealed many different types of literacy-related play in which children engage, many of which are similar to those discussed in previous research included in the literature review. These different types of literacy-related play included book based play (Peck & Virkler, 2006; Rowe, 2007), imaginary play (Boyle & Charles, 2010), block play (Cohen & Uhry, 2011), reading and writing activities (Neuman & Roskos, 1990), using background knowledge or prior experience in play (Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002), outdoor

play (Grugeon, 2005), speech development as a result of teacher modeling, and word play through music and rhyme, and each was carried out in the context of self play or collaborative play.

Research has shown that there is a continuing and widening achievement gap between early childhood children of differing socioeconomic statuses (Neuman, 2006; Reardon, 2011). Children of all socioeconomic statuses in early childhood classrooms must be given opportunities to develop and practice their literacy skills in an effort to close this achievement gap. Although the children in this study did not come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, the children were allowed an opportunity to develop and practice literacy skills through the context of play as they engaged in these different types of literacy-related play, demonstrating that play may be a viable context for closing this achievement gap among children. For example, Katie demonstrated the development and practice of literacy skills in the play scenario described previously in Chapter Four in the 'Writing' subsection, in which she wrote my name on an envelope. Through her interaction with me, Katie demonstrated that she was able to write her letters and practiced doing so through her play as she wrote my name on the envelope. She also demonstrated and was able to practice her knowledge of the alphabetic principle as she recognized that there was an 'l' at the end of my name without being told.

Similarly, through the reenactments of stories read, the children in this study were able to develop important comprehension skills such as understanding sequencing and story structure, skills important to meeting the new Common Core State Standards. In another example previously described in Chapter Four under the 'Reading' subsection, Sam, Katie, Anna, and Lily were given an opportunity to develop these comprehension skills as they engaged in a reenactment of Jerry Pinkney's *The Little Red Hen*. By acting as the characters in the story, the

children picked up on the structure of the story through the repetition of their lines, and they were able to demonstrate an understanding of the sequencing of events in the story as they reenacted each event in the correct, logical order. This play interaction demonstrated that play provided a context for the development of literacy skills through the children's reenactment of stories they had read previously.

Based on these findings, I concluded that play is a context conducive to the development of literacy skills in preschool children. The results of this study indicate that as children are given opportunities to develop and practice their literacy skills as they participate in a variety of literacy-related play activities, demonstrating that play is a viable context for the development of literacy skills. I concluded from the results of my research that children are able to develop a variety of literacy skills during their free play time and during teacher-directed literacy-related play activities. The variety of literacy-related play activities in which the children engaged throughout my research is summarized in the chart in Appendix A.

**Opportunity to engage in a wide variety of literacy-related play activities promotes the development of children's literacy skills.** It was observed in my study that the children practiced different literacy skills as they engaged in a variety of literacy-related play activities. This idea is supported by the various types of literacy-related play activities reported in previous research (Boyle & Charles, 2010; Cohen & Uhry, 2011; Korat et al.; 2002; Peck & Virkler, 2006; Rowe, 2007; Welsch, 2008). Different types of literacy skills seemed to be associated with different literacy-related play activities, indicating that the opportunity to engage in a wide variety of literacy-related play activities encourages children to develop different literacy skills. Some literacy-related play activities, such as applying background knowledge during play (Korat et al.), engaging in word play through music and rhyme, and peer talk, were observed across all

three sections of my research, (little teacher interaction and no added literacy props, play with the addition of literacy props, and more teacher-directed play with the addition of literacy props), and were observed in many different play contexts. For example, applying background knowledge during play was observed in the first section of my research as Ben incorporated his knowledge of machinery into his play. During the second section of my research, applying background knowledge during play was observed as the three focal children, Sam, Anna, and Lily, engaged in pretend play (Boyle & Charles) and carried out the actions of placing and taking an order in a restaurant. Finally, in the third section of my study, applying background knowledge during play was observed as Sam incorporated his knowledge of machinery while the children created their own Valentine's Day story.

