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The Politics of Play: A Sociocultural Analysis of Play in the Context of State Preschool Standards

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**THE POLITICS OF PLAY: A SOCIOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS OF PLAY IN THE
CONTEXT OF STATE PRESCHOOL STANDARDS**

By

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DISSERTATION

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Stephanie, Amanda, James and Emily who through a decade of support, teasing, eye-rolling and their very existences were the motivation for this accomplishment and to Jeff without whom they, this dissertation, and my happiness would not exist.

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ABSTRACT

The past decade has seen an explosion of brain research and early childhood policies resulting in academics as a priority at state-funded preschools. Although strongly supported through a century of research, play often is pushed out by a more formalized, academic curriculum. Under the direction of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002), and the “Race to the Top” program, states have developed early learning standards to inform preschool teachers and direct the education and assessment of preschool children in the United States. Through content analysis early learning standards for the 50 states and the District of Columbia were examined for the frequency of the word *play*. This study found a range of play frequency in the standards documents across the United States written in response to federal mandates. Case studies of 6 states illustrate the position of play and the prioritization, acceptance or omission of the play as learning paradigm.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	ix
List of Tables	x
Chapter I Introduction, Background, and Problem.....	1
Chapter II Literature Review: Policy, Pedagogy, and Play.....	7
Policy	7
Pedagogy and Standards	16
Play	25
Chapter III Methodology and Procedures	50
Procedures.....	56
A Closer Look: Case Studies	65
Chapter IV Findings.....	68
Case Studies	81
South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines for 3- to 5-Year-Olds.....	81
Arizona Early Learning Standards for 3- to 5-Year-Olds.....	82
Maryland Model for School Readiness: Framework and Standards for Prekindergarten.....	83
Alaska Early Learning Guidelines, Birth – Kindergarten.....	85
Washington State Early Learning and Development Guideline Birth to Third Grade.....	86
New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines: Birth through Kindergarten.	87
Chapter V Summary, Discussion, and Future Research.....	89
Future Research	92

Appendix A: Table of States 97
References 102

List of Figures

Figure 1. Timeline illustrating the paths of education policy and preschool policies	10
Figure 2. Map of play frequency by thirds	71
Figure 3. Map of play frequency of states with and without PreK	73
Figure 4. Map of states by age grouping.....	75
Figure 5. States by Governor’s Political Party (Democrat – Republican).....	77
Figure 6. States by 2008 Presidential Voting (Democrat – Republican).....	78

List of Tables

Table 1. Characteristics of the play paradigm and examples of play experiences	31
Table 2. Play words included and not included throughout the text.....	63
Table 3. States' Play Frequency Alphabetically	69
Table 4. Frequency of <i>Play</i> in Early Learning Standards Highest to Lowest.....	71
Table 5. Frequency of Play: States without PreK - States with PreK.....	73
Table 6. Frequency of Play and Age Grouping	75
Table 7. Frequency of <i>play</i> and party of governor when developing standards	77
Table 8. Frequency of <i>play</i> and 2008 Presidential Electoral Voting: Play Frequency	78

Chapter I

Introduction, Background, and Problem

The political prominence of early childhood education has increased rapidly over the last two decades and been documented by Soto (2000), Ohanian (2002), and Miller and Smith (2011). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* by Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) presents the discoveries in neuroscience, sociology, and psychology that have added to the cry: “what happens early matters” (p. 216). The first five years of a child’s life can have a lasting impact on a child’s future, and this fact has led to intense demand for government funds to be invested in developing the minds of these young children.

In preschool classrooms, the pressure to teach young children as much as possible as early as possible is enormous, as is the need to maximize education funds to put 4-year-olds on a strong academic path (Golinkoff & Hirsch-Pasek, 2000; Barnett & Frede, 2010; Finn 2009, Pianta & Howes, 2009). Federal legislation such as the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the “Race to the Top” program, and state preschool programs across the United States have created multiple policy layers influencing the standards and priorities for children who spend time in private and government funded programs (Pianta & Howes, 2009 and Kirp, 2007).

At the same time that preschool programs are being developed, research surrounding *play* as a cognitive, developmental, and social tool has grown and strengthened from its deep, historical roots with Dewey (2001) and Froebel (2005) to the new researcher-advocates for play in Elkind (2007) and Fromberg (2002). A tension arises between policymakers who have the goal of educating preschoolers through standards and assessments and researchers such as Hirsch-Pasek (2009), Heidemann and Hewitt (2010), and Hughes (2010), who advocate for the early childhood practices of play and educating the whole child.

In this research I will examine the relationship that exists between policy and play as viewed through state standards documents, which were developed to inform preschool teachers and direct the education and assessment of preschool children in the United States. The standards documents articulate a set of principles and expectations concerning what preschool children are expected to know and do (McInerney, Van Etten & Dowson, 2007) and thus direct what teachers are to teach. This research can inform the practice of early childhood teachers and impact the preschool children they educate, as suggested by Gall, Gall and Borg (2003). Creating a conversation around standards and play can instigate change and focus attention on the daily lives of very young children.

The guiding question for this research is as follows: What is the position of play in the context of a preschool policy document? In economics, position is a function of one thing being more desirable than another (Hirsch, 1976). This study seeks to determine how prioritized play is in preschool policy, as indicated by the uses of the word *play* in early learning guidelines and standards from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Then, through case studies selected to represent a range of frequency of its use, it seeks to characterize the importance of play in early childhood education across the country.

Standards are defined by Spillane (2004) as curricular frameworks that define challenging learning standards and align policies with these documents. Spillane remarks that states develop their own takes on standards-based reform, adapting to their unique political, historical and institutional contexts. As a result, approaches to standards-based reform vary from one state to the next. Written to enhance and advise preschool education, some states developed early learning standards, other states developed content standards, while still other states focused on prekindergarten (preK) benchmarks. To examine the

relationship between policy and play, I analyzed policy documents produced by each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia that focus on preschool children.

Preschool is defined as the specific early childhood education year before children enter kindergarten; ages range from 4 to 6, depending on state age requirements for starting school. Preschool is often replaced with the word prekindergarten or early childhood or even the age: 4-year-olds, 3- to 5-year-olds. Preschool encompasses all of these age groups and effectively denotes the year before a child enters the K-12 system of education. Policy documents will include the state-produced document directed at the education of preschool children. The word *play* and its inclusion, frequency, and relationship to and between the standards will illuminate the research question.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the degree to which play is prioritized in early childhood learning standards across the United States. Through counting references to play within these documents I seek to develop an indication of the position of the standards in relationship to how play is used in early childhood education: Play as a means for and indicator of learning, or what I shall term the *play as learning* paradigm. The play as learning paradigm competes for prominence in early childhood classrooms with national educational policies that focus on early acquisition of academic skills (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). As Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, and Singer (2009) explain, “Despite an extensive research literature that clarifies the components of excellent, effective early education through playful learning U. S. preschools are becoming academic ‘boot camps’” (p. 10).

In order to conduct a careful analysis of the standards, it is necessary to first define and characterize the nature of play. To define and explore the nuances of meaning encompassed in the research on play, I turn to the *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood*

Development (Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development 2008), a work devoted to explaining the concepts and issues central to the development of young children. In this volume, Smith and Pelligrini (2008) define play as “activity done for its own sake, characterized by means rather than ends (the process is more important than any end point or goal), flexibility (objects are put in new combinations or roles are acted out in new ways), and positive affect (children often smile, laugh, and say they enjoy it)” (p. 1). To further clarify their definition, they differentiate play activity from exploration, work, and games, all of which have more defined goals and parameters and may or may not be pleasurable. Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff (2008) concur that, from the child’s perspective, play has not extrinsic goals and is pleasurable, but they add that play is spontaneous, involves active engagement, is generally engrossing, often has a private reality, is nonliteral, and can contain a certain element of make-believe.

Children play in a variety of contexts, using their environment and people around them as sources of inspiration. Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff (2008) identify four different types of play:

- (a) *Object play* the ways in which children explore objects, learn about their properties, and morph them to new functions: (b) *pretend play* (either alone or with others), variously referred to as make-believe play, fantasy, symbolic play, socio-dramatic play, or dramatic lay, where children experiment with different social roles: (c) *physical or rough-and-tumble play*, which includes everything from a 6-month-old’s game of peek-a-boo to free play during recess, and (d) *guided play* where children actively engage in pleasurable and seemingly spontaneous activities under the subtle direction of adults (p. 1).

These categories provide a useful set of criteria for recognizing play in the activities of children and can frame an analysis of the extent to which play is emphasized in early childhood standards.

“Play functions as both a verb and a noun; rather than a category, property, or stage of behavior, play is a relative activity” (Fromberg, 2002, p. 10). Play is a verb in the lives of children and a noun in the standards documents. Play is always relative to the context of the young child experiencing it. Play offers children feelings of power and belonging. It provides the means for children to construct continuity between their worlds outside of and inside of school. According to Klugman (1995), play opens young children’s avenues of expression, communication, and participation. Play allows the classroom culture of peers to flourish. The children write the scripts through their interactions, friendships, and negotiations. Play is also at risk of shrinking in priority as academic goals increase within early childhood classrooms as put forward by Fuller (2007) and Fromberg (2002). When expressed in the standards, the word play represents the spontaneous activity of children with the caveat that spontaneous be defined as free, impromptu, natural, uncompelled, and uncontrived. By reviewing the literature, we can clarify further the conceptualization of play.

This research begins to examine the intersection of policy and play informed by my own experiences over the last 10 years. I have spent the last decade teaching preschool and college while going back to graduate school for a Ph.D. with an emphasis in early childhood and education policy. This involvement and knowledge gave rise to my interest in this topic. Based on the large body of research on the value of play and my first-hand observations of children at play, I am an advocate of play as a learning experience. Specifically, I will examine play as it appears in the writing of the standards documents that guide the education

of young children. I will strive to present a neutral analysis of these documents, but I wish to acknowledge my position on play because it will assist readers of this research in evaluating my empirical claims.

In this research, I employ the methodology of content analysis with support from Krippendorff (2013), Hsieh and Shannon (2005), and Schreier (2012) to gather and organize the information. The frequency of the word play will be counted and discussed in the sociopolitical contexts of the states and the country. The patterns between the various positions of play across the states' standards documents will be examined. The frequency of play will delineate case studies of relevant standards documents with specific characteristics to provide a grounded assessment of context of the word play in individual states standards documents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research characterizes state preschool standards documents as they are written. It does not focus on how teachers implement these standards or on how students learn in environments framed by these standards. Research that focuses on the relationship between policy and preschool education, however, creates a foundation for future investigation into how teachers interpret these standards and how children learn in contexts influenced by these policies.

Chapter II

Literature Review: Policy, Pedagogy, and Play

Policy

Three fields of existing scholarship support this research: policy, pedagogy, and play. Policy and the documents produced by policy agencies are the foundation for this research, so policy will be discussed first, followed by pedagogy, and finally play.

Dubnick and Bardes (1983) define “public policy” as the expressed intentions of government actors relative to a public problem. Policy also can be outputs of the political system in the form of rules, regulations, and laws, or “ongoing strategies for structuring relationships and coordinating behavior to achieve collective purposes,” according to Stone (2002, p. 261). In early childhood education, policy is a chain of decisions stretching from the statehouse to the classroom with the purpose of improving the lives of young children. The codification of these policy decisions has resulted in written preschool standards in each of the states.

While all states have similar political structures, each of the 50 states has a different policymaking environment as observed by Gerston (2002), which allows for 50 different standards to be written. This individualistic environment leads to specific curricular goals at various education levels including preschool; often these policies have intended and unintended effects, as concluded by Ripley and Franklin (1986). The intended effect of preschool, and preschool standards documents, is to prepare children to go to kindergarten and succeed academically, according to Pianta and Howes (2009). The unintended effect of preschool may be the replacement of play with academic skills as teachers follow standards

written to support testing, as Brown (2009) discusses. The standards documents are written to influence power over what is taught, how it is taught, and how it is evaluated.

Lindbloom (1968) and Fowler (2009) claim that power and education policy cannot be separated because the play of power shapes the outcome of the policy process.

Policymaking at the local, state, and federal level is a vertical relationship built upon a constitutional separation of powers. At the federal level, policies are sweeping and usually based on cooperation and compromise between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government with large expert support from the bureaucracy. Issues become polarized at the federal level often because of the scope of influence and possible costs. Light (1999) discusses the intentional omission of education by the framers of United States Constitution, who left public education to the discretion of the state and its leaders to allow for individuality.

Public schools are all under the jurisdiction of state officials, but the real power of these officials according to Stone (2002) is budgetary. What does and does not get funded determines the expansion of existing programs and the development of new ones. The return on preschool investment makes these programs a great investment. The ratios have been calculated as high as 10 to 1, meaning one dollar invested saves 10 dollars in the future, as put forward by Pianta and Howes (2009) and Morrison (2007). Awakening the economic and business interests to the value of early childhood education has brought business and work force powers to the education discussion. As a result of the increased focus and funding, economic models are increasingly useful and influential to calculate maximal return on these young minds; Marger (2002) contends that the increased attention has led to increased pressure for academic standards and success in the earliest years of education and

results in preschool standards documents. “Americans are still as convinced as ever that one of the primary ways to overcome poverty is to invest more money in education” (Glazer, 1988, p. 61). Investment comes with accountability, and with accountability comes reform.

Within the policy arena, education reform appears sporadically and at specific points in time. Reform in policymaking is a change from the status quo; the change or reform may be incremental or radical (Jones, 1984). Although education is a power left largely to the states, education reform often occurs at the far-reaching federal government policy level. In *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (1984), Kingdon presents a metaphor of streams to clarify the policy process and instances of reform. Kingdon’s metaphor starts with separate problem, political, and policy streams, each with an autonomous path. The theory starts with the problem stream in which a problem is identified and gains support. This leads to the policy stream in which policy specialists constantly are working on issues and generating proposals. Finally, the political stream is added and is composed of swings in national mood, public opinion, elections, and ideologies. When these streams meet, there is a critical “window of opportunity” (p. 193) during which policy reform is created. For preschool standards, the streams of brain research, state development of preschool programs, and passage of far-reaching federal legislation requiring early learning standards converged to create a policy window.

The timeline (Figure 1) illustrates the paths of education policy and preschool policies. There has been a rapid increase in early childhood education policies over the past century and most intensely over the past few decades. Kirp (2007) details the explosion of public and private support for preschool across the country over the past 20 years. The

preschool timeline is followed by a timeline of events and legislation at the national level that have influenced public education.

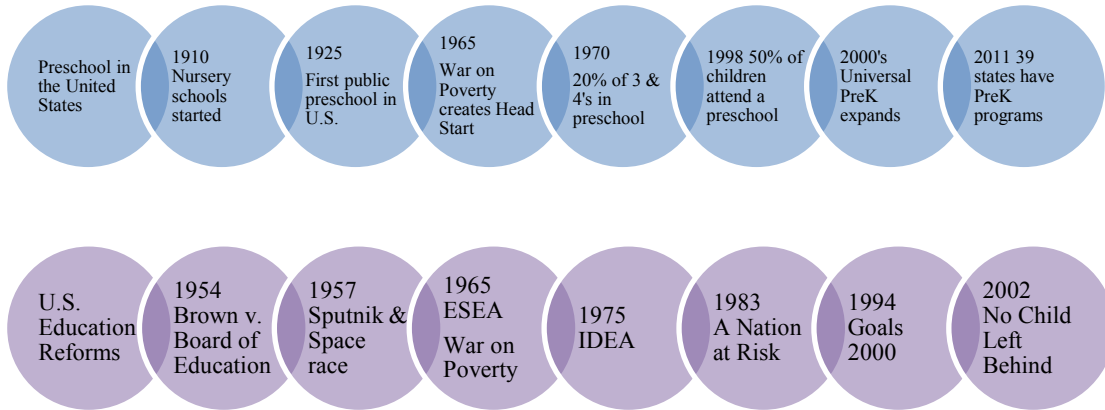


Figure 1. Timeline illustrating the paths of education policy and preschool policies

The preschool timeline is detailed but the U.S. Education Reforms deserve clarification (Light, 1999): the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling subjected state school systems to federal oversight; the 1957 launch of Sputnik resulted in federal education funds focused on math and science improvement; the 1965 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* brought wide-sweeping federal involvement and funding into state education; the 1975 *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* required states to educate students with exceptionalities in the least restrictive environment; the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* called out schools for failing to compete in the international community and presented reforms still being sought today; in 1994 the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* set forth ideals for the states to achieve in education; and in 2002 the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) became the most influential federal education policy ever written with requirements that if not met would result in the loss of federal funds.

The separate educational worlds of preschool and public education interact intensely with passage of the “War on Poverty” legislation (creating Head Start preschool programs), again with the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (supporting interventions and preschool programs for special needs children), and finally and inextricably with the *No Child Left Behind Act* (requiring states to develop early learning guidelines). This federal influence as the motivating source for standards in early childhood education is integral to understanding educational policy making at the state level.

For decades early childhood was outside the policy arena of education. Klugman (1995) reasons that early childhood was an isolated profession from the K-12 system and even in university structures was separate and not well respected or understood. While elementary and early childhood policies have connected and overlapped, the systems of education and the standards were rarely coordinated. That began to change in 2002 with the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Standards at the most basic level are “a written text...a cut-and-dried set of codified rules” (Scott 1998). Standards are documents that convey expectations of what individuals are expected to know and do as clarified by McInerney, Van Etten, and Dowson (200). *No Child Left Behind* (2002) stated clear early childhood expectations:

To support local efforts to enhance the early language, literacy, and prereading development of preschool age children, particularly those from low-income families, through strategies and professional development that are based on scientifically based reading research.

To provide preschool age children with cognitive learning opportunities in high-quality language and literature-rich environments, so that the children can attain

the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary for optimal reading development in kindergarten and beyond (Section 1221).

NCLB's entrance into early childhood was unknown territory and required more specific legislation to support the stated goals. The Good Start Grow Smart (GSGS) Early Learning Initiative was written to follow NCLB in creating a federal system of early learning standards. Federal agencies were to "encourage and support states to develop voluntary early learning guidelines that align with K through 12 standards." The legislation's proposals were identified as follows:

A stronger Federal-State partnership in the delivery of quality early childhood programs. This new approach will ask States to develop quality criteria for early childhood education, including voluntary guidelines on pre-reading and language skills activities that align with State K-12 standards (Retrieved from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/initiatives/gsgs/fedpubs/GSGSBooklet.pdf>).

More than a landmark piece of legislation at the federal level in early childhood education, GSGS (2002) brought standards to state preschool programs. While the mandate was voluntary, it immediately contradicted the core requirement for standards put forth by McInerney, Van Etten, and Dowson (2007) in regard to consistency. Consistency means the states would develop standards with theoretical and practical similarities. NCLB sought to create a national system of standards in K-12 education, but GSGS immediately conceded to states' authority and autonomy. Much of this concession is because GSGS is an unfunded mandate. Aside from child care development block grants for which states could apply, GSGS did not automatically provide funds for development of the standards they mandated.

The policy priorities or mandates of a higher level of government do not always have the ability to alter or influence the priorities of the lower level—in this case the federal legislation of NCLB influence over the states to write early learning standards, also known as early learning standards (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). NCLB had influence because the consequence of not following the legislation meant giving up millions of dollars in federal education funding (Peterson & West, 2003). GSGS was supported by small grants but no recurring incentive or funding was tied to it. Some of the states already had early learning standards in place while others took their time developing a document.

