



MURRAY STATE
UNIVERSITY

Murray State's Digital Commons

Integrated Studies

Center for Adult and Regional Education

Spring 2018

The Impact of Social Play on Young Children

Elizabeth Whitman
lizwhitman@bellsouth.net

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/bis437>

Recommended Citation

Whitman, Elizabeth, "The Impact of Social Play on Young Children" (2018). *Integrated Studies*. 94.
<https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/bis437/94>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Adult and Regional Education at Murray State's Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Integrated Studies by an authorized administrator of Murray State's Digital Commons. For more information, please contact msu.digitalcommons@murraystate.edu.

The Impact of Social Play on Young Children

Elizabeth C. Whitman

Murray State University

Spring 2018

Abstract

Play is an essential part of child development. Children learn about their world through playing. If children had one job, play would be it. Children are social beings and desire interaction and communication. When children play, they can learn about themselves as well as others. Through play, children are able to learn to regulate their emotions, interact with peers, teachers, and their environment. Play enables children to expand their attention span and to enhance intrinsic motivation. Play is a meaningful part of child development because it allows children to grow in all areas of development. This enhances their ability to reach and surpass milestones of development. Play serves as an outlet for children to discover their true selves and become who they were meant to be. Unfortunately, play is slowly disappearing in schools. Educators should prioritize play, because it is truly how children learn and discover. Play makes a child whole. It is a fundamental part of overall development and makes the child who they are and influences who they become.

Keywords: attention span, regulate emotions, interaction, intrinsic motivation

The Impact of Social Play on Young Children

What is play?

Play is considered work for young children. It is their job. “[It] is the lens through which children experience their world and the world of others” (Goldstein, 2012, p. 4). Play is a full body activity which helps children discover essential skills needed for development, it is also an active and constructive process (Mead, n.d.; Emslie & Mesle, 2009). Children are curious and are eager to explore and discover. Authentic play experiences consist of children exploring their world. It is spontaneous and ever- changing (Miller & Almon, 2009). Children engage in play that is not scripted. There are no right or wrong answers when participating in play. The teacher serves as the facilitator and the children are in charge when playing.

Play is characterized by the process rather than the product, being flexible cognitively, allowing children to explore their interests, express their joys, and process their fears, disappointments, and sorrows (Smith, 2013; Edwards, 2017; Miller & Almon, 2009). Play creates many opportunities for children to learn about one another. When engaging in play children become immersed in the moment. They enter into their own little world and just play. Allowing children time to play during the day is a fundamental part of creating lasting bonds and relationships.

Play is essential because it contributes to all realms of child development. Play boosts physical development because when children play, they are using both gross and fine motor skills. Play increases cognitive development through learning how to problem solve, remember information, and make decisions. Play enhances emotional development through allowing children to become more aware of their own emotions and how to effectively deal with such emotions. Play in a social context is crucial because this is how children begin to develop

relationships, gain trust, and create bonds that will last a lifetime. Play increases imaginative play by allowing children to be creative, come up with make-believe scenarios, and pretend. Play also increases communication skills in that children use and develop language skills as they play. Play continues to be a crucial part of the classroom because during play, children are able to explore and discover who they are meant to be.

What play is not

Play is not participating in competitive sports, using technology, or playing board games (Armstrong, 2015). Competitive sports are not play. There are strict rules that children must follow in order to participate correctly. If children do not follow the rules when playing competitive sports, they won't be able to participate because of the competitive nature.

When children are glued to technology, they are not playing. Children are becoming more and more addicted to technology and using technology to "play" is not truly playing, it is more of a crutch. A study that looked at children and the use of technology had shocking results. On weekdays, it was found that children were spending 1.71 hours per day on technology. On weekends, this time increased to 1.91 hours per day (Slutsky & DeShetler, 2016). Playing is interacting and cooperating with others, discovering likes and dislikes, and developing in all areas of development. Using technology does not allow for these opportunities.

Participating in commercially made games such as Monopoly or Scrabble can be play, but is not necessarily child-initiated. These games were not meant for children to play alone, but with adults because these games have adult-like rules. Also, having children participate in these games limits creativity (Armstrong, 2015). Children can play board games, but do not necessarily know how to follow the rules. Allowing children to play board games while creating their own rules is considered play because it is child-initiated.