Although some literacy-related play activities were observed throughout the entire study, there were some literacy-related play activities that were primarily observed in only one context. For example, book based play (Peck & Virkler, 2006; Rowe, 2007) in this study was only observed during teacher-directed literacy-related play. Similarly, block play (Cohen & Uhry, 2011) and outdoor play (Grugeon, 2005) were only observed in the first section of my study prior to the addition of literacy props to the environment and in which there was little teacher interaction in literacy-related play, and symbolic play was only observed during the second section of my study after the addition of literacy props to the children's play environment. Additionally, self play gradually decreased throughout each successive section of my research while collaborative play increased.

From this information, I concluded that children should be provided with a variety of play environments and contexts as this information indicates that children practice or develop different literacy skills in different play contexts. By providing children with the opportunity to

engage in a wide range of play experiences, they will have a greater opportunity to practice multiple literacy skills through literacy-related play.

**Environment and literacy props are integral to literacy learning.** Researchers have concluded that a literacy rich play environment enhances literacy-related play (Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Neuman & Roskos, 1997; Welsch, 2008; Saracho, 2004). I concluded that a literacy rich play environment encourages children to engage in more focused literacy-related play than they do in an environment that is not literacy rich.

For example, during the first section of my research before there were literacy props added to the children's play environment, the few literacy-related play experiences that the children engaged in often lacked a meaningful purpose, and literacy was not the main focus of play. In the play experience described in chapter four in which Anna and Lily drew and colored at the table after scribbling on my note-taking paper, they demonstrated engagement in a writing activity. Both girls initially chose a letter paper to begin with, but Anna quickly lost interest and moved onto another activity, while Lily chose to color a Winnie the Pooh picture after she finished her letter paper. The children in this situation spent a very short period of time engaged in a writing activity which lacked an authentic purpose. The environment and the literacy props they used did not encourage authentic literacy-related play and the children's play was unfocused and lacked a real purpose.

After literacy props were added to the environment, however, it was observed that the children engaged in more focused literacy-related play than in the first section of my research. For example, in a scenario described previously in chapter four, Sam also engaged in a writing activity, but it was more focused than the writing activity described above. In writing a note to his mom on paper that I provided to the children and placing it in an envelope to give to her, Sam

was demonstrating engagement in an authentic and purposeful literacy-related play activity. Similarly, in a play session described in detail in Chapter Four under the ‘Self Play’ subsection, Ben, Anna, and Lily cut and colored, but lacked an authentic purpose for their writing activity. This play session took place during the first section of my research before the addition of literacy props to the children’s play environment. While the children voluntarily chose to engage in a writing activity, it was not a meaningful, focused experience.

In a play session during the second section of my research after literacy props were added to the children’s play environment, Anna and Lily engaged in a more authentic writing activity as they participated in restaurant pretend play. This play activity is described in further detail under the ‘Literacy-Related Props Encouraged More Focused Literacy-Related Play’ section of Chapter Four. The children again voluntarily chose to engage in a writing activity, but in this case the activity consisted of writing down their peers’ orders as they took on the role of waitresses in a restaurant as they played. Unlike the writing activity in the previous example, Anna and Lily were able to engage in an authentic and meaningful literacy-related play activity as a result of the addition of literacy props to the environment.

This information indicated that the children’s literacy-related play activities became more focused and purposeful after literacy props were introduced into their play environment. A literacy rich environment should be provided to children so they have an opportunity to engage in authentic and meaningful literacy-related play experiences.

**Teachers’ interactions, or lack of interaction, with the children during play impact the type and quality of the children’s literacy-related play activities.** Finally, I concluded that the teacher’s level of involvement in the children’s literacy-related play activities significantly

impacted these play activities. This conclusion is supported by the findings of previous research (Han, 2007; Korat, Bahar, & Snapir, 2002; Neuman & Roskos, 1990; Saracho, 2004).

As the teacher's role increased as my study progressed, changes in the children's literacy-related play were simultaneously observed. During the first section of my research in which there was minimal teacher interaction in the children's literacy-related play, the children engaged in fewer literacy-related play experiences than observed in the last two sections of my study. The literacy-related play experiences that children did engage in were rather unfocused and lacked an authentic purpose.