By the end of 2002, 27 states had developed early learning standards, most since 1999. In 2004, 41 states had complied with GSGS and had developed early learning standards (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2005). At the time of this research (2012), all 50 states and the District of Columbia have early learning standards. This is where the similarity ends. Studies by Scott-Little, Kagan, and Frelow (2005) that examined the standards documents found that they vary “tremendously in format, content, length” as well as in many other characteristics (p. 2). What the early learning standards do share is a lack of foundational research according to a plethora of writers (McInerney, Van Etten, & Dowson, 2007; Neuman & Roskos, 2005; and Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006).

Increased incentive and funding for developing standards appeared in 2009 when the Obama administration used stimulus funds to create the Race to the Top Fund (RTTT) and specifically the “Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge” Fund. "Education must be our national mission," said President Barack Obama. "All of us must work to give all our children the best education possible. And today, we're acting to strengthen early childhood education to better prepare our youngest children for success in school and in life" (Retrieved

from www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/we-cant-wait-nine-states-awarded-race-top-early-learning-challenge-grants-awards). The key reform points of RTTT are as follows: aligning and raising standards for existing early learning and development programs; improving training and support for the early learning workforce through evidence-based practices; and building robust evaluation systems that promote effective practices and programs to help parents make informed decisions.

All of these reforms (War on Poverty, the *No Child Left Behind Act*, and the Race to the Top Fund) have put early childhood programs under pressure to replace play with more important ‘learning’ activities, a concept discussed by Johnson (2005). The emphasis on readiness for kindergarten dictates much of the preschool experience. Further, many educators, such as Miller and Smith (2011), see a need for a universal, centralized preschool system because they believe children are better served by a community. State control of education, however, makes systems different for each state. To understand this, one needs only to examine the large variances across the United States where some states fund preschool for every 4-year-old and other states that do not fund a single child (Pianta & Howes, 2009). In fact, early childhood education and K-12 public school education were distinct until recent and rapid prekindergarten programs developed across the United States (McCabe & Sipple, 2011). These policy developments coincided with implementation of NCLB and Race to the Top, but early childhood still generally has operated in a separate sphere.

Reasons for the current education policy environment are complex but largely economic. A quote from an RTTT press release illustrates this point clearly, "A strong educational system is critical not just for our children but also for our nation's economic

future," said U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius (Retrieved from www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/we-cant-wait-nine-states-awarded-race-top-early-learning-challenge-grants-awards). Periods of slower economic growth and anti-tax sentiment compounded by income disparity between the richest and the poorest has helped to create a sense of crisis in education, as asserted by Fowler (2009) and Marger (2008). In the United States, governmental policies are mediated more highly by a different articulation between the state, the economy, and schools. States and industry are trying to bring schools more closely in line with economic needs.

State preK programs can be seen as a state attempt to export some of its problems outside itself. Inequities in the experiences of young children compel a state to create preschool programs to equalize children academically as they enter kindergarten and the federal government agrees. RTTT's goals are stated as follows: increase access to high-quality programs for children from low-income families; provide more children from birth to age five with the strong foundations they need for success in school and beyond; support the development of new approaches in raising the bar across early learning centers; and close the school readiness gap. Georgia, Oklahoma, New Mexico and many other states have taken control of economic and educational concerns by creating preschool programs run through state agencies, and the states without programs have written documents guiding instruction while leaving administration to public and private preschool programs.

Through monetary incentive, the current policy environment encourages the development of readiness, K-12 aligned early learning standards to prepare children for school. E. E. Schattschneider (1960) observed, "...organization is the mobilization of bias" (p. 71). The very act of organizing to write standards means there is a motivation intrinsic in

the people writing them. They come to the meetings with goals, priorities, and biases. Standards are written to influence the curriculum that students learn and teachers teach. They are written to impact what is taught, how much of any subject is taught, and how what is learned is assessed. Standards are written to influence pedagogy.

Pedagogy and Standards

Standards are not written for preschool children to read; they are written to inform and influence the practice of preschool teachers. Standards are created in policy settings by constituencies that have direct interest in the results including students, educators, and policymakers, according to Diane Ravitch (1995). Ravitch also states that standards are developed in the context of collaborative, consultative, and broadly representative decision-making processes. This results in a document of compromise and consensus, not a document of precision. A committee of any size contains members from various backgrounds with various beliefs and goals: any resulting document from a committee must compromise all of these background, beliefs, and goals. The result is a standards document that possesses abstracted or removed beliefs and goals because individuals had to compromise and create consensus. McInerney, Van Etten and Dowson (2007) clarify and define the attributes of education standards and more precisely: “[C]ore academic standards [which] refer to specified levels of knowledge and skill in subject areas that are considered ‘essential’ for students to function as productive members of societies in given sociocultural contexts (p. 6). Content standards cover what individuals should know and do. “Standards have been written to articulate what exactly students are expected to learn” (Scott-Little, Lesko, Martell, & Milburn 2007, p. 1).

The standards movement is relatively young and emerged in the early 1990s as the policy solution for a failing K-12 public school system (Brown, 2007 and Ravitch 1995). “Paradigmatically, standards-based accountability reform enacts a theory of action that defines the goals and, in turn, the practices toward which an entire education system...works” (Brown 2009, p. 205). Early childhood is even newer to the standards movement. Brown (2007) writes profusely on early childhood education (ECE) in an age of accountability reform and concludes that “the field of ECE is at a critical point within the history of education reform, and stakeholders must continue to promote a vision of ECE that goes beyond simply protecting current practices and demand structural changes that foster the growth and development of all children” (p. 636).

The practice of preschool teachers is much more than entertaining young children. It is pedagogy: the holistic science of education. Putting pedagogy in the context of early childhood, a pedagogue is a term primarily used for an individual who occupies a job in preschool education such as kindergartens and nurseries. The pedagogue's job usually is distinct from the teacher's in that the pedagogue primarily focuses on teaching children life-preparing knowledge such as social skills and cultural norms (Petrie, et al., 2009).

I have taught early childhood teachers for the past decade and am always challenged to describe concisely why individuals choose early childhood over elementary education. I now see that “pedagogy” defines the profession of preschool teachers with a conceptualized depth.

Preschool teachers do not in isolation teach the years before children enter the K-12 system of education; the standards, policies, and pressures of the elementary schools influence them. The position of the preschool teacher is different even than that of an

elementary or kindergarten teacher. Jones (1991) maintains that early childhood educators too often “practice nice thinking rather than critical thinking” (p. 1). She discusses the need for early childhood educators to disagree rather than being agreeable just to appease others. If teachers can “learn to see themselves as creative and powerful agents for change” (Nieto, 2002, p. 197), they can build on and value what students bring to school. In order to be agents of change, teachers must understand the political system in which they function.

Paulo Freire (1998) wrote, “education is a political practice” (p. 72), but even he could not have foreseen the extent to which the United States would make this statement true. NCLB, GSGS, and RTTT have made virtually every bit of education political. From testing younger and younger students to progress adequately each year, to 95% attendance of all subgroups, to requiring teachers to be “highly qualified” in their field, NCLB has gone further than any other federal legislation (Peterson & West, 2003). The threat to early childhood practitioners is that reforms such as NCLB “display little confidence in the ability of public school teachers to provide intellectual and moral leadership for our nation’s youth...and teachers do not count when it comes to critically examining the nature and process of educational reform” (Giroux, 1988, p. 121).

NCLB has had widespread impact, but it is not the only political influence on early childhood practitioners in the classroom (Peterson & West, 2003). In part due to the pressures of NCLB, many schools have looked to “scientific research” for help in teaching reading and math. While research is an excellent resource for teachers and often can help with a particular challenge, packaged programs are restricting the flexibility and expertise of the teachers as Apple (1989) first discussed in the 1980s. Packaged programs have made millions of dollars and regimented millions of teachers and students in scripted learning.

My former students return to visit and guest lecture, and without exception they are in favor of packaged, scripted reading programs. If they are not in a school that has adopted a program, they are envious of others who are. They feel this way because they do not feel confident in developing an effective reading program in their first few years of teaching. They need the support of a scripted program to keep them directed and effectively teaching. My distraught concern is that they will indeed become “enslaved by the packages themselves, domesticated by the teachers’ guides, limited in their adventure to create” (Freire, 1998, p. 8). As these programs deskill and intensify education (Apple, 1989), when will the teachers find time to develop their own teaching skills and style?

Teachers themselves will have to decide whether standards will control the classroom or simply be a part of the educational experience. Aldridge (2002) raises the question: will teaching be thought of as transmission or will curriculum be thought of as transaction, inquiry, or transformation? The statement, “the doubt among the public that teachers and students have the ability to construct meaningful and important knowledge” (Nieto, 2002, p. 6) rings true even louder in early childhood classrooms. Classrooms that historically have emphasized finger painting playtime now focus on literacy and mathematical standards. Many people think that early childhood education is simply babysitting young children while parents are at work. Even in kindergarten there is a perception that teachers monitor play all day long and that children are not truly learning. The brain studies of the past 10 to 20 years have helped to change this perception.

Research on the need for appropriate instructional practices by Bowman and Burns (2000), Brown (2010), and Chien et al. (2010) found academic pressures have strongly influenced preschool as readiness research seeks to prepare children in preschool to be

successful in kindergarten. Particularly in the areas of preschool and child care, people often find it difficult to locate the specialized mastery of a body of knowledge and skills in early childhood education because the best practices look playful and because most early childhood workers are not required to have specialized professional preparation. Early childhood education is, therefore, a “public relations nightmare” (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003, p. 177). Public perceptions are based largely on a stereotype of young females who love children, not educated experts in the field of child development and care.

Van Hoorn (2003) vividly describes a preschool classroom where several children sit hodgepodge surrounded by blocks. Two are working together to build a tower of blocks as high as gravity will allow. Another has his back to the tower, intensely focused on balancing a semicircle block underneath a long, narrow block—like a seesaw. A third child is building a structure using symmetry, all the time unaware that her castle represents mathematical concepts. This activity is part of the self-selection portion of the daily schedule. It is free time when the children are allowed to choose an activity and interact with minimal direction from adults. It is also a time when the children are developing cognitive and creative skills to become engineers, architects, and mathematicians. In contrast, government policies such as the NCLB, GSGS, RTTT, full-day kindergarten, and prekindergarten are requiring standardized curriculum, frequent academic evaluations, and an emphasis on math and reading (Hirsch-Pasek, 2009).

In *Ways with Words* (1983), Shirley Brice Heath wrote about two neighboring communities: one black and one white, with equal socioeconomics. She discovered that the white and black children came to school with different ways of using language, and the school rewarded the vocabulary-based, question and answer language of the white children

over the language of the black children. “The school is not a neutral, objective arena; it is an institution which has the goal of changing people’s values, skills, and knowledge bases” (Heath, 1983, p. 367). Standards are written to change the existing educational environment and to direct or redirect the instruction in the preschool classrooms. Foucault wrote that regularities identified are not the same in all historical periods and in all cultures; rather, they are specific to particular times and places. In this case, we have state preschool standards in a NCLB world (in Olssen, 2003). Foucault’s (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller (Eds.), 1991) concept of “governmentality” is as follows: “[T]he problems...and the techniques of government have become the only political issue, the only real space for political struggle...what is within the competence of the state and what is not” (p. 103). Education and government have a tenuous relationship.

Education is not the solution to the bulk of society’s problems but is the site for many of society’s struggles. Existing and quite widespread conditions of discrimination, exploitation, and inequality—that is, structural conditions generated by the economy...and by governmental policies that largely reproduce these conditions (Apple 1986). The important “timing of knowledge” (Freire, 1998) aligns with the critical periods of development that a 3- or 4-year-old experiences. Teachers too often are asked to assuage “all the ills of society” (Freire, 1998, p. 4) during the limited school day. Freire in *Pedagogy of Freedom* address the great need for respect for educators and for education itself. Curiosity is the foundation and the mortar holding education together. For early childhood this means that stifling young curiosity will stifle the educational development of the child. In his own words, translated, “...the epitome of negation in the context of education is the stifling or inhibition of curiosity in the learner, consequently, in the teacher too” (Freire, 1998, p. 70). He calls for

the role of education to be the creation of possibilities for the construction of knowledge and brilliance in the field of teaching (Freire, 1998).

Dewey precedes Freire in chronology, but they are timely in their discussions and calls for change in education. In *Democracy in Education* (1916), Dewey discusses teachers and the needs of children and laments that the goals of adults often neglect the interests of children. He argues that the teacher too often is confined by the textbook, supervisor, or prescribed course of study, which distances the teacher from the mind of the students. “The teacher must be absolutely free to get suggestions from any and from every source; and stay always focused on the interests of the child (Dewey, 2001, p. 74).

We cannot expect schools to expand the horizons of our children if the teachers are kept limited and restricted (Apple, 1986). Historically, the teacher has had a large impact on the daily schedule of a preschool classroom and how a teacher fosters literacy, mathematics, art, social development, scientific thinking, and communication (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2003). Even when a committee develops a schedule for playground time, a teacher has great flexibility around the use of that time and the use of free time or self-selection (a time during the school day when children may choose from a variety of activities such as dramatic play, art, block play, book corner, etc.) in the classroom. In recent years, the effect of the teacher has been mitigated by policy and program regulations. The expansion of preschool at all levels has brought with it packaged literacy programs and rigid assessments.

“The state produces policies but it also produces people,” (Apple, 2003, p. 17). For the youngest members of society, the state is taking an influential role in the cognitive and social development of the people it produces. In the United States, more children are

attending preschool than ever before. The education of young children has become a central focus of federal, state, and local policymakers and programs. This focus is a result of studies lauding the economic benefits of preschool that find millions of dollars in future monetary returns for early childhood education expenditures, as discussed by Paciorek (2008), Morrison (2007), and Kirp (2007). Moreover, research on young children's brains has illuminated the elasticity and potential for learning that occurs during the years of 3 to 5, as presented by Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) and Bronson and Marrayman (2009). The past decade has seen a sharp increase in preschool funding and the goal of universal preschool in many states according to Saracho (1998). Recent policies such as *No Child Left Behind*, full-day kindergarten, and universal preschool/preK have joined Head Start and other established programs to educate young children. Originating from different needs and contexts, regardless of their longevity, all these programs share a strong, new call for assessment academics in the school schedule for young children.

Based on the historical establishment of a public K-12 education system in the United States, preschool and the field of early childhood education sit apart. Preschool classrooms are an eclectic array of homes, private child care centers, private preschools, federal Head Start centers, churches that contain religious and non-religious programs, cooperative centers, state-funded prekindergarten programs, and public school-based preschool programs (Kirp, 2007). The profession of the preschool teacher is varied and in transition as well. How preschool teachers are trained, and in some cases whether they are formally educated at all, who monitors their work, and the sociopolitical influences on their time with the children have moved from mostly autonomous to highly regulated forms in the United States and across the world (Sheridan, 2011).

Piaget pointed out that “the younger the child, the more ‘difficult it is to teach him, and the more pregnant that teaching is with future consequences’” (in Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006, p. 14). Teachers of young children thus need more, not less, training than those of elementary and secondary children. State departments of education agree with Piaget, and in 21 of 43 state-financed early education programs, teachers are required to have a bachelor’s degree. Moreover, 29 states require specialized training in early childhood to teach in an early learning program (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2006). The increased pressure on pre-service teachers to focus on reading and academics silences the theories of play that can be used to educate young children. “High stakes examinations and policy prescriptions have influenced the narrowing of early curriculum practices toward passing the examinations,” (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003, p. 178).

There is a body of research discovering that standards do not influence teachers as much we sometimes think. Spillane’s (2004) concept of interactive policymaking asserts that many teachers are making policy by fitting the standards to their curricular decision- not the other way around. Brown (2009) found that preK teachers needed to inform K-12 teachers as to early childhood practices so that their curriculum may flow up rather than elementary curriculum being pushed down in the wake of NCLB. Under the pressures of academics standards, teachers are expressing their autonomy in the classroom and making their own curricular and instructional policies and decisions (Goldstein, 2008). Teachers are “actively interpreting the requirements...through the lens of their professional beliefs, preferences...and creating classroom policy responsive to their particular professional contexts (Goldstein, 2008, p. 448). The pressure of mandated standards and assessments

may not be as strong in early childhood classrooms, as many teachers develop their own instruments (Hanes, 2010).

Whaley (2007) discusses that standards are not prescriptive in how they are to be implemented: the means are flexible while the ends stand static. Under GSGS and RTTT there is a large amount of flexibility because of open-ended goals and state autonomy. Play is a viable inclusion into curricular areas by teachers informed of its importance. In elementary classrooms and in preschool classrooms, the teacher may position play as a reward, a punishment, or an integral component of the educational experience. Scott-Little, Kagan and Frelow (2006) report that several important areas of children's development have been omitted from some of the early learning standards specifically: physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; and approaches toward learning, which includes curiosity, task persistence, reflection, and language. Play involves all of these curricular areas. Klugman (1995) observe that since play is not tested, it is not surprising that curriculum has come to revolve around the rote memorization of isolated skills rather than around play. Given the extensive theoretical foundations professing the relationship between play and cognitive growth, the absence of play in schools for young children is puzzling. The next section discusses the history of play in schools and the paradigm of play as critical to learning.

Play

Play is multifaceted, diverse, and complex; play resists easy definition and engages many disciplines. Play is voluntary, meaningful, symbolic, rule-governed, pleasurable, and episodic. Optimal play is when the player is unaware of time passing with play satisfying and focused enough in the present to transcend the moment (Fromberg, 2002). Play is an arena in

which children exert power and make choices. Play changes constantly, and unfolds differently in different settings. The shifting functions in different settings may contribute to problems many researchers experience in defining play. Adults may have the power to restrict space and time, but children retain their capacity for fantasy and imagination. Children at play reveal a great deal about what they understand; coordination, social competence, language, problem-solving skills, fluency, emotional tone and control (Fromberg, 2002).

Play is an interactive process through which children learn about themselves, their environment, the other people in that environment, and the interrelationships among all of these. Play, specifically sociodramatic play, helps children to appreciate on another's perspectives and contributions (Fromberg, 2002). Multicultural content appears in children's play through the use of gestures, language expressions, and attitudes toward issues that arise. Cultural orientation also influences whether children tend to focus on a figure or the background, the logical or the figurative, the single or the multiple interpretation, collaboration or competition (Heath, 1983). Play is very serious business in childhood where power relations are played out in terms of race, class, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, age, size, skin color, sexuality, and proficiency with language, gross motor skills, etc. (Grieshaber & McCardle, 2010).

Play is intrinsic, self-selected, active, mind involving, and a focus for personal powers. It is intriguing and captivating and frequently involves practice of needed mental and or//physical skills. Play engages and fulfills the player. Play as a detailed, complex concept is further delineated by the categories often used to analyze play. Types of play are categorized according to the level of physical involvement, the learning outcome, the intent

of the children involved, and the materials that are include in the play: large-motor play on the playground, small-motor play in building with small blocks or cutting with scissors, mastery play acting out a task to successfully accomplish a result, rule-based play in an outside sport, construction play in building a fort, make-believe play in flying to the moon, symbolic play in dressing up and interacting as a family, language play in sing-song repetitions or rhyming, playing with the arts in the freedom of art supplies and creating not only artwork but mathematical representations and creative depictions, sensory play in the water, sand or flour table, rough-and-tumble play in tag on the playground or wrestling in the block area, and risk-taking play in climbing up the slide and on top of the bar climber(Pellegrini, 2011). These different types of play have diverse underlying mechanisms and consequences, and these may be developmentally and contextually specific (Pellegrini, 2011). Playful learning occurs when children are actively engaged in meaningful discovery. Play is critical for the intellectual, physical, social, and emotional growth and learning of children.