Play is voluntary and self- directed, not teacher or parent directed (Gray, 2017). When a child is at play, leave them be and just let them play. When children are playing, they are developing and learning about themselves and others.

What do children learn from play?

Through play, children are able to learn by comparing physical experiences with what they already know. As children learn and associate experiences, they add to their schema. A schema is considered as building blocks of knowledge. As children play and develop, their schema continues to build and change.

Children are able to relate to others during play to create relationships. When playing, children interact with one another. Prosocial behavior is needed during play because it allows children to become aware of others' emotions and enhances perspective- taking (Denham, 1986). Being aware of others' emotions teaches children that they can empathize with another person. Perspective taking at a young age is important because this can show children that not everything is the same about everyone. It also helps children become less egocentric, because when children show prosocial behavior, they are not always thinking about themselves, but about others.

Children learn to recognize their emotions as well as think before they act. Children are also able to gain confidence, become more flexible in their thinking, and develop cognitively. Play allows children to grow cognitively. This is because when children play, their brain grows and creates additional neural synapses (Goldstein, 2012). Children learn that there is no right or wrong way to play (Hewes, 2006). As children play, they also build social skills, enhance language, and learn how to problem solve. Play is how children learn necessary skills for success (Catron & Allen, 2008). In order for children to learn through play, they need to be able to move

around and be active participants. When children participate, this allows connection to what is being taught and how the child uses what is learned to explore their world.

Types of play

There are many different types of play. Examples of each can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Types of Play

| Type of Play | Example |
|------------------|---|
| Constructive | Using blocks to create a structure. |
| Physical | Playground time, running, walking, or jumping. |
| Pretend | Playing dress- up, taking on roles such as a princess, doctor, firefighter, or nurse. |
| Games with Rules | Playing “Simon Says” or Go Fish. |
| Object | Playing with toys, banging on pots, or putting a puzzle together. |
| Social | Interacting with peers and adults, learning how to give and take, share, and build relationships. |

Constructive play. Constructive play is organized and goal- oriented. It often begins in the toddler years and evolves more and more with practice. (Drew, Christie, Johnston, Meckley & Neil, 2008). Children use constructive play when building an object with blocks, or Legos. Children everywhere, when free to do so, play through building things, though what they build varies each time. It also involves open- ended exploration which becomes more prominent as children continue to experiment while creating (Gray, 2017; Drew, et al., 2008). Constructive play allows imagination to flow and new ideas to blossom through experimentation with assorted materials as well as different ways to create objects.

Physical play. Physical play is when children engage in movement that uses gross motor skills. Some gross motor skills that are typical in children are walking, running, jumping, or climbing. Young children love being able to go outside during school. Playground time allows for development in gross motor skills and gives children a break from being inside. While playing, running and jumping around the playground, children like to partake in physically strenuous and sometimes physically risky activities such as monkey bars or climbing up a rock wall (Gray, 2017). Being active during the day, especially in preschool, allows children to burn their energy and refocus in the classroom.

Pretend play. During pretend play, children are able to come up with scenarios that are make believe and become inventive in that scenario. Pretend play allows children to be creative, explore and develop new ideas and roles. Within the dramatic play area in the classroom, children are able to take on different roles, such as princesses, trolls, firefighters, or nurses, and act out those roles as if they were true. (Gray, 2017). Pretend play enhances cognitive and language abilities because when children participate in make believe scenarios, they are actively communicating and agreeing.

Games with rules. When children participate in games with rules, they are agreeing to follow rules, remembering those rules and actively participating in the game while following the rules simultaneously (Gray, 2017). Following rules when playing games as a young child can be hard because children are egocentric, meaning that everything revolves around them. As children play games with rules, they learn to cooperate and take turns. Playing simple games such as Go Fish or Simon Says allows children to learn to follow the rules and come to understand that not every player will win the game. Learning to follow rules is essential for young children because

as they grow and transition into upper levels of school, the teachers expect students to follow the classroom rules.