In the second section of my research, I, as the teacher, played a more significant role in the children's literacy-related play by providing them with a literacy rich environment in which to play. My role in the second section of my research was to provide literacy props and a literacy rich environment. I didn't purposely interact with the children until the final section of my research. Subsequently, it was observed that the children engaged in more sustained and meaningful literacy-related play than they did without a literacy rich environment. For example, the menus provided to the children encouraged them to engage in authentic literacy-related play as they read the menus and recorded their peers' orders. Similarly, the provision of paper and envelopes encouraged the children to engage in authentic writing experiences as they wrote notes and letters to one another and their teachers and parents. Literacy-related pretend play was observed in this section, although it was not observed during the first section of my research, and an increase in collaborative play between the children was observed as well.

My role as the teacher increased significantly in the final section of my study as a majority of the literacy-related play activities were largely teacher-directed. Book-related play, which was not observed in the previous sections of the study, was observed in this final section

as a result of teacher-directed play activities. Primarily collaborative play was observed in this final section of my research, a change from primarily self play or a mix of collaborative and self play previously observed in the study. The children's play experiences were observed to be more sustained and the entire play session during each of the four play sessions in this section of the study consisted of literacy-related play activities, which was not the case in the earlier sections of my research. For example, during a play session during the first section of my research which involved little teacher interaction and no added literacy props, Anna, Lily, and another child engaged in a child-led rhyme activity with the other teacher in the room. This play experience is described in further detail in the 'Word play through music and rhyme' subsection of Chapter Four. This play experience was one of the few throughout this particular play session, and it was a short interaction, with each child having only a couple of turns with the teacher.

During the final section of my research, however, in which the literacy-related play activities in which the children engaged were much more teacher-directed, the children engaged in more sustained literacy-related play activities throughout the entire session. Unlike the word play through music and rhyme play activity described in the previous example, the children engaged in several sustained word play through music and rhyme activities during the final section of my research. For example, with my direction and encouragement as the teacher, the children participated in a song activity as an extension of the Valentine's Day play activities. This play experience is described in further detail in the 'The Teacher's Role Impacts Children's Literacy-Related Play' section of Chapter Four. This song activity was one of several literacy-related play activities that the children participated in during this play session, and it also demonstrated a more sustained play activity that was found in earlier sections of my research.

Based on this information, I concluded that the teacher's role has an effect on children's literacy-related play. This information implies that teachers need to be aware of the ways in which their role in children's literacy related play impacts children's play activities, and monitor their actions accordingly.

### **Implications for Student Learning**

The results of this study indicate many implications for student learning. First, children should be given time for literacy-related play each day, as it is a credible context for literacy learning in early childhood classrooms. According to this study, children are able to develop these skills in a variety of contexts including self play and collaborative play, as well as in free play and teacher-directed play experiences.

Second, children should be provided with literacy props as props add to the development of children's literacy skills. In this study, it was seen that children were able to engage in more meaningful and authentic literacy-related play when they used literacy props. The literacy props supported the children in their literacy development by helping them to take part in more focused and sustained literacy-related play experiences.

The final implication for student learning presented by this study is that teachers must engage in carefully planned interactions during their literacy-related play. Teacher involvement in play encourages more collaboration with peers and allows children an opportunity to expand on the types of literacy-related play that they engage in.

Literacy-related play provides an authentic context for children to practice reading and writing, learn through music and rhyme, apply their background knowledge as a basis for their literacy learning, listen to, reenact, and expand on books read aloud to them, develop their

speech, and learn both on their own and in collaboration with their peers. Literacy-related play provides a rich context for literacy learning for children.

### **Implications for My Teaching**

This study provides many implications for my own teaching as well. The ideas and findings that resulted from my research have shown me the importance of play and provided me with ideas to incorporate into my teaching.

**Literacy skills are developed through play.** As a teacher I will be sure to allow time for children in an early childhood setting to engage in play each day. Observing the many literacy-related play activities that the children engaged in throughout my study has furthered my belief that play is an important and essential piece to children's literacy development. I have also observed the importance of giving children the opportunity to engage in different types of play, such as free play, structured play, self play, and collaborative play, as different literacy skills are practiced and developed through each.