The history of play is poly-theoretical, involving the fields of anthropology, zoology, medicine, history, sociology, psychology, education, kinesiology, and philosophy. Following the history of play in childhood development from the writings of Johnson, Christie, and Wardle (2005), and Krogh and Slentz (2001) will illuminate the universality of the concept of play. In approximately 370 B.C.: Plato's *Republic* supported child's play as an important part of learning through experiences. The Greek words for play and education are the same, *paitheia*, and derived from the Greek word for child, *pais*. In the 1600s John Comenius's *School of Infancy* called for educating children at their mother's knee through songs, games and play. Later than same century John Locke professed that children are born like blank

slates, should put all of their senses to use in learning, have play and freedom, but always with discipline. In the 1700s Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Emile*, a treatise on education, claimed that children are inherently good and should roam, play, and follow spontaneous impulses. 50 year later, Johann Pestalozzi recommended universal education with lessons building from the concrete to abstract and to protect the blissful, natural life of the preschool years.

In 1826 Friedrich Froebel's *The Education of Man* espoused the natural unfolding of the germinal leaves of childhood and that children learn naturally through play. Froebel's gifts and his development of kindergarten became a foundation for play-based learning in formal education settings. In the 20th century Maria Montessori discussed children's play as a fantasy preparation for adult life and John Dewey's *The Child and Curriculum and the School and Society* proposed that play is activities not consciously performed for the sake of any result beyond the acts themselves. Soon after, Mildred Parten identified and detailed four steps in the sequence of preschoolers play: unoccupied, onlooker, or solitary play; parallel play; associative play with toys and conversation; and cooperative play toward a common goal which Jean Piaget in the 1960s developed further into the stages of functional play (repeating actions, imitating movements and manipulating objects), constructive play (goal-directed, creative, developing themes), symbolic play (dramatic situations, social themes, substitutions of reality with fantasy), and games-with-rules (controlled behaviors with limits and adjustments to others' needs).

Jerome Bruner then proposed that play supports creativity, flexibility, and problem solving without fear of failure. Supporting children in their play or scaffolding was outlined by Lev Vygotsky's in the 1970's. He asserted the importance of socio-cultural context in play and that play moves children into the zone of proximal development: a continuum into a

higher level of thinking which is the distance between what a child can do and what a child can achieve with skilled help (scaffolding).

Currently, there are multiple theories of play: Elkind (2006) and Fuller (2007) present play as enjoyment, Johnson, Christie, and Wardle (2005), and Van Hoorn, Monighan-Nourot, Scales, and Alward (2003) all discuss play as crucial to development in young children, Thompson (2009) clarifies the role of play in therapy for chronically ill children and in emotional therapy, and Grieshaber and Mcardle (2010) problematize play as not always safe, fair or fun. The multiple theories on play function in a field of discontinuity: “Despite the many treatises on play, scholars still find the term elusive” (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2008, p.1). This is not to say that there is not agreement or unity on the importance of play; rather, there exists a multiplicity of meanings and a lack of observable cohesion. I propose that the overarching paradigm “play as learning” is a cohesive view and represents play as essential to the education and development of young children. The “play as learning” paradigm allows “play” and “learning” to function as synonyms.

Child development psychologists agree on the importance of play for preschool children. Regardless of the type of program, its sponsorship or function, play is recognized as a child’s primary activity in life and as such the primary mode of learning (Klugman1995). This commonly-held belief follows Kuhn’s (1970) definition of paradigms as “what the members of a scientific community share” (p. 176): a generally accepted perspective of a particular discipline at a given time. Play is such a stable paradigm that those in the field often do not find it necessary to define play because it is part of the human and educational consciousness. A paradigm has a strong network of commitments—conceptual, theoretical, instrumental, and methodological—and can guide research and “may be prior to, more

binding, and more complete than any set of rules for research that could be unequivocally abstracted from them (Kuhn, 1970, p. 46). Dewey (1915) reasons that paradigms are had or lived before they are known—to have a paradigm is to have a habit. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert it is difficult for a fish to understand water because it has spent all of its life in it, so is it difficult for scientists to understand what their basic axioms or assumptions might be and their impact upon everyday thinking and lifestyle. There is a multiplicity of theories, and yet “play” is something everyone claims to know when they see it, with most of the authors failing even to attempt to define it.

The central tenet of the play as learning paradigm is the importance of young children learning in an environment that encourages playful activity (Grieshaber & McCardle 2010). “How you learn is as important as what you learn” (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009, p. 9) and the play as learning paradigm encompasses and accepts that play is the developmentally appropriate method for young children to learn. Play is an activity for learning through language, cognitive, physical movement and socio-emotional interactions (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Table 1 outlines the characteristics of the learning as play paradigm and examples of play experiences that occur while exploring each characteristic.

Table 1. Characteristics of the play paradigm and examples of play experiences

Characteristic	Examples of Play
Language as the instrument for shared understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication through language and gestures during play and social interactions in dramatic play: role play, props, negotiate roles, shared narrative of play, act out storybooks • Writing and drawing: pencils, clipboards, maps, receipts, coupons, note and letters • Listening: listen to others in play roles, suggestions during scenarios, negotiate roles and play themes, adapt and adjust behavior based on feedback during play
Cognitive as thinking during play, creativity and imagination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curiosity: explore roles, objects, relationships and question peers • Problem solving: address conflicts, present options, agree on solution • Invention and imagination: props or imaginary objects to represent real items, make up story scenarios, substitute imaginary objects for real objects • Pretend roles: enact observed roles, language, gestures and mental pictures to communicate understanding • Persistence in staying engaged in play: persist when other's interest lag, offer options to other children
Physical as movement through large motor and fine motor experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination in space: move around play spaces in roles and movements while interacting with others • Large-muscle control and coordination: climb, run, and slide while enacting play themes • Fine-motor skills: use a variety of tools: spoons, pans, pencils, keyboards, clipboards, chalkboards • Eye-hand coordination: Feed, rock, carry babies using dolls, blankets and bottles
Socio-Emotional as the expression, negotiation, and self-regulation of emotions, feelings, likes and dislikes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive self-concept and self-confidence: take risks in proposing ideas, success in group play • Understand and regulate emotions: control feelings when frustrated, persist in play • Explore, practice and understand social roles and relationships: assign roles, take on perspectives from various roles • Group competence: enter group play, negotiate turn-taking, share leadership, support peers, increase understanding of culture and language • Words used to resolve conflict: Decide roles, story narrative, agree to and enforce rules of play. Express anger through language when in conflict with other children • Play scenarios: take others' ideas, share ideas, change and adapt story lines and suggest new directions

(Adapted from Heidemann & Hewitt 2010, p. 11).

In the standards documents the appearance of these examples express the play as learning paradigm and their inclusion and development in the standards documents position play within the paradigm. The play as learning paradigm positioned in the standards documents may manifest as prioritization, acceptance or omission. Prioritization conveys play is the chosen method of learning as displayed through its integration throughout the document, acceptance conveys play is a method of learning equal to and supported by academic methods of learning and omission conveys play is not a method of learning and is replaced by academic methods of learning.

Play supports and increases academic learning in a variety of ways that are natural and enjoyable for young children, such as dramatic play (Seefeldt, 1999). Play has gained greater importance as a medium for literacy development because it provides meaningful, functional social settings. Literacy development involves a child's active engagement in cooperation and collaboration with peers, builds on what the child already knows, and thrives on the support and guidance of others. Play provides this setting (Morrow, 2001).

Play as science is seen in buttressing a tower made of blocks; play as math is classifying a collection of rocks based on specific criteria (Johnson, 2005). Play increases social competence and parental bonding; it teaches symbolic representation, language, creativity, and problem solving (Saracho, 1998). If the child developmentally is prepared and interested, he or she can learn much of what she needs to learn through play. Play has intrinsic value to the child and is an essential experience in childhood. If there is such an abundance of research on the importance of play in the education of young children, why is there a dichotomy between learning and play?

If play is a child's work, there is little space for a child to work in the school of today. Dewey was writing more than 100 years ago and repeatedly lamented the same environmental and structural concerns. Dewey's discussion of the child versus the curriculum identifies the false dichotomy created when the curriculum sets subjects up in a way that is not natural to the interests or learning of the child (Dewey, 2001). Schools were and are too often places for listening, not engaging and certainly not the "active centers of scientific insight" that Dewey had hoped (Dewey, 2001, p. 14).

Within the paradigm of play as learning, one major facet of development that play fosters is socialization. Through communication, children expand their vocabulary and discover new ways of expressing themselves in the varied play settings (Owocki, 1999 and Rogers, 1992). The conversations that develop during play are based upon the experiences, abilities, and feelings of the children. Satisfaction and frustration are two powerful examples of feelings that occur during play, and the child learns to experience, understand, and communicate about them (Jones, 1992).

In the exchange of socialization, the child is allowed to bring their years of play experience into the classroom only in limited increments. Play as the means of expression is limited in the classroom to circle time comments or reading group. There are potential opportunities during self-selection and centers to build upon earlier skills, but freedom is limited. Playground time has the greatest length and depth for developed play skills to be used and increased. From sharing to creative role-playing to physical challenges, the playground is the least-inhibited environment for the child to bring their experiences into the school setting. The time constraints placed on young children limits the chance to increase play-based skills.

Playtime and recess are often the first areas in the daily schedule to be shortened so that more time can be devoted to academic subject areas. Apple argues that the classroom is immersed in control of the children's choices. When making art projects, topics are assigned. Even when creating flowers from cupcake liners, students had to limit themselves to only three colors (Apple, 1990). Play quickly was seen as the reward for finishing the required work. Many children hastened their project simply to be free to interact with friends. Apple notes that the kindergarten children talked more about working and less about playing as the school year progressed from September through October. Recent research on early childhood education has focused on academic gains rather than the cognitive development brought on by play and the natural interactions that have been the foundations for early childhood education (Barnett, 2008; Fuller, 2007; Kirp, 2007; and Olfman, 2003).

Recess in the elementary grades and kindergarten has a strong role in the discussion. As the year immediately following preschool, kindergarten connects most closely to this play research. The debate over recess and the importance of outside play has escaped academic circles and entered mainstream media with articles in *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Spirit*, and a plethora of books with *Play* in the title (Brown, 2009 and Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Both the academic and mainstream research is focused on influencing policymakers, administrators, and educators with the hope that developmentally appropriate practices for young children be followed. They assert that kindergarten standards need to focus on the development of the entire child, and child-initiated play and experiential learning are important (Fuller, 2007; Miller & Almon, 2009; and Pelligrini, 2011). Preschool itself has a relationship with play and policy. The power of preschool and the promise of preschool are two guiding principles in

the fast expansion of preschool across the United States (Barnett & Frede, 2010 and Pianta & Howes, 2009).

These policies and programs have impacted children, families, and the teachers entrusted to educate and socialize young minds. Unfortunately, these policies have focused attention on early academic experiences and have intentionally shifted away from the role of play in learning. This has forced those who function within the paradigm of play (play as learning) to consciously include play or to consciously omit play from the experiences of children. “With the new emphasis on school readiness promulgated by the *Goals 2000 Educate America* and *No Child Left Behind* federal education acts, Head Start, private, and school-based early childhood programs are under pressure to replace play with more important ‘learning’ activities” (Johnson, 2005, p. 221). The core problem is the belief held by policymakers, parents, and even some educators that play is the opposite of teaching and educational learning. Simply put, the belief is that play and learning cannot occur at the same time. If they cannot occupy the same space, they must be given individual time, and there is not time in the busy academic day of a preschooler for play.

Within many preschool schedules, there are scheduled times called ‘outside time’ or ‘playground time,’ along with ‘self-selection’ or ‘activity choice’ (Johnson, 2005 and Van Hoorn, 2003). The environment may include indoor spaces, outdoor spaces, or communal spaces. The environment is created by the architecture of the facilities, the school administrators, and the teachers, but will not be the focus of this research. The children and their opportunities within the environments will be the focus. It will be sufficient to think of play environments as an entity that cannot be controlled for but can be manipulated by the creativity of the children experiencing it.

This manipulation can be seen on the playground when slides become waterfalls and sandboxes become elaborate work sites or castles. It can be seen in the classroom when art supplies enter the kitchen as a salad or when science objects are needed to make the block structures look more like jungle ruins. “The quality that work and play have in common is creativity. At their best, play and work, when integrated, make sense of our world and ourselves” (Brown, 2009, p. 127). These environmental manipulations are not unique to young children. Adults play and, according to Brown, “creativity is the source of all growth—the new products, new techniques, new services, and new solutions to old problems” (Brown, 2009, p. 134). Children are not the only influences on their play. The adults who create and control the independent variable of environment also control the amount of time children spend in these environments. This is precisely what makes the preschool standards documents and their analysis important: they are the framework for guiding the adults in making decisions about the education of young children.

“Play...is a central part of neurological development—one important way that children build complex, skilled, responsive, socially adept and cognitively flexible brains” (Hirsch-Pasek, 2009, p. 14). Given the enormity of play research, choosing which theorists to include in this research is similar to choosing which books to take on a trip; the determining factors are relevance, interest, priorities, and space. Whose research enriches and most defines the research questions at hand?

There has been a shift in thinking; play is increasingly seen as irrelevant and no longer highly valued for children (not by children, *for* children). Heidemann and Hewitt (2010) outline reasons for this shift in preschool as follows: competing curricular demands in programs focused on readiness; separating play and academics; societal perceptions that play

is not learning; noisy play seen as violent and out of control rather than problem-solving; and assessment concerns because measuring play can be formidable. Failure to develop creativity is contributing to the loss of competitiveness on the global scene: the exact thing policymakers are trying to avoid could be exacerbated by their own educational programs (Elkind, 2007). By creating policies that emphasize rote-academic lessons and activities, politicians are attempting to educate young children for a global market. Teachers are attempting to balance the social and physical developmental needs with the academic standards the new programs demand.

The need for children to play reached enough of a crisis that in October 2006 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a clinical report titled, “The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds” (Ginsburg, 2006). In it the largest association of pediatricians in the United States advocates “for the changes specific to the need of each child’s social and environmental context that would enhance the opportunities for play” (Ginsburg, 2006, p. 2). The idea that joyful play cannot contain academic study and learning is unfounded. “When something gives us pleasure we are inclined to study it more carefully” (Noddings, 2003, p. 244). There is a need for policymakers and educators to use the current brain research and the decades of research on play to support cognitive and social development in the way that is best for young children.

“Play is so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a “right of every child” (Ginsburg, 2006, p. 1). This right is not being protected and is frequently being violated by testing and academic drills. This research attempts to benefit all who attend school, teach, or research in

the area of early childhood to counterbalance policies that are being developed to maximize the hours preschoolers spend in formal, education settings. There is a swell of research appearing in defense of play supported by researchers in education and child development (Bodrova, 2007; Brown, 2009; Catron, 2003; Elkind, 2007; Fromberg, 2002; Hirsch-Pasek, 2009; Johnson, 2005; and Saracho, 1998). This renewed focus on what children are actually doing when many adults think the children are simply “playing” may be the critical piece. From choosing colors for a painting or mixing colors to get the precise shade of purple, to studying the habits of the classroom guinea pig, to measuring the growth rate of bean seeds growing on the windowsill, play is exploration in the most scientific of fields. The teacher, the classroom, the environment and the materials impact play in the preschool classroom.

The growth of the “educational toy” has limited open-ended play for children and changed the way they experience childhood. Children can use open-ended toys such as blocks and animals in many different ways that encourages them to be creative. “Educational toys” and media-based toys “effectively tell children how to use them, thus preventing children from playing creatively” (Soto, 2000, p. 92). When children lose control over their creative play, they lose control over the one aspect of their lives not constantly interfered with by adults. When Apple observed a kindergarten class for the staying power of social meanings, he discovered that children had little influence over their environment. “First, work includes any and all teacher-directed activities; only free-time activities were called ‘play’ by the children” (Apple, 1990, p. 55). All activities, even listening to stories and coloring, were considered work because they were told to do it. The use of classroom materials without direction was the only true play over which the children had influence. It was not the object or the toy but the freedom from direction that defined play.

One toy whose influence is not yet clear is technology. Computers and the internet are new resources and concerns that did not exist in earlier generations. Technology is as intrusive or educational as the teacher allows it to be (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). Depending on the teacher's level of knowledge, computers can be used effectively or just take up classroom space. The teacher, however, cannot control for unlimited computer access in the home or compensate for a home in which there is not a computer. Isenberg and Jalongo support choosing software carefully and monitoring computer use by students to ensure healthy social and emotional interactions and development. Technology allows some children a chance to explore topics and visuals they can find in no other medium. I will not address cell phones and iPods in the hope that the few children eight and under who possess such technology are an anomaly and not a trend.

Observing a preschool playground demonstrates that play challenges motor skill development. Through play, children are able to challenge their bodies by watching classmates or creatively design activities that push their physical abilities. Eye-hand, body control and large motor skills are all developed in play (Catron, 2002). Catron (2002) also discusses the invisible curriculum of play that children develop, carry through, and use for continuity in a day filled with transitions and new experiences. Piaget states, "Play is the answer to the question, how does anything new ever come about" (Elkind, 2007, p. 3)? Play is the dominant mode of learning in the early years and helps us adapt and create new learning experiences (Elkind, 2007). "Play is very serious business as a child is engrossed in creating, exploring, and pondering; it is serious business; it is his/her world" (Catron, 2002).

Vygotsky believed that not only can development impact learning, but that learning can impact development. Learning can hasten and even cause development, rather than

developmental stages locking a child's development. Play is the primary interaction that allows children to have peer mentors within the zone of proximal development. "What the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 211). The static and fluid nature of the ZPD is what makes it so appropriate for young children and lets it be readily and easily applied to play in preschools. The ZPD is individual to each child and to each area of knowledge, skill, strategy, discipline, or behavior. The ZPD can reveal skills on the edge of emergence and the limits of the child's development at a specific time. This idea presumes there is time and space for skills to emerge at their natural pace. Play is often the environment where this occurs, but without the freedom of play, the flexibility of the ZPD is lost.

Every single aspect of a child's learning and growth is experienced through play. The challenge is to find an academic subject or social milestone that does not have its grounding in the early play of young children. Froebel wrote that play is not to be identified with anything that the child does externally. Rather, it designates his mental attitude in its entirety and in its unity. "In all of these major theories of development, play has a major role in shaping the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of the child. Although the emphases differ in each theory, all of these theoretical perspectives underscore the centrality of play in the healthy development of the whole child as an integrated, competent, and self-aware person" (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2003, p. 36). Solitary, parallel, and social play each give children significant interactions with their peers and environments (Van Hoorn et al., 2003). Some play must be left entirely up to the children for there is no other place to learn the give and take and tough lessons of social interaction (Ginsburg, 2006).