Object play. During this type of play, children practice hand- eye coordination and eye tracking. Object play increases cognitive function and problem solving (White, 2015). Allowing children to play with various item such as balls, bean bags, scarves, and puzzles helps develop hand eye coordination. Playing catch with children allows them to work on focusing on the ball and catching it when thrown. Allowing children to play with puzzles is a fun activity but also helps hone in on practicing hand-eye coordination and problem solving skills.

Social play. All play is considered social play if two or more children are interacting with each other (Gray, 2017). This type of play involves a lot of communication, agreeing with one another and developing relationships. Children learn to take turns, become aware of others' emotions, recognize others' needs and interact with peers and teachers in positive ways. Social play begins at two years old, but becomes more prominent in ages three through six. Between the ages of three and six, social play increases because children are becoming more aware of other children in their environment and are naturally drawn to play with other children and being to seek gratification from adults (Gray, 2017). During preschool, social play becomes a huge part of the day. When the children are playing in centers or participating in a group activity, interaction is occurring. It is crucial for teachers to allow children to try to communicate and interact without interruption of an adult. This is how children discover right from wrong as well as create and build relationships.

Positive Effects of Play

There are many positive effects of play in childhood. Children learn to be social through play. Children learn to recognize their emotions and regulate them. Play is a gateway for peer

interaction. When children play, they are interacting with others in their environment. Also, as children play, they are developing their attention spans and are learning their preferences through intrinsic motivation.

Regulate emotions

As children develop and grow, one essential skill that is needed is the regulation of emotions. Children learn to become more empathetic towards others by learning to share, take turns, cooperate, and work with one another (GoodTherapy.org, 2012). Learning how to regulate emotions as a child can be difficult, but as children become more accustomed to their feelings, they are more aware of others as well.

Children experiment in all different types of play. Sociodramatic play, also referred to as pretend play, is one in which children create make believe scenarios, take on different roles other than their own, and cooperate with peers. When children engage in pretend play, they are engaging in self- regulation (Foley, 2017). Sociodramatic play enhances emotional regulation because as children play, they are learning to recognize their feelings, share emotions in an appropriate way, and relate to others as well.

Through sociodramatic play, children are able to take on different roles. Three main categories that children use when taking on different roles are family, character, and functional roles (Ashiabi, 2007). When children take on these roles, they are internalizing and expressing their emotions while using their imagination and creativity. Taking on roles while playing helps children relate their emotions to the external world through symbolizing what the real roles would look like during play.

Participating in pretend play also provides children with a sense of perspective- taking. When children participate in pretend play they are becoming more aware of peers emotions and

engaging in cooperation. As children engage in pretend play more often, it is proven to increase self-regulatory skills, such as emotions and feelings. When engaging in pretend play, children are able to understand themselves, their peers, and teachers better. Pretend play also increases emotional regulation in children through executive function (White, 2015). Executive function is the conscious ability to self-regulate and control impulses. This is important because executive function is one way children learn to regulate their emotions while playing.

Rough- and- tumble play is also shown to increase emotional competence by teaching children perspective-taking, emotional expression in an appropriate manner, and by differentiating between what are real emotions and play-related emotions (Ashiabi, 2007). As children become more comfortable with their emotions, they are more cognizant of others emotions as well. This allows for children to become more empathetic towards others, creating relationships with peers and teachers.

Negotiation is also a key factor in emotional regulation. As children learn to cooperate and share, negotiation is prominent. For example, if two children want to play dress-up and they want to be the firefighter, they have to negotiate and take turns. This can be difficult for children because they have to learn about control and compromise of situations, especially in pretend play (Ashiabi, 2007). Negotiation relates to the enhancement of emotional regulation because children have to be able to communicate and resolve issues, such as who gets to dress up as the firefighter first.

A 2009 study on self-regulation proved to be in agreement with research found on the topic. This study was done over a two year period. The Foundation Stage project consisted of 582 video recordings of children between the ages of three and five year olds, who showed self-regulatory skills in multiple situations throughout the day. The activities done throughout the

days ranged from construction, pretense, object play, free play, role play, and more (Whitebread, Coltman, Jameson, & Lander, 2009). The study was divided into three main aspects of self-regulation and metacognition. The behaviors of the children also influenced the aspects throughout the study. The three aspects were metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive regulation, and emotional and motivational regulation.