**Literacy-related props encourage more focused literacy-related play.** The results of this study formed my belief that it is necessary to provide children with literacy props in order to give them an opportunity to take part in authentic and purposeful literacy-related play experiences. As a teacher, it is important to me to provide children with a literacy rich environment in which to develop their literacy skills through play. By providing them with literacy materials and a print rich environment, I will be allowing children an opportunity to engage in focused literacy-related play more conducive to developing emergent literacy skills.

**The teacher's role in literacy-related play.** The importance of the teacher's role to provide a literacy rich environment and to act as a guide for children in order to provide them with authentic literacy-related play experiences was indicated in this study. It is my goal in my

own teaching to provide children with as many authentic literacy play experiences as possible, through setting up a literacy rich environment for play and guiding children in their play as necessary to encourage them to engage in literacy-related play experiences that they otherwise would not engage in on their own. Play based literacy development could also be aligned to the Common Core State Standards through teacher involvement in play to encourage children to engage in book based play experiences.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings of this study revealed that children do develop literacy through play and that the teacher has an impact on that development through involvement in the children's literacy-related play. Further research would be beneficial to continue learning how to best use play to develop children's literacy skills.

**How does literacy-related play differ for children of different ages, genders, or socioeconomic statuses?** All three of the focal children demonstrated engagement in similar literacy-related play activities throughout my research. As the only four year old and only male of the three focal children, however, Sam demonstrated more interest in engaging in formal reading and writing activities during play, possibly due to the fact that he was the only focal child who attended a preschool program. Further research is needed to determine whether different kinds of play are more effective for the development of literacy skills of children of different ages and genders: boys and girls, three-year-olds or four-year-olds, lower elementary or upper elementary aged children. In this study, a difference in the types of literacy-related play that the children engaged in was noticed between the three and four year old children. Further research would help determine if this difference proved true in similar situations as well. It would also be beneficial to note if there is a difference in the types of literacy-related play

activities that children engage in between children of the same age who attend a preschool program and those who do not.

Although this study specifically examined three- and four-year-old children, further research is needed to determine if literacy-related play contributes to the development of literacy skills in children in the lower and upper elementary grades as well. Similarly, further research is needed to determine whether differences in the development of literacy skills exist between boys and girls at each of these age levels, in order to determine how to best structure play to be beneficial for different children.

Finally, the three focal children in this study were of roughly the same middle class socioeconomic status. Research indicates that there is a continuing and growing achievement gap among early childhood students from low socioeconomic statuses (Neuman, 2006; Reardon, 2011). I recommend that further research be conducted to determine if literacy-related play has differing effects on children from different socioeconomic statuses.

**Would the addition of reading props affect literacy-related play?** The majority of the literacy props that I provided in my study contributed to the children's engagement in writing activities. I would recommend that further research be done to determine the effect that the addition of literacy props that could be used in reading activities would have on children's literacy-related play. These literacy props could include items such as a variety of reading materials such as books, posters, menus, recipes, notes, signs, etc. These props may also include items that may be used in book-related play, such as dress-up clothes to represent characters from a story, or items important to a story that the children have read. This would provide a more well-rounded perspective of the effect of literacy props on children's play.

**Observe a greater number of play sessions.** My study was conducted over a relatively short period of time as children's literacy skills take time to develop. I did not have an opportunity to observe the children's free play after the teacher-directed play activities to determine if those activities would have any impact on the literacy-related play activities in which the children would engage in during free play. I would suggest that further research be conducted to gain a better understanding of the effect that literacy-related play has on the development of children's development of literacy skills over time.

### **Final Thoughts**

With an increased emphasis on the importance of high stakes testing, we see many instances of drill and teaching to the test. At the same time, there is a continuing achievement gap between children of differing socioeconomic statuses. Along with previous research, this study has shown that play may be a viable context for helping to close that gap and helping children develop the skills necessary to be successful on high stakes tests. The findings of this study have also indicated that play can be adapted to meet the new, rigorous Common Core State Standards through teacher direction. This study reiterated three important points revealed in previous research on the topic. First, children develop literacy skills through several different types of literacy-related play contexts, including free play, teacher-directed play, self play, and collaborative play. Second, literacy props provide children with a basis for play and allow them to engage in more authentic and purposeful literacy-related play experiences than they might without any props. Finally, the teacher's involvement in children's literacy-related play impacts the type and level of play in which children engage. With the teacher's guidance and support, children can be exposed to a variety of literacy materials during play, and can be encouraged to engage in different types of play than they may choose to engage in on their own. This study has

indicated that having a literacy rich environment, coupled with teacher involvement in play can provide a context in which children are able to successfully develop literacy skills through play.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