In the late 1980s the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published developmentally appropriate practice guidelines to provide guidance to centers seeking accreditation and to respond to the pushing of academic learning further and further into preschools (Aldridge, 2002). These guidelines rapidly became the essential guide for educators of young children. The NAEYC is one of the largest professional education organizations in the world with more than 100,000 members. They strongly support play and teacher-supported play as crucial in a child's educational experience (Aldridge, 2002).

Play continues to be a necessary ingredient in high-quality early childhood programs. "Beginning with Pestalozzi, early childhood practitioners centered their curricula around children and their play" (Soto, 2000, p. 62). Teachers cannot center curricula on a future work force or economic benefits. A balance must be found. Play in preschool has been studied, but usually in an indirect manner. While studying academic gains in preschool, many studies have found that the amount of time spent in free play is significant (Chien et al., 2010). This study also found that play occupied 45 minutes of a half-day program and described this amount as "quite a long time" (Chien et al, 2010). The focus of these studies is academics not play, so comments, not analyses are used to discuss the free time and play. If academics and play cannot occupy the same space, priority must be given to each within the daily schedule (Fuller, 2007; Kirp, 2007; and Olfman, 2003). Again, play is not to be identified with anything that the child externally does. It rather designates his mental attitude in its entirety and in its unity. It is the free play, the interplay of all the child's powers, thoughts, and physical movements, in embodying, in a satisfying form, his own images and interests (Dewey, 2001).

The modern theorists agree with their predecessors in many ways and scientific research supports their assertions. Freud thought play was a way of dealing with unpleasant experiences through role switching and repetition. Erikson and Jung further developed this field. Skinner (1974) and Bandura (1977) thought that children are more likely to learn a behavior when they feel it is important, makes them similar to others, have a chance to act it out, and results in a positive reinforcement. The social influences of play were discussed as being parents, siblings, and peers. Cognitive theories in the 1960s developed by Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner researched the role of play on the development of children's thinking. Neurobiological science discovered that children's brains are wired when they play. Their neural network is strengthened and synapses are developed. Play is an integrative behavior using many areas of the brain. The adaptive variability of play requires and teaches children great flexibility, which is needed in today's world: Play as progress, play as fate, play as power, play as identity, play as imaginary, play as self, play as frivolity.

Sociocultural perspectives brought Brofenbrenner examining the role and influence of context in play. Goncu sees play as a cultural activity with beliefs and values. Play became viewed in the broader sociopolitical context of our culture. This level of analysis primarily is concerned with how education and play perpetuate gender, class, and inequality in society. Appropriately named chaos theory brings Vander Ven (1998) and the idea that in such a fast-paced world how to find, order, and evaluate information is key, not the learning of facts and content. One could argue that this is more true now, in the electronic era, than ever. Play is dynamic and generative as it creates meaning for a child in terms of social context, which is defined as everything in the child's environment that has been either directly or indirectly influenced by the culture (Brofenrenner, 1977). Apple follows with "the meanings, interests,

and languages we construct are bound up in the unequal relations of power that do exist” (Apple, 2000, p. 31).

The concept of ‘knowledge’ within different cultures varies, as do ways of learning and the strategies applied in the pursuit of learning. In an early childhood classroom culture is everything—every experience, every comment, every reaction. Young children still are completely immersed in their culture without the world or school experiences to separate themselves from it. Play is often an expression of culture (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005 and Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2003). It can give a teacher insight into a child’s world. Culture can be a verb: dynamic and changing. Culture can be complex and intricate. Culture can be a smell, a song, a phrase, or “something inside our hearts” (Nieto, 2002, p. 9).

The central focus of this research is the position of play in the standards documents. The documents and the views on play expressed through the standards are expressions of the dominant culture. Individuals—children or adults—are not only part of one culture. Gollnick and Chinn (2006) discuss the many and varied microcultures that children belong to as they move from one context to another. Home, school, friends, and work each require functioning a little differently and expressing ourselves in a certain manner.

The relationship between play and culture is important and influential not only for the young child but also for the teacher. The teacher’s background and values surrounding play influence that teacher’s curriculum decisions every day. It is also in the early childhood population in which the differences of language, poverty and culture are most obvious and strong. Often a child does not know their home disciplines or speaks differently until they arrive at school. The meaning of these differences can be confusing and isolating. “In an

economy that needs to stimulate individual consumption and a search for happiness based on the pursuit of consumable goods and services, older cultural values involving respect and the public good need to be subverted. Traditional cultural forms are not progressive for capital and need to be replaced by ideologies of individualism. Respect for position and ‘sacred’ culture will be subverted and replaced by respect for possessions” (Apple, 1986, p. 121).

Heath (1983) illustrates this in such a strong manner that its relevance remains today. Her research into two communities in the rural Carolinas presents the power of language within a cultural and community context. The ways of communicating were so strong for the children that when they attended school, their entire vocabulary of meaning had to be translated into school-accepted behaviors and communication. The power of discourses and the need to know which we are in at any given time is still rarely discussed in the area of early childhood education. The need for a formalized way of being while at school does not allow for a variety of cultural means of communication. The freedom and flexibility young children need to express themselves as thoroughly as possible is absent once they enter a school setting.

Narrowing play through the preschool experience allows us to glimpse into the lives of children attending the myriad programs in the United States. Activities associated with a greater degree of free choice, free choice, and outdoor time often are associated with more positive engagement with peers and tasks (Vitiello, 2012). The continued call for universal preschool and the willingness of the federal government and individual state governments to fund educational early childhood programs but not high-quality child care reinforces this academic approach to early childhood development (Johnson & Wardle, 2005). The focus on academics comes at a cost. As Dewey wrote, “Learning is active” (Dewey, 2001, p. 107);

making the need for movement and play imperative in the early childhood classroom. The need for play in preschool settings as a socializing experience also has increased as family size has decreased (Shonkoff, 2000). Sibling interactions were the site of social learning for centuries, and now with more and more one- or two-child families, that experience has shifted. More children have entered formal child care settings giving them the opportunity, if allowed, to learn and play with a large number and wide range of personalities. This makes classroom management very important.

Class management comprises everything from arranging the environment for optimal learning to supporting appropriate behavior so that all the students can engage and learn. “Educators and, presumably, parents see management as the primary factor by which quality instruction and student learning occur” (Garrahy, Cothran, & Kulinna, 2005, p. 56). At a time when teachers are facing more and more behavior issues, social development must be kept a priority. The preschool expulsion study out of Yale University Child Study Center hit the mass media as fast as it hit academic circles. Its findings were disturbing: preschoolers were expelled from state-funded prekindergarten programs three times more often than K-12 students were expelled from public schools; 4-year-olds were expelled at a rate 50% greater than 2- or 3-year-olds; and boys were expelled at a rate 4.5 times that of girls (Gilliam, 2005). These expulsions were based solely on behavioral problems; there were no academic standards that a student could fail to be expelled. The expelled children simply could not function with the other children in the classroom. Friendship, conflict, conflict resolution, pretend play—all of these are learned through play interactions outside the orchestrations of the teacher and classroom environment (Shonkoff, 2000). Play as an ounce of bad behavior

prevention has not yet been proved scientifically but has been professionally practiced for decades.

The paradigm of play as learning may be shifting not only because of policy pressures but also as a result of the attributes of play itself. In Brian Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play* (2001), he laments the undefined nature of play across fields of research: "[F]or example, biologists, psychologist, educators, and sociologist tend to focus on how play is adaptive or contributes to growth, development, and socialization." Communication theorists tell us that play is a form of meta-communication far preceding language in evolution because it is also found in animals. Sociologist say that play is an imperial social system that is typically manipulated by those with power for their own benefit. The title of the book itself alludes to the ethereal nature of precisely defining play.

Sutton-Smith (2001, p. 4) applies William Eppson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1955) to play:

- 1) The ambiguity of reference (is that a pretend gun sound or are you choking?);
- 2) The ambiguity of the referent (is that an object or a toy?);
- 3) The ambiguity of intent (do you mean it, or is it pretend?);
- 4) The ambiguity of sense (is this serious, or is it nonsense?);
- 5) The ambiguity of transition (you said you were only playing);
- 6) The ambiguity of contradiction (a man playing at being a woman);
- 7) The ambiguity of meaning (is it play or play fighting?).

The preceding questions are challenging to answer and thus illustrate the ambiguity of play effectively. In reading dozens of treatises on play, I discovered that the majority did not

define play; they wrote an entire book on play and did not define the topic of their text. The ambiguity or unknown quality of play assists in the explanation of these omissions.

Educational play may be seen as clarification of the play as learning paradigm. For Johnson, Christie, and Wardle (2005), “Educational play is linking educational goals, objectives and outcomes to one or more of the significant characteristics of play” (p. 199). Educational play may take many forms in different classrooms. The role of the teacher is to use the “natural spontaneous play of children in a way that it has educational value while continuing to maintain its qualities as play” (Saracho & Spodek, 1998, p. 9). Play in educational settings is the specific site for this research, and the demise of play has virtually been formalized by legislative mandates such as the reauthorization of Head Start in 2003 (Hirsch-Pasek, 2009).

In *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool*, researchers Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, and Singer present the legislative mandates of the *No Child Left Behind* (“NCLB”) program as contradicting decades of developmental research. Curriculum, assessments, and classroom environments that were scientifically based have been replaced with standards focused on the results of tests (Hirsch-Pasek, 2009). NCLB sets goals for preschoolers that are to be achieved by scientifically based research while at the same time ignoring all the research supporting play as the path to cognitive development.

There are theorists who find play less than innocent and joyful. In *The Trouble with Play* by Grieshaber and Mcardle (2010), play is presented as hard, frustrating work that is serious business. The fluctuating rules of young children’s play gives rise to cheating, bullying, and risk-taking behavior. The authors problematize play to help “early childhood educators resist the academic push-down effect from school and maintain play as a key

pedagogy” (p. 24). Teachers and advocates of play must be able to call on a depth of understanding and analysis so as to compromise the paradigm of play and the academic standards, outcomes, and demands being place on young children.

We are in the midst of a profound historical shift in education and a dramatic change in policy (Kirp, 2007). So much has happened so rapidly in preschools that it is hard to know what goes on in a classroom of four year old. From a policy analysis view, at a time when social programs are being cut and education is still the financial responsibility of the states, despite influences of the federal NCLB and the newer Race to the Top initiative, preschool is an expanding, public sphere. Academic and social concerns are of primary interest in this proposed research but health is an underlying foundation. Obesity in childhood is a global concern and national epidemic. A sedentary lifestyle, not matter what the cause, is an unacceptable health risk that can be avoided. Preschool-time play fulfills a crucial role in the health and physical activity of children.

Fromberg (in Klugman, 1995) laments that, “At the same time the research literature describing the value of play appears to be expanding geometrically, the presence of play in early childhood classrooms is dwindling impetuously. The once cognitively rich play curriculum of nursery schools, kindergartens, and primary grades has been replaced by an accelerated academic curriculum” (p. 187). The acceleration of academic curriculum did not happen suddenly but has been a progression over the past several decades. The paradigm of play as learning can insulate the community that functions within its beliefs (Kuhn, 1970). This insulation may have allowed for play to dissipate under the pressure of standards and academic goals.

Although Dewey states that we should turn to the “best and wisest parent” for guidance in determining what is best for all children, to determine the goals, activities, and curricula that are appropriate for 4-year-olds, our society currently turns to the theoretical and empirical research and to groups of experts, educators, and other stakeholders who do not adhere to the paradigm of play.

Chapter III

Methodology and Procedures

This research is a descriptive survey and cross-sectional study of official reports (Miller, 1991). I seek to describe the importance and use of play in the documents that guide preschool education in the United States. Data for this study include early learning standards from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Because the amount of information in the standards is sizable, I employ content analysis methodology (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to identify and analyze the inclusion of play inherent in each document. Counts of the mention of the word *play* (Krippendorff, 2013) will be the first analysis to answer the research question followed by case studies to detail analysis of the standards documents.

Lincon and Guba (1985) outline general procedures for content analysis:

- 1) Analysis based on rules and procedures;
- 2) Consistent category construction;
- 3) Generalizability from text to theoretical model;
- 4) Manifest content with contextual analysis;
- 5) Qualitative analysis even of a quantitative technique.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) provide a more precise analysis as they discuss three approaches to content analysis. This research best fits the concept of summative content analysis, which “involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 127). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) write that one of the strengths of content analysis is the classifying of large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings. One of the goals of content analysis is to provide knowledge and understanding of the

phenomenon under study. Summative content analysis identifies and quantifies certain words or content in text with the purpose of understanding the contextual use of the words or content to explore usage. Counting is used to identify patterns in the data and to contextualize the codes. It allows for interpretation of the context associated with the use of the word or phrase. This research will explore usage of the word *play* and discover the range of meanings play can have in normal use within the documents. The steps Hsieh and Shannon (2005) outline will be followed in this research:

- 1) Formulating research questions,
- 2) Selecting sample to be analyzed,
- 3) Defining the categories,
- 4) Outlining the coding process,
- 5) Implementing the coding process,
- 6) Determining trustworthiness,
- 7) Analyzing the results.

Weber (1990) describes content analysis as a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. Weber then goes further and presents that content analysis can be used for many purposes including: detect propaganda; reflect cultural patterns of groups, institutions, or society; reveal the focus of individual, group, institutional, or societal attention; describe trends in communication content; or identify the intentions and other characteristics of the communicator. Holsti (1969) suggests that content analysis is an objective, systematic, and general description of the manifest content of a text where the text is emphasized. Strengths of content analysis are that the analysis is done directly on the text (thus avoiding many levels of possible miscommunication), that cultural indicators generated

from such documents constitute reliable information, that these indicators can be used to assess the relationships among economic, social, political, and cultural change, and that “the best content-analytic studies use both qualitative and quantitative operations on texts” (Weber, 1990, p. 10).

Krippendorff (2013) defines content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 24). He states “the context analyst views data not as physical events but as texts, images, and expressions that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on for their meanings” (Krippendorff, 2013, p. xii). Analyzing texts in their contexts for which they are written distinguishes content analysis from other methods of inquiry. Schreier (2012) hones content analysis to a systematic method to describe the meaning of material. Schreier (2012) also addresses the option of presenting frequency results in a case-by-case basis; the 51 cases studied in this research may be compared as long as coding is repeated for the same categories in each document. The durability of the documents analyzed supports the use of content analysis as well according to Stemler (2001). He details the use of a key word in context to test for the consistency of usage in word; this research specifically uses a priori coding since the concept of play was the impetus for the entire research topic and question and the specific word *play* is the key word. Literally counting the number of times the term *play* is used in preschool standards documents was the first step in determining the position of play in the guiding visions for each state.

Content analysis is used to determine the presence of words, concepts, themes, or characters within texts to quantify this presence in an objective manner (Krippendorff, 2013). The results are used to make inferences about the messages within the text, the writer and the

audiences. This description aligns with the lengthy document produced by the Government Accounting Office (1996), which recommends content analysis to “summarize the formal content of written material, describe the attitudes or perceptions of the author of the material, and determine program effectiveness criteria” (p. 7). For political decisions a broad overview of the entire United States is often desirable even if it is cursory or simply the beginning of a more intricate study.

According to Grimmer and Stewart (2012), “language is the medium for politics,” (p. 2). The enormous amount of language in print produced by political entities lends itself to this methodology. “Content analysis can make possible the previously impossible...the systematic analysis of large-scale text collections” (p. 2). Grimmer and Stewart support content analysis in being able to amplify the close reading and analysis of a text; in this case to show a characteristic across the United States to create a foundation for analysis and discussion. Grimmer and Stewart (2012), Holsti (1969), Krippendorf (2013), and Schreir (2012) all warn that it is important to not conflate counting with the use of scientific methods. Displaying counts without discussion of context is simply counting. Krippendorf (2013) provides a caveat that counting is justified when the resulting frequency accounts can be related to what a body of text means in the chosen text and leads to answering a research question. As an initial survey of play in early learning standards a frequency count is necessary in choosing specific states to study further.

Position will be examined by content analysis of the standards focusing on the word play. From this data emerging patterns will be discerned, examined, and discussed. Choosing preschool standards as the policy context within which to study play allows for the examination of the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs. Play is not

being compared to any other curriculum area; rather, the position of play is being established to start such discussions. Looking at play in preschool standards gives a glimpse into the lengthy and detailed documents that direct the instruction of young children, but a deeper logical connection among the theory, the research hypotheses, and treatment conditions needs to be examined according to Keppel (1991). The objects of examination for this research are 51 black-and-white documents written to inform and direct the preschool days of young children. I am positioning play in the documents by counting for frequency, analyzing for patterns, and discussing the standards written for the education of preschoolers. Kaplan (1943) writes, “Content analysis, then, is an analysis of manifest, not latent content” (p. 234).

I started talking to early childhood teachers about my research topic, and one question was dominant: Which states had the most play in their standards? Because it is important to create relevant research to the field I am studying, this question became a central focus of my study; not was play missing and who missed it in their standards, but where was play found most frequently? Creating a “people’s scholarship,” one in which scientific facts from a field give voice to a people’s experience, will allow me to be a voice for children who cannot speak for themselves (Featherstone, 1989). Teachers, parents of young children, advocates, and administrators should read and discuss this form of scholarship so that it has a life outside the realm of academia.

The context of this research is the early learning standard written by each of the 50 states directed at the education of children the year before they enter kindergarten. This context of standards is the setting: physical, geographic, temporal, historical, and cultural, the framework or map for the research and discussion. Examining play in the classroom context or in the research context provides a different map than the standards. I will examine the

standards from the outermost circle inward, macro to micro, with all 51 standards documents analyzed and brought to a smaller, representative picture of play. Standards are a valid context to examine play (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Once published, the standards are autonomous, and open to be used in the early childhood education environment. The word play and other consistent forms of the word play will be examined for frequency within the standards and then compared across the United States.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) support allowing the themes to emerge from the information. This kind of emergent design concept affects the conduct of the investigation. The unknown or undetermined at the outset lessens as the information accumulates. The key then is to arrive at a focus as to what is most salient to study more in depth. Some of the most important priorities in this research process have been embracing an evolving decision process and adjusting design and analysis to newly discovered knowledge. Taking time to reflect, think and not react to the loudest noise or brightest light of the research was crucial. Making sense of 51 documents can only be done by careful thought, scrutiny, and analysis. Weber (1990) notes: "To make valid inferences from the text, it is important that the classification procedure be reliable in the sense of being consistent: Different people should code the same text in the same way" (p. 12). The issue of different people coding in a variety of ways is not an issue in this research because I did all the coding and made all the decisions concerning word meanings, category definitions, and any other issues that arose during the analysis. Should anyone follow my procedures in this research, they should be able to arrive at the same play analysis and results.

When analyzing a text, an author inherently frames the content or character of the text using a certain attitude or point of view: this is called positioning or positionality.

Positioning need not be static and could change as the text develops. My own position is that of teaching preschool for a few years and higher education for a decade. Teaching politics, curriculum, diversity, and nutrition to early childhood educators in a teacher licensure program at a large state university has informed and impassioned this research from start to finish. My own education is interdisciplinary as I have bachelor's and Master's degrees in political science and am currently pursuing a PhD in Educational Thought and Sociocultural Studies. "Content analysis is the statistical semantics of political discourse," (Kaplan, 1943, p. 230). Political discourse in this research is specifically the early learning standards required, written, and distributed by political agencies across the United States. My background and education have made me familiar with these political discourses and the language and organization they possess as well as from which they originate.