Of the 582 events where play was present, data showed that 64.6% of play was child-initiated. During this time, children were seen interacting with one another in different settings in the classroom without adult interaction. The children were discovering their feelings and learning to regulate their emotions. Play seen with adult interaction was recorded at 19.6%. This is important to keep in mind because play is the work of children. Also, when children learn to interact without adults, emotional regulation is practiced more than if adults are interacting too. Children working together, in pairs or in small groups was recorded at the highest percentage, 76.5%. The children in this study showed self-regulation because they were able to work together and cooperate with each other. Working in pairs and small groups enhances metacognition because the children are able to learn to be cognizant of others and respect their thought process, just as much as they respect themselves. Working together, especially in preschool is essential, because this is how children become aware of their own feelings as well as others.

Throughout the course of childhood, children learn to regulate their emotions. Children with emotional regulation skills are able to label their emotions as well as others' and can respond to situations in the appropriate way (Karsten, Foster, Decker & Vallotton, 2017). In order for children to develop such skills, it takes time, "attentional flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory control" (Kangas et al., 2015, p. 848). Attentional flexibility, working memory

and inhibitory control in the classroom looks like taking turns, sharing, finishing tasks, or following directions (Kangas et al., 2015). Some children will struggle with doing these things, especially at the beginning of the year. As children learn and adapt to the classroom environment, they learn what is expected of them. Promoting self-regulation is important within the classroom because it is necessary for children to recognize their emotions and how to deal with them as well. According to Bodrova and Leong (2005), some ways to promote self-regulation are as follows:

- “Instruction in self-regulation should not be reserved for only “problem” children
- when children are constantly being regulated by adults, they are at risk for becoming “pseudo-regulated”
- learning to regulate one’s own behavior is in many ways similar to learning other competencies
- the primary context in which preschool and kindergarten children learn self-regulation is make-believe play and that is intentional, imaginative, and extended” (p. 56- 57).

These tips on how to promote self-regulation are crucial. When children get together, all are at different levels of development even though they may be the same age. It is important to remember that all children can benefit from a movement break or “practicing deliberate and purposeful behaviors” such as counting to ten to calm down or walking away from the situation (Bodrova & Leong, 2005, p. 56).

Preschool is about exploration and developing at the child’s own pace. When a child is constantly regulated by an adult, this could cause problems down the road. Consistent adult

regulation can hinder the child by not allowing him to successfully regulate his emotions, learn to empathize with others, nor learn to follow directions.

Learning to regulate emotions is a tricky task. Many children have not yet developed cognitively to be able to target their emotions. In the typical preschool classroom, there are many pictures and labels. Having visuals for young children when learning self-regulation serves as a reminder and helps support memory and attention (Bodrova & Leong, 2005).

During preschool regulations of emotions becomes more and more evident. Research marks the ages between “three and five as a critical transition point in child development” and social and emotional development also play a role in this transition (Willis & Schiller, 2011, p. 42). Preschool is an essential period for overall child development. From multiple sources, it seems that children who have more advanced regulatory skills and impulse control when moving from grade to grade, are more successful at school and when creating relationships (Kangas et al., 2015; LaFreniere, 2013).

Interaction with peers

Play can be categorized by the way children interact with peers. According to Mildred Parten’s 1932 study of interaction in children during play in the classroom, she found that there were six prominent stages play. These stages were according to a child’s development and age. The types of interaction differ depending on the age of the children. The stages range from birth to six years old. Table 2 below, describes different types of interactions that can be seen in the classroom with examples.

Table 2

Types of Interaction in the classroom

| Type of Interaction | Example |
|---|--|
| Unoccupied (birth- 2): Child does not engage in play at all, observing only. | Child moves with exploration, no objective or goal. |
| Solitary (age 2-3): Child engages in play by himself, no interaction with others. | Child plays with Play-Doh by himself. |
| Onlooker (age 2.5- 3.5): Child watches another child play and does not join in on playing, no interaction with each other. | Child asks what the other child is doing but does not participate in the play. |
| Parallel (age 2.5- 3.5): Children play side by side, but do not interact with each other, in their own worlds. | Two children in the same space, playing with cars but each of them have their own cars and little interaction occurs, maybe some conversation. |
| Associative (age 3- 4): Children interact with each other, have interest in what each other is doing, but still have their own toys to play with, imitating each other. | Children playing in blocks center, building their own things, but also discussing what they are building and end up creating the same tower. |
| Cooperative (age 4- 6): Children interact and play with each other, share toys, and create things together. | Children playing with trains, making a train track together, sharing train engines. |