Field Notes

	Book Based Play	Movie Based Play	Reading Activity	Writing Activity
Focal Child 1				
Focal Child 2				
Focal Child 3				
Child 4				
Child 5				

Self-Created Observation Chart

Child 6				
Child 7				
Child 8				
Child 9				
Child 10				
Child 11				

Self-Created Observation Chart

Child 12				
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Self-Play	Collaborative Play	Book Vocabulary	Other

Self-Created Observation Chart


Self-Created Observation Chart

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**Appendix B**

**Social supports for literacy-enriched dramatic play**

	Roles	Routines/Scripts	Rules
<b>Props</b>			
<b>Print</b>			
<b>Preparatory Experiences</b>			
<b>Peer Talk</b>			
<b>Teacher Talk</b>			

**Play Performance**

**Name:**

**Date:**

Self-Created Observation Chart

**Appendix C**

Student Interview

1. What do you like to read while you play?

2. What do you like to write or draw while you play?

3. Do you like to pretend that you are a character from a book or movie when you play? Who?

4. Which words do you notice on toys or in the area around where you play?

Self-Created Interview

## Appendix D

Play Session	Literacy Related Play Activities
<b>Section 1:</b> No Added Props or Teacher Input	<b>Overall:</b> Writing activity, reading activity, teacher modeling contributing to speech development, using background knowledge or prior experience during play, song and rhyme with the teacher, block play, self-play, and collaborative play
<b>Play Session 1</b>	Writing activity, song and rhyme with the teacher, block play, self-play, and collaborative play
<b>Play Session 2</b>	Writing activity, reading activity, teacher modeling contributing to speech development, using background knowledge or prior experience during play, and primarily self play
<b>Play Session 3</b>	Writing activities, teacher modeling contributing to speech development, block play, music in play, using background knowledge or a prior experience during play, and primarily self play
<b>Play Session 4</b>	Writing activity, incorporating music into play, self play, and collaborative play
<b>Section 2:</b> Added Literacy Props	<b>Overall:</b> Reading activities, writing activities, pretend play, symbolic play, music and rhyme, peer talk, speech development through teacher modeling, using background knowledge or prior experience in play, self play, and collaborative play
<b>Play Session 5</b>	Reading activities, writing activities, pretend play, using background knowledge or prior experience in play, self play, and collaborative play
<b>Play Session 6</b>	Pretend play, music and rhyme, using background knowledge or prior experience in their play, and primarily self play
<b>Play Session 7</b>	Reading activity, symbolic play, self play, primarily collaborative play
<b>Play Session 8</b>	Reading activities, peer talk, speech development through teacher modeling, engaging in music with the teacher, and primarily self play
<b>Play Session 9</b>	Pretend play, incorporating music into play, writing activities, reading activities, speech development through teacher modeling, self play, and collaborative play
<b>Section 3:</b> Literacy Props and Teacher-Directed Play	<b>Overall:</b> Reading activity, book-based play, collaborative play, self play, book vocabulary, word play through rhyme or music, using background knowledge or prior experience in play, speech development through teacher modeling
<b>Play Session 10</b>	Reading activity, book-based play, collaborative play, minimal self play
<b>Play Session 11</b>	Book-based play, book vocabulary, word play through rhyme or music
<b>Play Session 12 and 13</b>	Collaborative play, reading activities, book-based play, word play through music and rhyme, self play, using background knowledge or prior experience in play, speech development based on teacher modeling