Procedures

I am interested in play: why children play, how children play, and if children play. I wanted to examine the intersection of policy and play and what happens to the opportunity for play at these junctures. I was startled to find that research on the newly mandated and newly written standards for preschool and early learning was limited. I decided to study preschool standards and their use of the word *play* as an indicator of the priority of play as an educational experience in a policy setting. At the start of this research, I thought there might be an absence of play in preschool standards because of the academic pressures and reforms being introduced into early childhood education.

Schreier (2012) recommends a pilot phase as essential to discover shortcomings and that the selected subsets should represent the differences in your material. I chose preschool standards from four states with existing prekindergarten programs that were located in two

different regions of the United States: Florida, Nevada, Georgia and Oklahoma. I found a variety of positions of play, which confirmed my preliminary categories and coding. I also found enough of a range of play to confirm my idea that surveying the entire United States was the only way to create a complete picture of play in preschool standards documents at this point in time. The pilot garnered information precise enough to formulate a research question: What is the position of play in the preschool standards documents for the 50 United States and the District of Columbia? The pilot question was adjusted to: What is the position of play in the context of a policy document? To answer this question I developed sub-questions: How frequently is play mentioned in U.S. preschool content standards? Where is play mentioned in the standards? Which state sociopolitical characteristics indicate a lower or higher play frequency?

The economics concept of position as a function of one thing being more desirable than another from Hirsch (1976) clarifies position in education as well and in examining play in documents where play is in direct competition with subjects such as math and literacy. The value of play, the priority of play, the position of play—all of these concepts are underlying the appearance of play in preschool standards documents. I was able to examine exhaustively each of the 51 standards documents, which allows my research documents to be equally informative. Examination of the entirety of standards documents is an unusual but welcome circumstance according to Krippendorff (2013) who warns that often pieces of a collected work are missing or do not fit the criteria. My criteria are the early learning documents produced by each state that address children the year before they enter kindergarten across the United States and the District of Columbia as of December 2011. The result is a complete sampling that is large but manageable and will display play in early

learning documents across the United States. Content analysis of political documents is particularly appropriate due to the volume of documents produced (*Content Analysis*, 1996). Frequency in content analysis builds into case study and constantly embraces “emergent flexibility” (Schreir, 2012, p. 23). In making research decisions human intelligence is required (Krippendorf, 2013), and the most surprising aspect of conducting this research is the amount of thought it takes to problem solve and clarify concepts.

The standards were studied through an extensive search of the World Wide Web to locate the documents. I identified a total of 51 documents from 50 states and the District of Columbia. I found the documents in a variety of locations, with some states locating the standards on their Department of Education websites, others locating them in separate early childhood agency locations, and still others housing them in separate, isolated locations discovered by Google searches. State education agency websites housed the vast majority of the standards and represent the structure of the state and the agency credited with producing and maintaining them. It is the technological window into early childhood education. Some of the websites were easy to access and some were confusing and required multiple clicks to access early childhood education programs and the standards themselves. Several for-profit companies have developed websites to supplement and support the state standards (repeated at www.highreach.com; www.highscope.org; <http://www.ixl.com>). The documents put forth by the for-profit companies can be confusing and are often more readily available than the state documents, which can be misleading.

The website is an interesting site of enactment and control, even if it is only simulated control because it assumes technology is accessed by early childhood teachers. The agency website became the publishing entity for this research. Some standards listed authorship with

detailed information of everyone involved in the development process; some standards did not. I have decided that the publishing entity can be thought of as the responsible party in medical situations. If you sign the document, you are responsible for the person. In the case of the standards, if you produce, print, or display the document on your website, you are responsible for the document.

To gain an overall understanding of the 51 standards, I created a preliminary table to gather vital information. The first item in the table is the title, a simple task that became an initial challenge. At one point I considered studying only early learning guidelines as that is specifically what the legislation requested, but after a quick analysis, the individuality of the states was apparent. Most states did not call their standards early learning guidelines and did not follow the 3- to 5-year-old age group requested by the legislation. This is not surprising because there was not federal funding directly tied to the legislation, so there was little incentive for the states to follow it verbatim. Light (1999) discusses the relationship and responsibilities between states and the national government: specifically the tension in the area of education in which states provide the vast majority of funding but national legislation dictates policy.

The states are varied enough in discussing early childhood and standards that it took examining all 51 documents to bring to light the appropriate phrase when discussing the documents. Some states used multiple, descriptive words in their title: ‘early learning’ is mentioned 28 times; ‘PreK’ is mentioned nine times; ‘preschool’ and ‘early childhood’ are each mentioned six times; ‘performance’ is mentioned once; ‘standards’ is mentioned 28 times; ‘guidelines’ is mentioned 14 times; ‘framework’ and ‘foundations’ are mentioned four times each; ‘benchmarks’ is mentioned once; ‘learning’ and ‘content’ are each mentioned six

times; ‘education,’ ‘development,’ and ‘readiness’ are each mentioned twice; while ‘teaching,’ ‘comprehensive,’ ‘curriculum,’ ‘building blocks,’ and ‘voluntary’ are each mentioned once. The result is that Early Learning Standards are the words most often put forth to name the majority of the documents and will be the chosen phrase when discussing these documents. It is important to use the vocabulary found in the profession to better inform the profession (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

The age group for which the standards were written is the next item and for many states it is clearly stated in the title. This was a challenge because this research is studying preschool standards that focus on children the year before they enter preschool, not multiple years or all years from birth until kindergarten as some of the standards are written. While all of the standards address the year before kindergarten, some include more years as well. The standards are specifically written to address a variety of preschool-range age groups as shown below:

- 10 states: Prekindergarten
- 11 states: 3- to 5-year-olds
- 9 states: 4-year-olds
- 8 states: Preschool
- 4 states: Birth to kindergarten
- 4 states: Birth to 5
- 1 state: Birth to 4
- 1 state: 4- to 5-year-olds
- 1 state: 3-year-old to kindergarten

- 1 state: Birth to third grade
- 1 state: Prior to K-12

Early learning standards are not alone in their inexactness concerning age. When discussing early childhood education, it is often unclear precisely what age parameters are being discussed. Expanding the K-12 system to include preschool has bridged the worlds of elementary education and early childhood education and both fields are still struggling with the relationship and the role of standards and reform. Defining what portion of elementary education should be considered early childhood is unclear even to authors in the field: Kauerz (2009) and Wilson and Wilson (2010). Even the textbooks and articles within the field do not adequately address what age encompasses early childhood as shown in the following statement:

The National Association for the Education of Young Children says that early childhood education focuses on the educational development of children starting at birth and continuing through age 8. The National Center for Education Statistics, a division of the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, notes that early childhood education typically begins at 3, 4 or 5 years of age—sometimes earlier—and continues for one to three years. With such loosely defined indicators, it seems early childhood education refers more to a stage in a child's life than to a specific age (Hinkle, 2010).

The next item is the date of adoption, publication, or posting. South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia do not include a date in their documents, but they did include dates of signature or research meetings, which allowed me to extrapolate a valid date. The policy authority was included next; many states include an extensive list of the individuals,

organizations, and state agencies that developed the standards. Early in this research I was interested in the amount of play in the standards and the possible correlation that may have with the authoring entity. Is there more play in standards written by early childhood educators or departments of education? Is there more play in standards written by departments of education or by departments of child and family welfare? Although most states list the participants who worked on writing the standards, it was not clear how often they met, who was in attendance, who wrote which sections, and many other factors that would enlighten me as to their impact on the standards, so I did not pursue this question further.

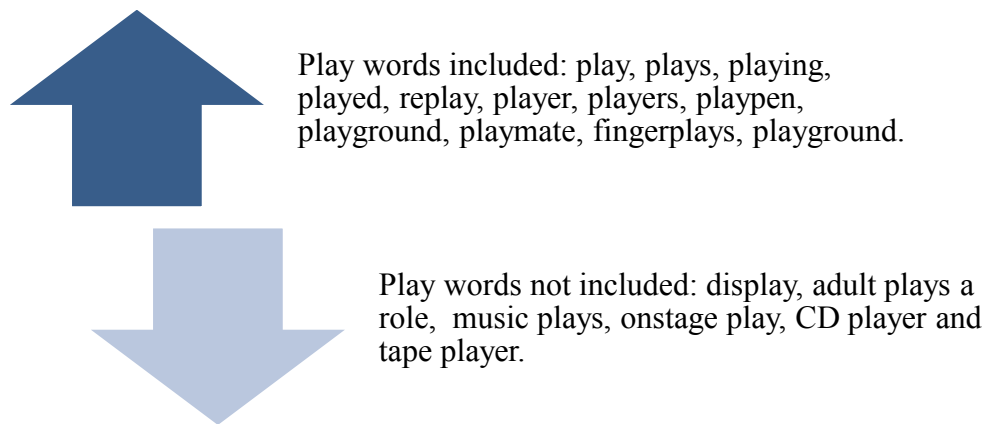
The next step was to focus on play in the standards. Gee (1996) extensively discusses the meaning and limits of a word. “No meaning is fixed, meaning is always in flux” (p. 79). Meanings are negotiations between different social practices with different interests where power plays an important role. This research seeks to investigate the power to include the word play in various forms by the authoring entities of the standards. The meaning of a word does maintain a temporary permanence when the negotiations are settled for a time by the community in which they are deeply rooted. Permanence, even temporary, allows for meaning to become conventional and routine. As discussed in the literature review, Fromberg (2002) states that play can be a verb and a noun and is always relative to the context of the young child experiencing it. Examining the use of the word play appears straightforward yet is problematic because play has many uses in the documents.

Plato states that, “Literacy always comes with a perspective on interpretation that is ultimately political” (repeated in Gee (1996)). Dictionary methods use the relative frequency of key words to measure the presence of each category in texts. Grimmer and Stewart (2012)

caution that human coding is necessary to successfully develop a dictionary method, and that a specific dictionary for the text should be developed. The limits of play must be defined clearly and in the context of the standards. For this research, when discussing play and young children, play must be a verb. Versions of the word play to be included must express the child interacting with an object, another person, or even themselves. Passive versions such as “display artwork” are not included. Frequency of key words can be used to determine a document’s class or in this research, a hierarchy of play frequency.

The thousands of pages of standards were made manageable by a word search to highlight play throughout the text. Table 2 lists the words included and not included in the count.

Table 2. Play words included and not included throughout the text



Words included had to exemplify play as a verb or noun as defined in the review of literatures. Play as an experience denotes movement or interaction, as do the words included in the play count. The uses of the word play in the standards that were counted are: play, plays, player, players, replay, playing, played, playpen, playground, playmate, fingerplays, and playdough. The words play, plays, player, playing, and played are all forms of the root

word and denote similar actions. Replay denotes the action found in many role-play scenarios when children “replay” an earlier scenario. Playpen describes a safe environment for infants to play. Playground denotes the location for outdoor play experiences so it was included in the play count. Playmate is included because it denotes another child who will engage in the act of play. Fingerplays was included because they allow for playful interaction while reading and singing, and playdough was included because it is an interactive activity and often is two separate words as in play dough rather than playdough.

The uses of play not counted are display, plays a role, music plays, going to see a play or formal onstage production, CD player, and tape player. Display was frequently found in the standards documents but is defined in this context as “display the child’s work” or “display environmental print,” which does not fit the act of play. “Plays a role” was not included because it is used to describe an adult family relationship not the child in an activity. Music “playing” was not included but “playing and instrument” was because the latter includes the participation of the child. Performing a “play” was counted but watching a play being performed was not because of the passive role of being in the audience rather than participating. CD and tape “player” describe the motion of the CD or tape not the motion of the children. The play count was repeated for 10 percent of the states, five states in all, to assess possible errors in counting. The margin of error found was less than 1 percent.

Along with the play count a foundational play quote was recorded and play sections as dramatic play and play as assessment were noted. These two items became difficult because the standards were organized so inconsistently with benchmarks, indicators, and assessments in some, and examples and observations in others. Adaptations for children with special needs were lengthy in some standards and completely absent in others. Some states

include assessment within the content of the standards, some place assessment in a separate document, and some do not include assessment as a specific section at all. I quickly decided that these two items were not contributing to establishing the position of the standards.

Standards that included dramatic play sections and or used play in assessment could be examined in the entire play count. These two items also did not allow for play as authentic assessment within examples or indicators while the play count did. Discussion of the results also would better represent the sections of play than a sterile table item. Word searches are limiting because the locations in which play was found still had to be read for context. This was particularly challenging in the use of the phrase *plays a role* as in “grandparents play a role in the lives of young children,” but I became aware of the sections in which this might occur and was able to keep the count accurate. The table of information collected was informative but lacked a depth that would give specific insight to the research questions. Cases for study were selected based on high, medium, low and specific characteristic criteria. The case studies follow an organizational outline adhering to Lincoln and Guba (1985): Play frequency, position of play in the document, guiding principles and quoted, the importance of play, organization of the document, visual assessment and acceptance or mitigation of the play as learning paradigm as an overall assessment of the document.

A Closer Look: Case Studies

Examining 51 standards documents paints an overview of play across the United States, but it does not enlighten as to the position of play within the documents themselves. Miller (1991) discusses the event that should no statistical relations be found, this spurs the need for case study. Here, I thought that patterns discovered during frequency analysis and

comparison would indicate which states to study further, but this did not occur. Instead, cases will be selected after survey: those with high and low or those that display significant characteristics. The specific cases may illuminate relationships first portrayed in a correlational pattern and then interpreted through case study to display processes and patterns (Miller, 1991). The case study, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) represents an unparalleled means for communicating contextual information that provides a grounded assessment of context. The details of preschool standards documents can be examined and will illustrate their specific positions for and of play. Grimmer and Stewart (2012) discuss the “consequential and shocking step” (p. 10) of discarding the order in which words occur in a document. Simply to count a word without locating it within the document gives it little context. The position of play words within the standards may illuminate the differences between the cases. Content analysis will be carried through to the case studies with the word play along with its extended forms examined in the context of the sentences, paragraphs, sections, topics and within of the organization of the document itself.

Extreme cases at the tails of a distribution may suggest new hypotheses, new designs, and new analyses of the data. To further detail the range of play frequency the case study analysis will include the state with the highest play frequency (South Dakota), the state with the lowest frequency (Maryland), as well as a state that represents the middle range of play frequencies (Arizona). Three states with unique document characteristics are also included: Washington included birth to third grade, which was by far the largest age range to be addressed by the documents, and Alaska positioned play within a geographic and cultural context that warrants further examination, and finally, New Mexico is included because it is the locale for this research. Play frequency as a referencing point will start the case study

analysis followed by play in the guiding principle, within the organization of the document: standards, benchmarks, indicators, examples, etc., visual assessment of the document, photographs, and graphics. The play as learning paradigm is the lens through which to examine the position of play within the documents.

Chapter IV

Findings

Comparing the position of play in a preschool policy document across the United States is a voluminous task. A narrow content analysis allowed for the development of a frequency of play for each state. Play frequency was calculated by dividing the play count by the number of pages in the standard. For example, Wisconsin has a play frequency of 2.27, which means play is mentioned 2.27 times per page of the standards document. The mean play frequency for all 50 states and the District of Columbia is 1.33, the median is 1.18, and the mode is 0.84.



The range of play frequency is from 0.20 mentions of play per page in Maryland's standards document to 2.74 mentions of play per page in South Dakota's standards document. The following table illustrates the entire range of play frequency in early learning standards documents across the United States.

Table 3. States' Play Frequency Alphabetically

Alabama	1.10	Kentucky	0.89	North Dakota	1.18
Alaska	1.98	Louisiana	0.87	Ohio	0.94
Arizona	1.08	Maine	0.84	Oklahoma	2.35
Arkansas	1.61	Maryland	0.20	Oregon	1.63
California	1.18	Massachusetts	2.60	Pennsylvania	2.43
Colorado	2.40	Michigan	0.92	Rhode Island	2.04
Connecticut	0.64	Minnesota	0.60	South Carolina	1.09
Delaware	0.93	Mississippi	0.78	South Dakota	2.74
District of Columbia	0.68	Missouri	1.97	Tennessee	1.09
Florida	1.70	Montana	1.65	Texas	1.62
Georgia	0.84	Nebraska	0.84	Utah	1.81
Hawaii	1.16	Nevada	1.87	Vermont	2.43
Idaho	0.60	New Hampshire	1.33	Virginia	0.69
Illinois	0.24	New Jersey	1.34	Washington	1.45
Indiana	0.80	New Mexico	1.13	West Virginia	0.97
Iowa	1.45	New York	0.71	Wisconsin	2.27
Kansas	0.62	North Carolina	2.30	Wyoming	0.65

Scott-Little, Kagan, and Frelow (2006) analyzed early learning standards for their content and readiness, and while their research is quite different in focus and analysis, it is educative that they found standards written under the leadership of state departments of education had lower percentages of standards in the physical, social-emotional domains and higher in the language and cognitive domains. Applying this idea of state department influence to play frequency did not extend their theory: the mean is 1.33 for all states and 1.34 for the 41 states where the department of education was the lead agency. The average play frequency was slightly lower, 1.28, for the 10 states (Vermont, Colorado, Montana, Alabama, North Dakota, Hawaii, Georgia, Indiana, Connecticut, and Idaho) that did not have the department of education as the lead agency.

Date of publication of the document was examined through play frequency and taking into consideration the play frequency, revealed that the highest third of standards were written on average in late 2004 to early 2005, the middle third were written on average in

mid-2005, and the lowest third were written on average in mid-2005. Overall, the standards were written from 2003 through 2011, but there are no patterns based on date of publication for the frequency of play.

Early childhood professionals will find it interesting to locate their state's play frequency (Table 4), and even more informative to see how one state compares with another. The frequency map (Figure 2) provides a visual overview of the frequency of play found in early learning standards across the United States. Visually, the West has higher play frequencies, but the sheer amount of geography can be misleading. There are groupings of three or four states that share position in highest, middle, or lowest, yet when expanded past those few states, the pattern weakens. The map was colored according to thirds because quartiles and quintiles did not provide more clarity of the play frequency distribution.

Table 4. Frequency of *Play* in Early Learning Standards Highest to Lowest

South Dakota	2.74	Arkansas	1.61	Michigan	0.92
Massachusetts	2.60	Kentucky	1.61	Louisiana	0.87
Pennsylvania	2.43	Iowa	1.45	Georgia	0.84
Vermont	2.43	Washington	1.45	Maine	0.84
Colorado	2.40	New Jersey	1.34	Nebraska	0.84
Oklahoma	2.35	New Hampshire	1.33	Indiana	0.80
North Carolina	2.30	Alabama	1.28	Mississippi	0.78
Wisconsin	2.27	California	1.18	New York	0.71
Rhode Island	2.04	North Dakota	1.18	Virginia	0.69
Alaska	1.98	Hawaii	1.16	District of Columbia	0.68
Missouri	1.97	New Mexico	1.13	Wyoming	0.65
Nevada	1.87	South Carolina	1.09	Connecticut	0.64
Utah	1.81	Tennessee	1.09	Kansas	0.62
Florida	1.70	Arizona	1.08	Minnesota	0.60
Montana	1.65	West Virginia	0.97	Idaho	0.33
Oregon	1.63	Ohio	0.94	Illinois	0.24
Texas	1.62	Delaware	0.93	Maryland	0.20

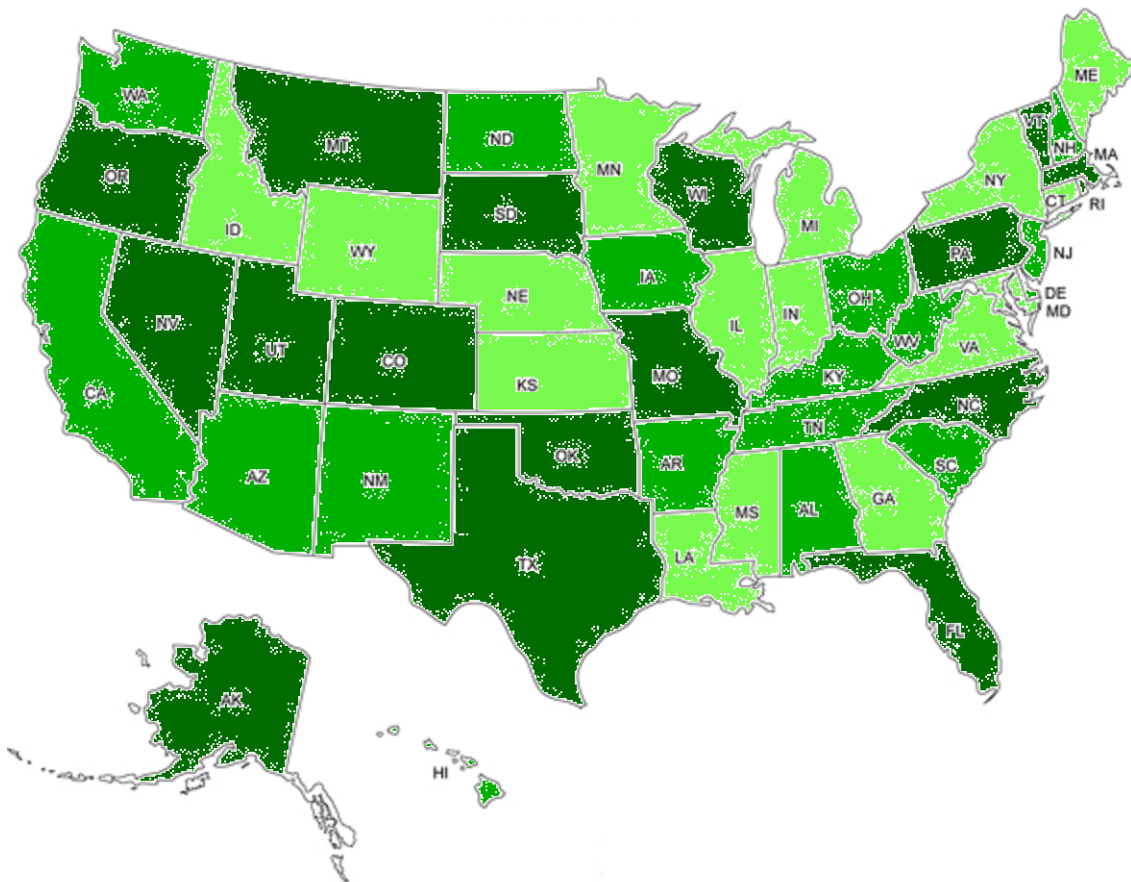


Figure 2. Map of play frequency by thirds

According to *The State of Preschool 2011* (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald & Squires, 2011), prekindergarten programs have spread to 40 states and the District of Columbia, enrolling 1.3 million preschool children with total funding of almost \$5.5 billion. The map below displays the states that do and do not have state preK programs. The play frequency mean for states with preK programs is 1.35, and the play frequency mean for the states without preK programs is 1.24. In the northern Midwest/West there is a cluster of neighboring states, all of which do not have preK programs (North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah), though the similarities end there. Their identities as rural, Western, lower socioeconomic states do not tie their play frequencies to each other. When these states' play frequencies are examined, they range from South Dakota with the highest to Idaho with the third lowest through an unremarkable pattern in between. Almost half of the states that do not have preK (4 out of 10) have play frequencies in the lowest third of the states.

This pattern is interesting because it could be argued that states with preK would have pressures to replace play with academic curriculum; here, however, are four states that do not have the pressure of a preK program, yet all are in the bottom third for play frequency. One theory could be that these states without preK wrote simple standards: without a formal state program, there would be little need for lengthy, detailed documents. This theory is incorrect in that these four states represent from the shortest to the second-longest standards in terms of page count. These states also are all historically politically conservative, except for New Hampshire, which could be a manifestation of the value-laden belief that preschool attendance should be voluntary and not a state mandate.

Table 5. Frequency of Play: States without PreK - States with PreK

South Dakota	2.74	Arkansas	1.61	Michigan	0.92
Massachusetts	2.60	Kentucky	1.61	Louisiana	0.87
Pennsylvania	2.43	Iowa	1.45	Georgia	0.84
Vermont	2.43	Washington	1.45	Maine	0.84
Colorado	2.40	New Hampshire	1.33	Nebraska	0.84
Oklahoma	2.35	New Jersey	1.34	Indiana	0.80
North Carolina	2.30	Alabama	1.28	Mississippi	0.78
Wisconsin	2.27	California	1.18	New York	0.71
Rhode Island	2.04	North Dakota	1.18	Virginia	0.69
Alaska	1.98	Hawaii	1.16	District of Columbia	0.68
Missouri	1.97	New Mexico	1.13	Wyoming	0.65
Nevada	1.87	South Carolina	1.09	Connecticut	0.64
Utah	1.81	Tennessee	1.09	Kansas	0.62
Florida	1.70	Arizona	1.08	Minnesota	0.60
Montana	1.65	West Virginia	0.97	Idaho	0.33
Oregon	1.63	Ohio	0.94	Illinois	0.24
Texas	1.62	Delaware	0.93	Maryland	0.20

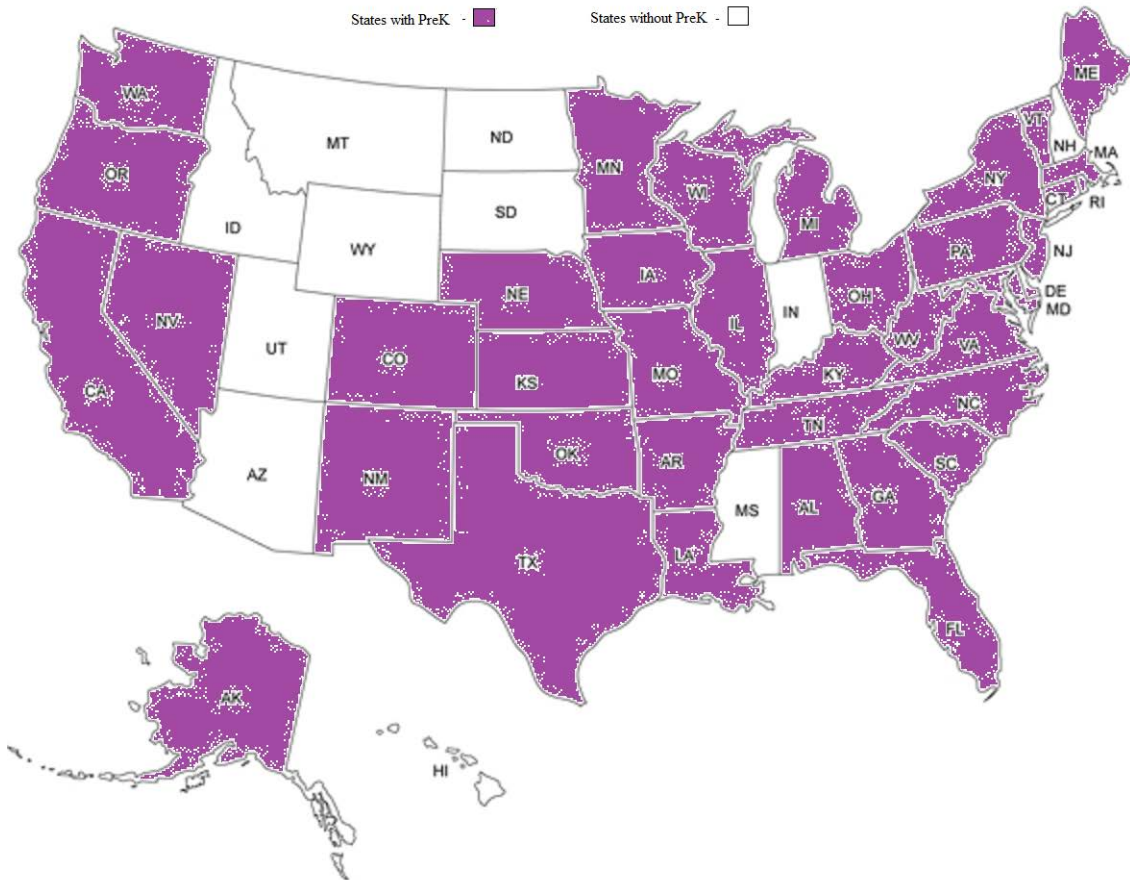


Figure 3. Map of play frequency of states with and without PreK

The age that the standards are written toward produces an interesting pattern when examining play frequency. In the highest third of play frequency, there are only two states that use the birth to kindergarten age grouping while all the others use preschool, preK, or ages 3 to 5. In the middle third of play frequency there are six states that use a birth-to-K or birth-to-5 age grouping, and in the lowest third of play frequency there are two states that use birth-to-5 or birth-to-third-grade age grouping. What is interesting in this observation is that play in the standards that include the youngest children have the lowest play frequency. Play is thought to decrease as a child matures as discussed by Johnson, Christies, and Wardle (2005) and Chudacoff (2007). If play decreases with age, it follows logically that standards written for younger children in less structured environments would have more play. In this analysis, the average play frequency for states using birth-through-5 age grouping is 1.35, while average play frequency for states using preschool, preK, and 3-to-5 age groupings is 1.32. Not a large difference, but still in support of the literature that children play less as they get older.

Table 6. Frequency of Play and Age Grouping

Preschool, PreK, 3-to-5 age grouping [Birth-5](#) [Birth-K](#) [Birth-third grade age grouping](#)

South Dakota	2.74	Arkansas	1.61	Michigan	0.92
Massachusetts	2.60	Kentucky	1.61	Louisiana	0.87
Pennsylvania	2.43	Iowa	1.45	Georgia	0.84
Vermont	2.43	Washington	1.45	Maine	0.84
Colorado	2.40	New Jersey	1.34	Nebraska	0.84
Oklahoma	2.35	New Hampshire	1.33	Indiana	0.80
North Carolina	2.30	Alabama	1.28	Mississippi	0.78
Wisconsin	2.27	California	1.18	New York	0.71
Rhode Island	2.04	North Dakota	1.18	Virginia	0.69
Alaska	1.98	Hawaii	1.16	District of Columbia	0.68
Missouri	1.97	New Mexico	1.13	Wyoming	0.65
Nevada	1.87	South Carolina	1.09	Connecticut	0.64
Utah	1.81	Tennessee	1.09	Kansas	0.62
Florida	1.70	Arizona	1.08	Minnesota	0.60
Montana	1.65	West Virginia	0.97	Idaho	0.33
Oregon	1.63	Ohio	0.94	Illinois	0.24
Texas	1.62	Delaware	0.93	Maryland	0.20

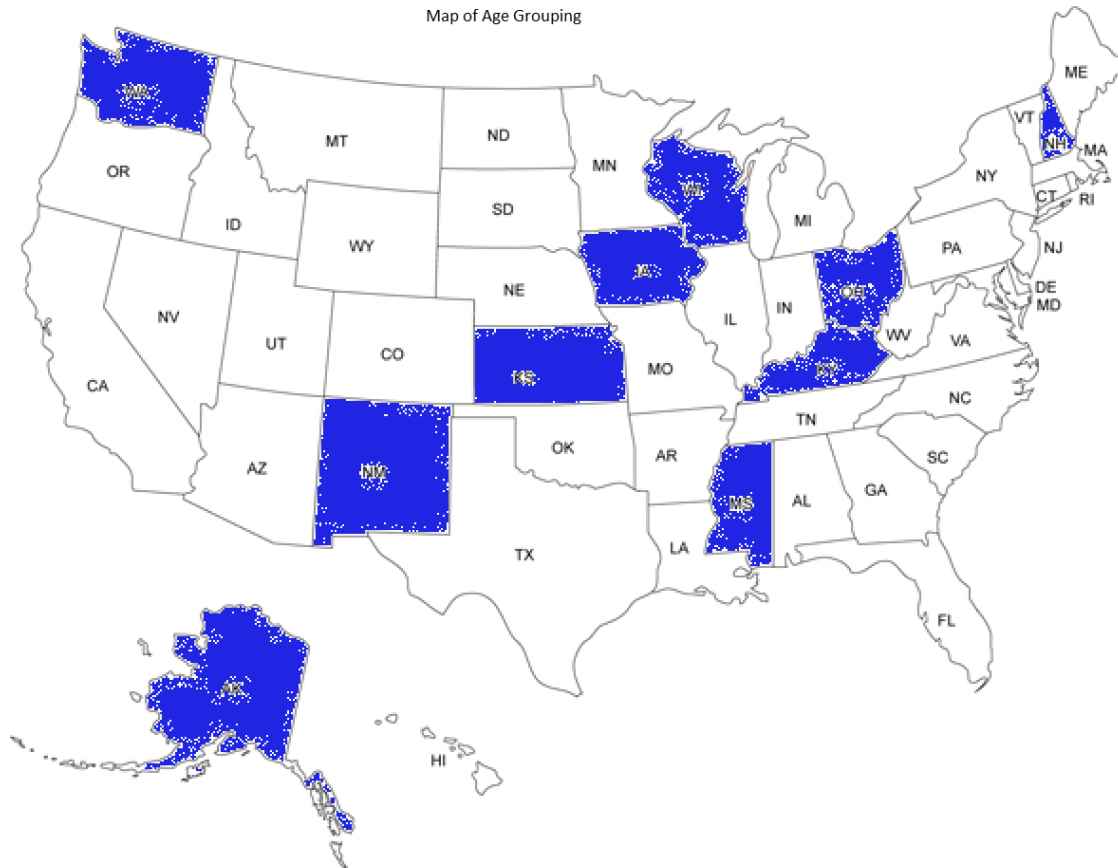


Figure 4. Map of states by age grouping

Examining play frequency through the lens of the governor's political party prior to standards' publication increased average play frequency by 0.06 for states with Republican governors and decreased average play frequency 0.08 for states with Democratic governors. These changes are negligible, so once again the frequency of play in early learning standards is not related to a governor's political party. In many of the states where governors have influence over the committee responsible for writing the standards, they also have influence in appointing the department heads responsible for organizing and/or writing the standards. Red and blue states, however, do not show a pattern because preschool transcends ideology (Kirp, 2007). The research driving support for early childhood education has become part of political and educational core beliefs even if the funding falls short to fully implement state preschool programs.

Table 7. Frequency of *play* and party of governor when developing standards

Frequency average, Republican states: 1.34, Democratic states: 1.13

South Dakota	2.74	Arkansas	1.61	Michigan	0.92
Massachusetts	2.60	Kentucky	1.61	Louisiana	0.87
Pennsylvania	2.43	Iowa	1.45	Georgia	0.84
Vermont	2.43	Washington	1.45	Maine	0.84
Colorado	2.40	New Jersey	1.34	Nebraska	0.84
Oklahoma	2.35	New Hampshire	1.33	Indiana	0.80
North Carolina	2.30	Alabama	1.28	Mississippi	0.78
Wisconsin	2.27	California	1.18	New York	0.71
Rhode Island	2.04	North Dakota	1.18	Virginia	0.69
Alaska	1.98	Hawaii	1.16	District of Columbia	0.68
Missouri	1.97	New Mexico	1.13	Wyoming	0.65
Nevada	1.87	South Carolina	1.09	Connecticut	0.64
Utah	1.81	Tennessee	1.09	Kansas	0.62
Florida	1.70	Arizona	1.08	Minnesota	0.60
Montana	1.65	West Virginia	0.97	Idaho	0.33
Oregon	1.63	Ohio	0.94	Illinois	0.24
Texas	1.62	Delaware	0.93	Maryland	0.20

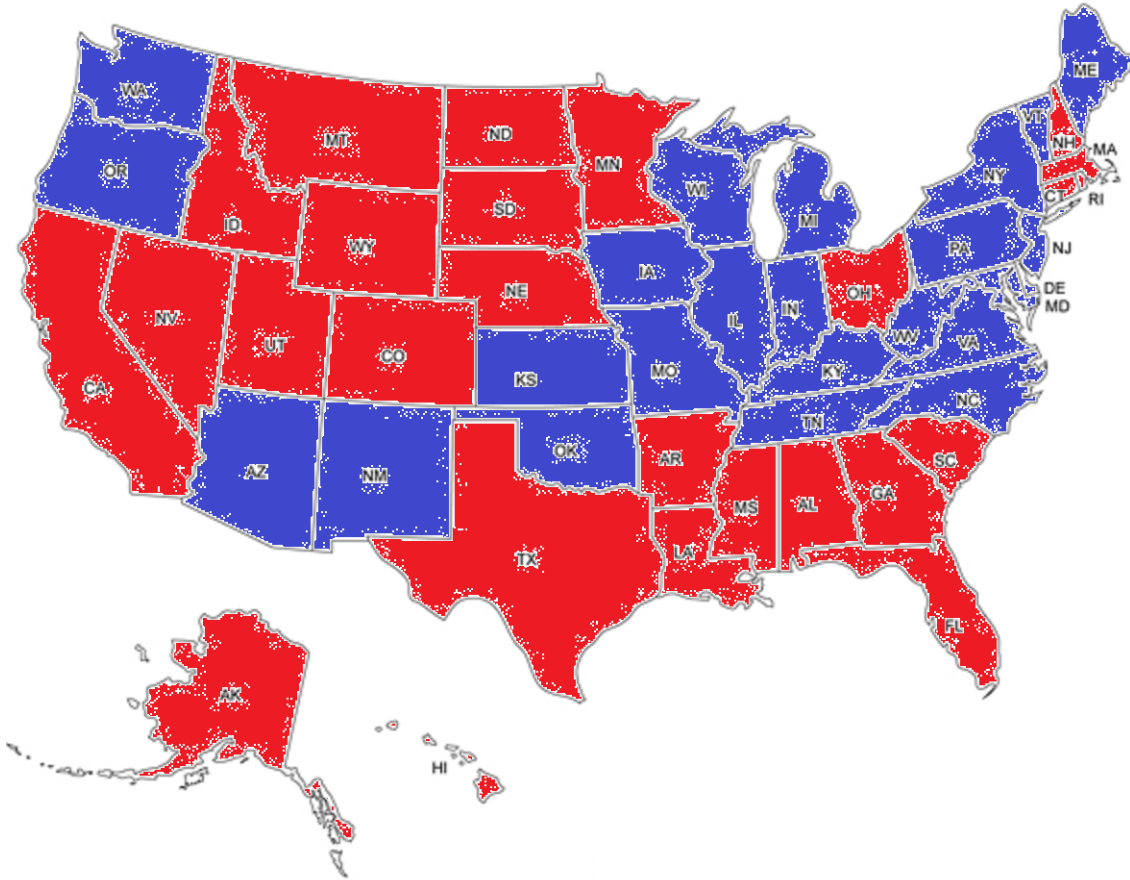


Figure 5. States by Governor's Political Party (Democrat – Republican)

Table 8. Frequency of *play* and 2008 Presidential Electoral Voting: Play Frequency