## Appendix E

Play Session	Social Supports and Teacher Support
<b>Section 1:</b> No Added Props or Teacher Input	<b>Overall:</b> Engaging in song and rhyme with the teacher, prompts, peer talk, teacher talk, providing print, asking for teacher support
<b>Play Session 1</b>	Engaging in song and rhyme with the teacher, prompts
<b>Play Session 2</b>	Prompts
<b>Play Session 3</b>	Peer talk, teacher talk, prompting, providing print, and asking for teacher support
<b>Play Session 4</b>	Provided literacy props, peer talk, prompts, providing print
<b>Section 2:</b> Added Literacy Props	<b>Overall:</b> Literacy props, teacher talk, preparatory experience, peer talk, asking for teacher support, providing print, prompting
<b>Play Session 5</b>	Literacy props, teacher talk, preparatory experience, peer talk, asking for teacher support, and providing print.
<b>Play Session 6</b>	Peer talk, literacy props, providing print
<b>Play Session 7</b>	Peer talk, teacher talk, and literacy props
<b>Play Session 8</b>	Literacy props, peer talk, and prompting
<b>Play Session 9</b>	Literacy props, peer talk
<b>Section 3:</b> Literacy Props and Teacher-Directed Play	<b>Overall:</b> Teacher talk, prompting, provision of literacy props, providing print, preparatory experiences, engaging in music and rhyme with the teacher, asking for teacher support, peer talk
<b>Play Session 10</b>	Teacher talk, prompting, provision of literacy props, providing print, preparatory experiences
<b>Play Session 11</b>	Teacher talk, prompting, preparatory experiences, literacy props, engaging in music and rhyme with the teacher
<b>Play Session 12 and 13</b>	Teacher talk, prompting, engaging in music and rhyme with the teacher, literacy props, providing print, preparatory experiences, asking for teacher support, peer talk

## Appendix F

Focal Child	Literacy Related Play Activities
<b>Focal Child 1: Anna</b>	<b>Overall:</b> Writing activity, word play through music/rhyme, block play, self play, collaborative play, imaginary play, peer talk, asked for teacher support, used literacy props, reading activity, using background knowledge/prior experiences in play, speech development as a result of teacher modeling, book based play
<b>Section 1:</b> No Added Props or Teacher Input	Writing activity, word play through music/rhyme, block play, self play, collaborative play, imaginary play, peer talk, asked for teacher support, used literacy props
<b>Section 2:</b> Added Literacy Props	Reading activity, word play through music/rhyme, writing activity, imaginary play, collaborative play, self play, using background knowledge/prior experience, speech development as a result of teacher modeling, asked for teacher support, peer talk, used literacy props
<b>Section 3:</b> Literacy Props and Teacher-Directed Play	Reading activity, book based play, collaborative play, self play, used literacy props, word play through music/rhyme
<b>Focal Child 2: Lily</b>	<b>Overall:</b> Collaborative play, self play, word play through music/rhyme, block play, writing activity, using background knowledge/prior experience, used literacy props, peer talk, reading activity, imaginary play, asked for teacher support, book based play
<b>Section 1:</b> No Added Props or Teacher Input	Collaborative play, self play, word play through music/rhyme, block play, writing activity, using background knowledge/prior experience, used literacy props, peer talk
<b>Section 2:</b> Added Literacy Props	Word play through music/rhyme, reading activity, writing activity, self play, collaborative play, using background knowledge/prior experience, imaginary play, used literacy props, peer talk, asked for teacher support
<b>Section 3:</b> Literacy Props and Teacher-Directed Play	Reading activity, collaborative play, self play, book based play, used literacy props, word play through music/rhyme

<b>Focal Child 3: Sam</b>	<b>Overall:</b> Self play, speech development based on teacher modeling, word play through music/rhyme, using background knowledge/prior experience, used literacy props, reading activity, imaginary play, asked for teacher support, peer talk, book based play, collaborative play
<b>Section 1:</b> No Added Props or Teacher Input	Self play, speech development based on teacher modeling, word play through music/rhyme, using background knowledge/prior experience, used literacy props
<b>Section 2:</b> Added Literacy Props	Collaborative play, self play, reading activity, writing activity, speech development through teacher modeling, word play through music/rhyme, imaginary play, used literacy props, asked for teacher support, peer talk
<b>Section 3:</b> Literacy Props and Teacher-Directed Play	Reading activity, writing activity, collaborative play, book based play, used literacy props, word play through music/rhyme, self play, using background knowledge/prior experience, speech development through teacher modeling, asked for teacher support, peer talk