Republican States: 1.28, Democratic States: 1.21

South Dakota	2.74	Arkansas	1.61	Michigan	0.92
Massachusetts	2.60	Kentucky	1.61	Louisiana	0.87
Pennsylvania	2.43	Iowa	1.45	Georgia	0.84
Vermont	2.43	Washington	1.45	Maine	0.84
Colorado	2.40	New Jersey	1.34	Nebraska	0.84
Oklahoma	2.35	New Hampshire	1.33	Indiana	0.80
North Carolina	2.30	Alabama	1.28	Mississippi	0.78
Wisconsin	2.27	California	1.18	New York	0.71
Rhode Island	2.04	North Dakota	1.18	Virginia	0.69
Alaska	1.98	Hawaii	1.16	District of Columbia	0.68
Missouri	1.97	New Mexico	1.13	Wyoming	0.65
Nevada	1.87	South Carolina	1.09	Connecticut	0.64
Utah	1.81	Tennessee	1.09	Kansas	0.62
Florida	1.70	Arizona	1.08	Minnesota	0.60
Montana	1.65	West Virginia	0.97	Idaho	0.33
Oregon	1.63	Ohio	0.94	Illinois	0.24
Texas	1.62	Delaware	0.93	Maryland	0.20

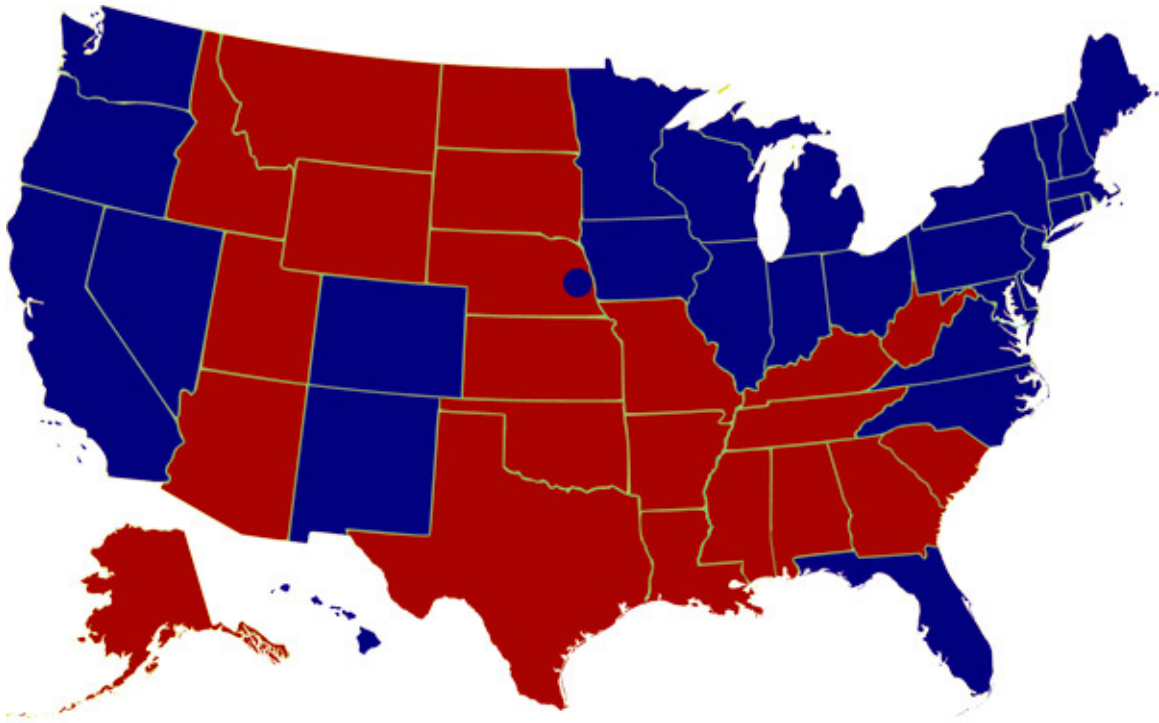


Figure 6. States by 2008 Presidential Voting (Democrat – Republican)

The previous maps illustrate the varied standards documents that produce similar stances toward play. The position of play in the context of a preschool policy document, or the frequency of play in this content analysis, is informative to the following:

- The extent to which play is emphasized in given states: lower frequency may indicate emphasis on K-12 academics.
- The extent to which play is emphasized in the 40 states with funded prekindergarten programs and the 11 states without funded prekindergarten programs: higher frequency may indicate less government influence.
- The extent to which play is emphasized in the 41 documents focused on preschool or pre-K age grouping and the 10 documents focused on birth-to-5, birth-to-K, or birth-to-third-grade age grouping: higher frequency may indicate a focus on play for younger children.
- The extent to which play is emphasized in Democratic or Republican governorship and Presidential voting may indicate a political ideology reinforced by the state in the standards.

An initial result of this research is the range of play frequency in the standards documents. The range of play frequency may be indicative of state autonomy and individual nature of early childhood education systems across the United States. Even in a period of common core standards and national legislation that is embodied in NCLB, there is little consistency in early learning standards. Early childhood is however, relatively new to the pressures of national legislation. Some states are bending to the academic pressures and focusing on literacy and math, while others are holding to the foundational and theoretical

research that play is crucial in the education of preschool children, but the relationships are random and varied.

Frequency is a tool to provide parameters for choosing states that are representatively beneficial to examine further. Frequency is employed as a rough metric that can be influenced by font, spacing and page layout. For the purpose of this research, frequency is the level of analysis that informs the choice of case studies. Frequency in content analysis builds into case study (Schreir, 2012) and lends stronger insight into the variety of standards and frequency of play across the United States. The states with the highest, lowest, and middle play frequencies will be discussed, along with states that have specific characteristics of interest. South Dakota represents the high play frequency count, Arizona represents the middle play frequency count, and Maryland represents the low play frequency count. Alaska represents the characteristic of sociocultural play, Washington represents play from birth to third grade, and New Mexico represents our local context. These cases will provide the reader with a “vicarious experience” (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 24) of the standards documents. The presentation of cases will adhere to the following organization:

- Play frequency as a referencing point;
- Play in guiding principles;
- Play within the organization of the document: standards, benchmarks, indicators, examples, etc.;
- Visual assessment of the document, photographs, and graphics;
- Position of play viewed through the play as learning paradigm: the prioritization, acceptance or omission of play as learning within the document.

Case Studies

South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines for 3- to 5-Year-Olds. South Dakota has the highest play frequency of 2.74, which means that play is mentioned an average of almost three times per page. Locating the density of play within the document tells a story of emphasis and curricular priority. In South Dakota's standards document, play is primary and foundational for children 3 to 5 years. The guiding principles for play are: "Observations of children should be made and recorded while children are engaged in play and daily activities." "Young children learn through play and active exploration of their environment. They need large blocks of time to actively engage in a variety of activities." The definitions of why play is important include: helps develop pride, joy, mastery of skills and self-control, negotiation, problem solving, and role-play. There are phrases of: children learn _____ in play throughout the document; denoting that play is the teaching method of preference.

Organization of the document includes standards and benchmarks written in outline and paragraph form. Standards are the general statements that represent the information and skills children should know while benchmarks provide concrete explanations of what and how the children should learn. Benchmarks include ideas on how to set up the environment to enhance play and learning. Play is mentioned in every single standard except one that teaches children to demonstrate healthy habits and safe practices. Visually there is a lot of color in the South Dakota document, along with photographs of preschool-age children and teachers working with children.

There is a specific standard for curiosity and eagerness where "children demonstrate a positive self-concept and self-confidence in play and everyday tasks," and a standard for

invention and imagination where “children use invention and imagination in play and everyday tasks.” The most powerful statement in the document is as follows: “Allow children to lead play, even if it strays from planned activities.” To make play the priority even when curriculum dictates otherwise is a crucial example of play as learning paradigm. The South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines prioritize and articulate the play as learning paradigm throughout the standards document.

Arizona Early Learning Standards for 3- to 5-Year-Olds. Arizona’s play frequency of 1.08 puts it three states and 0.10 below the median of all the play frequencies, with barely over one mention of play per page. Play is integrally positioned in guiding principles, examples, and an extensive dramatic play section. The guiding principles are written in poem form as shown below:

Every Child
Is a unique, complex learner;
Is a social being who learns through the development of
relationships with peers and adults;
Is entitled to learning environments that support optimal
development of the whole child;
Is entitled to opportunities to learn through active
exploration;
Learns through child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported play.

From this guiding principle play is evenly placed throughout the document. The importance of play is expressed through the following quotes: “knowledge is constructed through play,” “through play children learn to create meaning,” “children need to play with

familiar language.” The document is organized by strands that delineate the topic, concepts that are subsets of the strands, a column of indicators that are what the child should be able to do, and a second column with “Examples in the context of daily routines, activities and play.” This heading appears on every page that has a table with indicators and examples and clearly states the importance of play as a daily activity and method for assessment. There is a detailed, colorful graphic explaining each of the points that appear on tables in the following pages.

In Arizona’s document, play is so integral to a preschooler’s education that it is in the title of each table as a means to teach and assess students. The content area of dramatic play is also given prominence with dramatic play as inquiry, described as when children use dramatic play as a way of observing, organizing, and interpreting the world and dramatic play in context described as when children use play to make sense of his/her environment and community. The cover has a photo of children’s hands on a globe and there are multiple photos of children throughout. The play as learning paradigm is prioritized in this document, but it is apparent that acceptance is not simply conveyed by quantity as shown by play frequency, but also by quality as shown by its embedding in the examples and dramatic play.

Maryland Model for School Readiness: Framework and Standards for Prekindergarten. Maryland has the lowest play frequency with 0.20 mentions of play per page in its document focused on prekindergarten. The Maryland Model for School Readiness: Framework and Standards for Prekindergarten is part of the larger program “Investing in Quality Early Childhood Education in Maryland.” The guiding principle for the document is that, “The General Assembly wants to learn what Maryland’s children know and are able to do as they enter kindergarten.” The framework is written to “assist early educators in

instructing and assessing young children in the knowledge, skills and behaviors they need to be prepared for the learning demands of formal schooling.” An introductory statement is that, “School readiness is a continuum that begins at birth.”

The organization of the document includes charts of the following:

- Dimensions: a broad area or domain of a child’s growth and learning,
- Standards: a measurable statement of what a child should know or be able to do,
- Indicators: further delineation of a standard that is measurable, and
- Objectives: a precise statement of what students should know or be able to do.

They are organized into grids separating each item and heading. Small yellow flags alert the reader throughout the document to the specific indicators that are collected as school readiness data. The flags denote assessments such as: “interacts easily with one or more child,” “shows some self-direction,” “follows simple classroom materials carefully,” “uses classroom materials carefully,” and “demonstrates phonological awareness.” Assessment and accountability are clearly explained: “Early childhood professionals also share accountability for the results of providing early learning opportunities. Any assessment, determining such results, is rooted in each practitioner’s interaction with the young children as a learner.”

The word *play* does not appear in any introductory or guiding material, only in objectives: “attempts new play and learning experiences independently,” “plays with and uses materials with appropriate intention and purpose,” and “demonstrates activities that improve muscular strength and flexibility through play.” The extreme lack of play in the document requires that I search out what experiences are replacing play. The word *play* occurs 17 times in the document and the word *readiness* occurs 36 times. Even when its use

in the title is taken out of the count, *readiness* is mentioned 23 times while *play* is mentioned only 17 times. There are no photographs of children and the only color is on the yellow flags discussed earlier. “Children who succeed in school do well in life” and for Maryland preschoolers, readiness is the pathway to success. The Maryland standards document consciously rejects the play as learning paradigm in favor of readiness.

Alaska Early Learning Guidelines, Birth – Kindergarten. The state with the most specific, interesting characteristic has nothing to do with frequency, location, or priority of play: Alaska, even from my initial reading, positioned play in the most unique natural context. Alaska’s play frequency of 1.98 ranks it 10th of 51 for frequency of play. Alaska begins by defining early learning and the age groups into four critical stages of development: 18 months, 36 months, 60 months and entry to kindergarten, while acknowledging that these age ranges are flexible to allow children to grow and develop sometimes dramatically. Play is a guiding principle of the document: “Play is an important vehicle for children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as a reflection of their development.” This guiding principle took several paragraphs to explain and presents play theory and research including the work of Piaget, Bergen, Morrow, Fromberg, and Vygotsky. The importance of play is expressed by phrases such as: play promotes, play supports, play leads, play provides, play serves; the 15 mentions of play can be summed up as “play is an essential component of developmentally appropriate practice.”

Colors and vivid photographs are displayed throughout the document, as are many references to play. The document is organized into domains, goals, indicators, and strategies (“some indicators” and “some strategies” are the titles in each domain so as to not limit the

teacher). All of these support children's learning and development as they "progress" toward goals with the help of "nurturing" adults.

What truly makes Alaska's document stand out are the specific uses of outdoor play as in "snowplay," "playing in snow," "skating, hiking, drumming, and skiing." The geographical and cultural contexts of the children are explicitly addressed in the document as well as the natural play of children. "Use natural objects for play (e.g., makes mud pies, makes a house out of sticks, uses leaves for pillow," and "collect and use natural materials for play." Assessment is not explicitly addressed but phrases such as "provide opportunities for child to participate in activities that require new skill development" require a teacher to know what skills a child possesses and what skills they are ready to acquire. Alaska's document understands children in its programs and goes to great lengths to ensure its teachers and caregivers are well instructed. Alaska prioritizes the play as learning paradigm through research-based, sociocultural methods.

Washington State Early Learning and Development Guideline Birth to Third Grade. Washington has a play frequency of 1.45 that just puts in in the top half of the 51 cases. Washington holds the unique position as the only state addressing early childhood as the years from birth through third grade. This is the age span many teacher licensure programs describe early childhood as covering. Many researchers separate early childhood from upper elementary grades based on this age span. Washington addresses this wide span in a colorful document with current research on brain development and whole-child education goals.

One of the first pages is dedicated to listing what the guidelines are and are not. They are not a curriculum but are there to guide the healthy development of young children. The

word *play* is found throughout the introductory/guiding pages as an important educational experience: “Children learn through relationships, play and active exploration...In play children express their zest for living.” A topic not found in other documents: “children also need safe places to live and play;” by expanding the early learning age the discussion of children’s play and play spaces becomes more important.

There are not standards, benchmarks, or indicators in this document. There are topics under which one column is titled, “Children may...” and another titled “Ideas to try with children...” with subject areas or topics below. Under some of these columns are “Learning to learn” sections with examples and advice such as “don’t give advice or change the play except for safety concerns,” “enjoy vigorous play, “learn through play,” and “expressive play.” There is a portion of each section devoted to possible developmental delays or concerns; there is not sense of panic in the list of possible concerns, just information and resources to educate teachers and parents. This concern for children with exceptionalities also sets apart the Washington state document, as does its many colorful visuals and photographs of adults and children of various ages interacting. The document ends with a list of examples of materials to help your child play and learn; encouraging open-ended toys that children can play with imaginatively. The Washington standards document prioritizes the play as learning paradigm and continues it along the developmental spectrum to include children from birth through third grade.

New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines: Birth through Kindergarten. New Mexico has a play frequency of 1.13, which ranks it 28th of the 51 cases. A guiding principle of the document is that “Play is children’s mode of finding out about the world around them.” All types of play are included: manipulative play, play with games, rough-and-

tumble play, and socio-dramatic play. Research is presented to explain and support play in early childhood education and development. The organization of the document includes domains, components, indicators, and examples expressed through paragraphs and tables. Detailed stories of children and conversations are included and often capture children playing or describing their play. The inclusion of quotes representing the voices of young children is a rare occurrence in the standards documents. The developmental continuum of birth through kindergarten is represented in tables that explain a standard. Curiosity and creativity are prevalent concepts in the document. Curiosity refers to the very young child's growing interest in her environment and creativity looks at the very young child's developing capacity for inventiveness. Both of these concepts exist during play. Play is carried through to the portfolio assessment forms. Developmentally appropriate play is emphasized. Throughout the document there are colorful photos of children in educational settings. The play as learning paradigm is accepted as play is dispersed in this research-based document. It is not prioritized because play set out as a guiding principle is not carried through as a priority in the indicators and benchmarks.

Chapter V

Summary, Discussion, and Future Research

The position of play in the context of a preschool policy document was informed in this research by the frequency of play within the document. Varied standards documents produced similar stances toward play. Even though NCLB and RTTT required states to write early learning guidelines, states used their educational autonomy to develop documents that vary across the United States, express their beliefs about the importance of play, and include as much or as little play as consensus allowed. The standards outline what and how to instruct, but the committee members dictate the amount of play included in the standards based on how they prioritize, accept, or reject the play-as-learning paradigm. States with a high frequency of play show a greater prioritization of play as crucial to the development of young children regardless of the age group to which the document is written. States with a middle frequency of play show an acceptance of play as crucial to development, but may not spell out play within the organization of the standards. States with a low frequency of play show an emphasis not on play but academics and the K-12 standards.

While the location of play within the introduction/guiding principles shows a fundamental acceptance of the play as learning paradigm, play in the standards, benchmarks, indicators and examples along with authentic assessment of play opportunities shows a prioritization of play in the classroom environment and activities of a preschool child. The question remains: Is there enough play in the standards documents to educate preschool children healthily? Following the play frequencies across the United States answers this question only in relation between states: South Dakota has play embedded throughout its document while Maryland's document is focused more on readiness than play. While it is

impossible to quantify numerically how much play is enough, South Dakota clearly values play more than Maryland, whose standards more clearly emphasize play. According to the paradigm of play supported by the literature, play should be a method of instruction and assessment throughout the standards documents. Play should not stay in isolation within specific sections of the standards documents: introduction, guiding principles, indicators, benchmarks, or assessments. It is unclear that play frequency can identify a threshold for acceptance of the play as learning paradigm within the policy document. Further investigation may reveal such a threshold and contribute to analysis of the position of play in the documents.

The legislative mandates for standards and academics are a challenge to play as learning. The significance of crisis in (a paradigm) is the indication it provides that an occasion for retooling has arrived (Kuhn 1920). Play can be exacting to defend: it is challenging to explain what children learn as they play blocks or finger paint. But the literature clearly explains why these activities are learning. The states with high play frequencies did not assess the writing of standards documents as a threat to “play as learning” and many embraced play as the guiding principle for their documents. This scope of interpretations and reactions is consistent with the scope of the standards documents.

This is not the first research to find wide variations in early childhood standards; Neuman and Roskos (2005) also found “wide variations across states in the structure, organization, and terminology used to reflect expectations for content learning.” They contend, as do I, that the standards process and result should represent the individual and unique character of state early childhood programs and reflect the consensus building among all the constituencies throughout the state. The range of play frequency across the states and

the variety found within the case studies illustrates the consensus and compromise inherent in development of standards (Ravitch, 1995): the context of collaborative, consultative, and broadly representative decision-making process.

Even the best standards will be ineffective unless they are used to build quality programs. Some states have high-quality standards but little authority to implement or monitor them; other states have standards for state preK programs but no jurisdiction in child care. Neuman and Roskos (2005, p. 143) state, “standards will have an increasingly powerful role in guiding decisions about issues as far-reaching as teacher licensure, professional development, curriculum, and assessment.” Following this contention, it is imperative that states develop and revise early learning standards that are research-based and focus on appropriate practices in children’s learning and development. Neuman and Roskos (2005) report that while there is a substantial knowledge base on early childhood standards development, there is little known about impact. Clear, comprehensive, challenging, but achievable expectations that accurately reflect the research base in early childhood content domains might help to build bridges across different program and funding streams.

An international perspective is always valuable in today’s global society. A study done by Montie, Xiang, and Schweinhart (2006) of 10 countries and children’s language performance at age 4 and age 7 found that across all countries, 4-year-olds who attended settings with predominantly free choice had significantly better language performance at age seven than children in settings with predominantly personal/social activities. When children have free choice, they play; when children play, they interact; and when children interact, they talk, develop language skills, problem-solve and expand their knowledge and experience

base. Dewey's following query leaves these findings with the question, "Will play as natural learning for young children be part of the educational experience?"

Future Research

A clear area of future research that these findings support is a survey of preschool teachers to discover their perceptions, understandings, and use of the standards. It also would be insightful to study classroom playtime to examine if there is a correlation between a standard's frequency of play in the document and frequency of play in the classroom. This would be extensive because multiple preschool classrooms in multiple states would be necessary to describe the entire United States. Examining play within the preschool curriculum would also be informative in assessing the position of the play as learning paradigm in preschool classrooms.

A 2005 study titled "Inside the Content: The Breadth and Depth of Early Learning Standards" examined 38 documents from 36 states (Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2005). Play was not among the 36 indicators used to code the standards; however, curiosity and social skills/relationships with peers were included. This type of research, along with what I found, indicates that content analysis of standards is a viable but largely neglected field particularly when examining play and social, peer interactions. The word *play* in this research is meant to capture the concept of children having an influence and impact on their actions, learning, and experiences. A comparison of play and other possible content areas such as math, counting, reading, or literacy could be insightful for examining a variety of curricular priorities in the standards. The funding opportunity put forth by Race to the Top provides a further incentive for states to write comprehensive early learning standards. Examining the standards documents revised in response to Race to the Top, and their

prioritization, acceptance or omission of the play as learning paradigm may provide further insight into the politics and position of play.

Scholarly research was included in many standards document and absent in many others. This illustrates the question, why doesn't policy use scholarship and research more extensively in its development and evaluation of programs? The relationship between scholarship, practice, and policy is an area that requires study. Why do policymakers pursue goals without the knowledge and experience of the fields they wish to influence? Rich (2004) examines opportunities for researchers from think tanks and universities to influence the policy process. Early on in the political decision-making process, research can offer warning of problems with government programs and guidance for policy change. "Research and expertise can play a critical role in how issue debates take shape and are initially defined," (Rich, 2004, p. 139). Unfortunately, as the issue debate heats up, research becomes of less substantive importance and more about dressing up the two sides of the issue. The commonly held perception is of intellectuals being "owned" by the grants or research post that funds them according to Smith (1991). The negative connotations of intellectuals along with the fact that not all expertise is pertinent to public policy add to the weak relationship of research and policy.

Congress has also substantially increased its own intellectual resources. Smith (1991) writes that increasing the policy arm of the General Accounting Office, expanding the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress and Congressional staff has led to the government's own cadre of experts and researchers. At the same time, the number of senior political advisers and appointees drawn from think tanks and universities has increased. "Expertise is now a means of advancement...yet the power of the expert remains

a power rooted in ideas; it is an authority grounded in the suspect and ambiguous claims of science and professionalism” (Smith, 1991, p. 14). From the expertise of the professors, I turn to the expertise of the practitioner, the early childhood teachers themselves.

The dissemination of the standards to early childhood teachers and implementation of the standards is another area of future research. In *Standards Deviation*, James Spillane (2004) discusses the familiar policy challenge of successful local implementation. Local levels of education program administration remain central governing entities of standards implementation in the classroom. The dissemination of standards is also an issue of local influence. I witnessed this process in a Southwestern state in December 2011 when the state held a series of Early Learning Guideline Conferences. These two-day conferences were developed to disseminate the new draft of the early learning guidelines as well as direct the teachers and center directors as to their proper use. They were facilitated by an out-of-state early childhood consultant and attended by more than 100 early childhood educators.

The first day of the conference I sat with a colleague from my university. What we did not realize was that we were at a table where everyone had advanced degrees. This made for interesting conversation in between lectures session because our purpose in attending was not to absorb the new guidelines or to fulfill required training hours, but rather to understand the direction the state was taking the education of young children. We had all worked with young children, giving us insight in the examples being presented. Our experience led to us critiquing the document for its choppy developmental spectrum as well as its limiting opportunity for creative teacher analysis.

The second day, upon arriving a few minutes late, I sat at a table in the back where I happened to find an open seat. The table was an eclectic mix of a YMCA director and

teacher, a mother-daughter duo who were in-home child care providers, and an experienced home visitor. The best discussion developed out of the obvious deficit in the conference that none of the materials were available in Spanish. The mother spoke very little English, so the daughter was attempting to translate relevant information. The home visitor, who was bilingual, was helping them make sense of the document, the training itself, and why cultural and language support for young children did not apply to teachers of young children as well.

Throughout the day we discussed the topic of play versus academics in preschool quite frequently. Studies on the benefits of play were presented by the facilitator but not handed out or referenced in the document. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and their work on Developmentally Appropriate Practice was discussed. NAEYC's Program Standards and Criteria (2006, p.4) is 86 pages and has 187 mentions of play, which equates to a 2.17 frequency. In this document, the NAEYC emphasizes the need to "provide opportunities for children to play and learn from each other" and "enter into play, sustain play, enhance play, making play more complex." The American Academy of Pediatrics studies, along with programs such as *Leave No Child Inside* and the NFL "Play 60" were all cited as new support for the importance of play in a healthy child's development.

In mainstream media today there is a renewed focus on play and the importance of play for children and adults. Articles by Heinrich (2012) and Tierney (2011) focus on how play increases and influences creativity and productivity and that the focus of education and business have strayed from these benefits of play. There is also a more academic resurgence on the topic of play, some of which is teaching parents and teachers how to play with children as if it were a lost knowledge or activity. Books such as *Playful Parenting* by

Cohen (2002) instructs parents in how to play with their children and *The Art of Roughhousing* by Cohen and DeBenedet (2010) teaches parents how to wrestle and play physically with their children. In *Einstein Never Used Flashcards*, Golinkoff, Hirsch-Pasek, and Ever (2003) discuss the cult of achievement and the loss of childhood. This renewed interest and return to play amid standards and academic pressures is another area for future exploration. As Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, and Singer (2009) state, “Returning play to its evidence-based, rightful place in early education—center stage in the curriculum—is a first step toward restoring developmentally appropriate play experience to children’s lives” (p. 67).

Appendix A: Table of States

Title Age Group Year of Publication	Length of Document # Play words Play frequency	Publishing Agency
Alabama Performance Standards for 4-Year-Olds 2010	73 pages 86 play words 1.18 play frequency	Alabama Department of Children’s Affairs Office of School Readiness
Alaska Early Learning Guidelines Birth to Kindergarten 2007	203 pages 401 play words 1.98 play frequency	Governor, Department of H&HS, Dept. of Education & Early Development
Arizona Dept. of Education Early Learning Standards 3- to 5-Year-Olds 2005	170 pages 184 play words 1.08 play frequency	Arizona Department of Education
Arkansas Early Childhood Education Framework 3s and 4s 2003	95 pages 153 play words 1.61 play frequency	Arkansas Department of Education Division of Child Care & Early Childhood Ed, EC Educ. Task Force
California Preschool Learning Foundations Volume s1 & 2 2008	331 pages 390 play words 1.18 frequency	California Department of Education
Building Blocks to the Colorado K-12 Content Standards PreK 2007	21 pages 50 play words 2.4 play frequency	Department of Education
Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework 2006	44 pages 28 play words 0.64 play frequency	State of Connecticut State Board of Education
Delaware: Early Learning Foundations for School Success Preschool 2004	15 pages 13 play words 0.93 play frequency	Delaware State Department of Education
Florida: Voluntary PreKindergarten Education Standards for 4-Year-Olds 2008	127 pages 216 play words 1.7 play frequency	Florida Department of Education Agency for Work Force
Georgia’s PreK Content Standards 4-Year-Olds 2011	61 pages 59 play words 0.84 play frequency	Georgia Department of Early Care

Title Age Group Year of Publication	Length of Document # Play words Play frequency	Publishing Agency
Hawai'i Preschool Content Standards: 4-Year-Olds 2004	31 pages 36 play words 1.16 play frequency	School Readiness Task Force
Idaho Early Learning Guidelines Birth-K 2009	15 pages 9 play words 0.60 play frequency	Early Learning Guidelines Collaboration Work Group
Illinois Early Learning Standards: 4-Year-Olds 2004	51 pages 12 play words 0.24 play frequency	Illinois State Board of Education Division of Early Childhood Educ.
Indiana Early Childhood Foundations 3- to 5-Year-Olds 2006	124 pages 99 play words 0.80 play frequency	Indiana Foundations for Young Children
Iowa Early Learning Standards Birth to 5 2006	114 pages 165 play words 1.45 play frequency	Department of Education & Department of Human Services
Kansas Early Learning Guidelines Birth to 5 2009	162 pages 101 play words 0.62 play frequency	Kansas State Department of Education
Kentucky Early Childhood Standards Birth to 4 2009	170 pages 151 play words 0.89 play frequency	Kentucky State Department of Education
Louisiana Content Standards for Programs Serving 4-Year-Olds 2003	105 pages 91 play words 0.87 play frequency	State Superintendent of Education
State of Maine Early Learning Guidelines 3 years to Kindergarten 2005	56 pages 47 play words 0.84 play frequency	Maine Department of Education & Department of Health & Human Services
Maryland Model for School Readiness: Framework and Standards for Prekindergarten 2009	85 pages 17 play words 0.20 play frequency	Maryland State Department of Education
Massachusetts: Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences 2003	57 pages 148 play words 2.60 play frequency	Early Childhood Advisory Council to the MA. Board of Education

Title Age Group Year of Publication	Length of Document # Play words Play frequency	Publishing Agency
Michigan: Early Childhood Standards of Quality Prekindergarten 2005	156 pages 143 play words 0.92 play frequency	Michigan State Board of Education
Minnesota's Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: 3- to 5-Year-Olds 2005	68 pages 41 play words 0.60 play frequency	Department of Education & Department of Human Services
Mississippi Early Learning Standards for 4-Year-Olds 2006	238 pages 185 play words 0.78 play frequency	Department of Education Guidelines Writing Team
Missouri Early Learning Standards: Preschool 2009	84 pages 165 play words 1.97 play frequency	Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education
Montana Early Learning Guidelines 3- to 5-Year-Olds 2004	91 pages 150 play words 1.65 play frequency	Dept. of Public H& HS & Montana Early Childhood Services Bureau
Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines for Ages 3 to 5 2005	86 pages 72 play words 0.84 play frequency	Department of Education, Health & Human Services
Nevada Pre-Kindergarten Content Standards 4-Year-Olds 2010	102 pages 191 play words 1.87 play frequency	Nevada State Board of Ed. & Nevada State Board for Career & Tech. Ed.
New Hampshire Early Learning Guidelines Birth to 5 2005	32 pages 24 play words 1.33 play frequency	Department of Education, Dept. of H&HS
New Jersey: Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards 2004	70 pages 94 play words 1.34 play frequency	Department of Education & State Board of Education
New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines Birth to Kindergarten 2011	193 pages 218 play words 1.13 play frequency	NM Children, Youth & Families Department, Health & Public Education Department
New York Prekindergarten Learning Standards 2011	73 pages 52 play words 0.71 play frequency	New York State Board of Regents

Title Age Group Year of Publication	Length of Document # Play words Play frequency	Publishing Agency
Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies to Guide Their Success: 2005	40 pages 92 play words 2.3 play frequency	Public schools of NC, State of Board of Educ., Department of Public Instruction
North Dakota Early Learning Guidelines 3- to 5-Year-Olds 2010	66 pages 78 play words 1.18 play frequency	Department of Human Services
Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards Birth-K 2006	72 pages 68 play words 0.94 play frequency	Department of Education Center for Students, Families & Communities
Oklahoma: Priority Academic Student Skills Early Learning Guidelines for Children Ages 3 to 5 2011	71 pages 167 play words 2.35 play frequency	Department of Human Services Division of Child Care
Oregon: Early Childhood Foundation for Ages 3 to 5 2006	56 pages 91 play words 1.63 play frequency	Oregon Department of Education
Pennsylvania Learning Standards for PreK 2009	88 pages 214 play words 2.43 play frequency	Office of Child Dev. and Early Learning & Dept. of Educ. & Dept. of Public Welfare
Rhode Island Early Learning Standards: 3- to 5-Years 2003	24 pages 49 play words 2.04 frequency	Department of Education
South Carolina Early Learning Standards 3s, 4s and 5s No Date	129 pages 141 play words 1.09 play frequency	Governor of South Carolina
South Dakota Early Learning Guidelines Ages 3 to 5 2006	82 pages 233 play words 2.74 play frequency	University of SD & Dept. of Education's Head Start Collaboration Office
Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards 4- to 5-Year-Olds 2005	115 pages 125 play words 1.09 play frequency	Department of Education, HH&S, & Head Start Collaboration Office

Title Age Group Year of Publication	Length of Document # Play words Play frequency	Publishing Agency
Texas Prekindergarten Guideline 2008	129 pages 209 play words 1.62 play frequency	Texas Education Agency
Utah PreK Guidelines 4- to 5-Year-Olds 2006	48 pages 87 play words 1.81 play frequency	Utah Office of Education & Utah Dept. of Workforce Services Office of Work & Family Life
Vermont Early Learning Standards Children entering kindergarten 2003	40 pages 97 play words 2.43 play frequency	Standards, Monitoring & Technical Assistance Sub- Committee of the Vermont Early Childhood Work Group
Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Comprehensive Standards for 4-Year-Olds 2007	62 pages 43 play words 0.69 play frequency	Virginia Department of Education Office of Elementary Instructional Services
Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines Birth to Third Grade 2011	152 pages 221 play words 1.45 play frequency	Governor, Superintendent of Public Instruction, WA State Dept. of Early Learning
West Virginia Early Learning Standards Framework: PreK 2003	32 pages 31 play words 0.97 play frequency	State of West Virginia
Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards Birth to 5 2008	139 pages 188 play words 1.35 play frequency	Dept. of Public Instruction & Health & Family Services of Workforce Development
Wyoming Early Childhood Readiness Standards: PreK 2002	40 pages 26 play words 0.65 play frequency	Wyoming Department of Education
D.C.: Early Learning Standards: Pre-kindergarten 2008	75 pages 51 play words 0.68 play frequency	D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education

References

Websites for Early Learning Guidelines, Listed by State

AL: www.dhr.alabama.gov/large_docs/aelg.pdf

AK: www.eed.state.ak.us/publications/EarlyLearningGuidelines.pdf

AZ: www.azed.gov/wp-content/uploads/PDF/EarlyLearningStandards.pdf

AR: www.arkansas.gov/childcare/programsupport/pdf/aeceframework.pdf

CA: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/preschoollf.pdf>

CO: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/early/downloads/BuildingBlocks.pdf>

DE: <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/programs/earlychildhood/preschool.shtml>

FL: <http://www.fl DOE.org/earlylearning/pdf/feldsfyo.pdf>

GA: <http://www.dec.al.ga.gov/ChildCareServices/GeorgiaEarlyLearningStandards.aspx>

HI: <http://www.goodbeginnings.org/index.php/site/contentAndHIPreschoolStandards/>

ID: <http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/portals/0/children/earlychildhoodinfo/elg%20Introduction.pdf>

IL: www.isbe.state.ill.us/earlychi/pdf/early_learning_standards.pdf

IN: www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/curriculum/Indiana-foundations-february-2012-2.pdf

IA: www.dhs.state.ia.us/docs/IELS_2-20-006.pdf

KS: www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3321

KY: <http://www.kde.state.ky.us/NR/rdonlyres/1C04B68C-01F3-4AF6-855D-56482F9FC0EA/0/BuildingaStrongFoundationforSchoolSuccessKentuckysEarlyChildhoodStandardsREVISED.pdf>

LA: <http://www.state.lib.la.us/empowerlibrary/LouisianaStandardsforProgramsServingFour-Year-OldChildren.pdf>

ME: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/ec/occhs/learning.pdf>

MD: <http://mdk12.org/instruction/ensure/MMSR/MMSRpKFrameworkAndStandards.pdf>

MA: http://www.eec.state.ma.us/docs1/research_planning/guidelines4preschool.pdf

MI: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Early_Childhood_Standards_of_Quality_160470_7.PDF

MN: <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/StuSuc/EarlyLearn/index.html>

MS: <http://www.earlychildhood.msstate.edu/resources/curriculumforfour/index.php>

MO: http://dese.mo.gov/eel/el/PreK_Standards/index.htm

MT: http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/hcsd/childcare/documents/mtelgs_001.pdf

NE: <http://www.education.ne.gov/oec/elg.html>

NV: http://www.doe.nv.gov/Standards/Pre-K/Pre-K_Standards.pdf

NH: <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcyf/cdb/documents/earlylearningguidelines.pdf>

NJ: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/preschool.htm>

NM: http://www.newmexicoprek.org/Docs/PreKMaterials2011_2012/FY12_NM_PreK_Early_Learning_Guidelines_webversion_20110830.pdf

NY: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/pdffdocs/prekindergarten_learning_standards_jan_10_2011.pdf

NC: http://www.earlylearning.nc.gov/Foundations/pdf/BW_condensed.pdf

ND: <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/cfs/nd-early-learning-guidelines-for-ages-3-thru-5.pdf>

OH: <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1513&ContentID=1629&Content=127736>

OK: http://www.okdhs.org/NR/rdonlyres/8D52CAF8-E29E-4C88-8131-FB9F18D46910/0/1054_EarlyLearningGuide_occs__10012010.pdf

OR: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=1408>

PA: http://paprom.convio.net/site/DocServer/Pre-K_Standards_2007.pdf?docID=4401

RI: http://www.ride.ri.gov/els/pdfs/ELS_Booklet.pdf

SC: http://childcare.sc.gov/main/docs/gsgs_finalbook_022608.pdf

SD: <http://doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/documents/EarlyLearningGuidelinesBook.pdf>

TN: <http://www.state.tn.us/education/ci/earlychildhood/>

TX: http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/ed_init/pkguidelines/PKG_Final_100808.pdf

UT: <http://www.schools.utah.gov/CURR/main/Core-Curriculum/By-Subject/Pre-K.aspx>

VT: http://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/pdf/cdd/care/2006-03-29-VELS_booklet.pdf

VA: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/early_childhood/preschool_initiative/foundationblocks.pdf

WA: <http://k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/guidelines.aspx>

Washington, DC:

<http://dcps.dc.gov/portal/site/DCPS/menuitem.06de50edb2b17a932c69621014f62010/?vgnextoid=3e7d112f62c32210VgnVCM100000416f0201RCRD&vgnnextchannel=22aba12cbf242210VgnVCM100000416f0201RCRD>

WV: <http://www.wvdhhr.org/oss/pieces/ta/documents/wv%20elsf.pdf>

WI: <http://dpi.wi.gov/ec/ecqualhm.html>

WY: http://edu.wyoming.gov/sf-docs/standards/Standards_2003_Early_Childhood_Readiness

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