Unoccupied play. Infants, from birth to two, typically engage in this type of play. This type of play is when the child is strictly observing their surroundings. The child is not interacting with anyone or anything. As the child is engaging in unoccupied play, he is exploring the environment through watching, moving, squirming, and reaching. The child has no objective to reach a goal. As the infant participates in unoccupied play, he preparing himself for the next step of play, solitary play.

Solitary play. Solitary play typically occurs in two and three- year- olds. Solitary play is just how it sounds, the child is engaging in play alone. The only interaction is between the toy or object that the child is playing with and the child itself. The child does not engage in play or

communication with anyone else in the environment. When the child begins to engage with others but is not quite ready to fully engage in play with others, it is called onlooker play.

Onlooker play. This type of play occurs when the child is 2.5 to 3.5 years. During onlooker play, the child is not ready to fully commit to play with another child. The child who is the onlooker is curious as to what the other child is doing, and may ask what he is doing, but will not participate in play. The onlooker will continue to play by himself until he is ready to engage in play with others.

Parallel play. Parallel play typically occurs during the same age as onlooker play. 2.5 to 3.5 year olds are still trying to grasp the concept of playing with each other, which is why during parallel play, they engage in play, but not with each other. During this type of play, children are directly next to each other playing but have their own set of toys. The children do not share the toys with one another and they are usually in their own little worlds.

Associative play. This type of play typically occurs during 3 to 4 years old. During this time of play, children begin to have interest in what each other is doing and what each other is playing with. Children usually imitate each other. For example, if one child is building a tower with blocks, another child would also begin to play with different blocks and build a similar tower to his friend. There may be some communication between the children, but they are mainly playing on their own.

Cooperative play. By age 4, associative play becomes cooperative play. As children become more and more interested in what others are doing, they engage in play together. Typically, this stage lasts from age 4-6. Children during this stage of play will share toys, communicate their wants, needs, and ideas to each other, and create together. This is when relationships truly begin to blossom in childhood because children are beginning to agree on

things and cooperate with each other. Also, at this age children become more aware of their emotions as well as others’.

Children learning to interact with peers is an essential skill. Sharing is also another essential skill that children learn throughout childhood. As children grow, develop, and interact with one another, sharing becomes a habit. When children enter school, there is a lot of sharing that takes place. Show- and- tell, taking turns with toys or playing dress- up are examples of what sharing could look like in a classroom. Children learn to share as a means of interaction and communication. When sharing first takes place, it can be hard for children to understand. Children learn to share through compromising and turn- taking (Raising Children Network, 2017). Continuing to build relationships with peers also helps children develop the power of sharing.

Attention span

Typically, most young children have a difficult time sitting still, even for a book. With distractions such as other peers, the teacher, or toys near, some children just cannot manage to pay attention. In a study of three and four- year- olds, it was found that children could only maintain focus for a total of 3 minutes (Shacter, 1934).

Self- regulation is a key factor into attention spans of young children. Self- regulation is an learned behavior that is also internal. It is something that takes practice to learn and recognize. It allows children to interact with others with intention and purpose (Bodrova & Leong, 2008). As young children learn to adapt their emotions and actions to the situation at hand, this allows them to acknowledge their own feelings as well as others. When a child cannot focus, it distracts the whole class from learning. When children have difficulty with self- regulation skills, they are

often not as successful in school (Pakulak et al., 2017). This is because the children have not yet learned how to properly regulate their emotions.

Moyer and von Haller Gilmer (1955) conducted a study about children and their attention span and interaction with toys. The children were able to engage in free play using the toys during a given hour. There were six simple toys that were set on the floor. A truck, top, acorn, Tinker toy, box, and a book. During this study there were a total of 80 children. The attention span while playing for children ages two to four ranged from 1.5 to 2.5 minutes with any toy.

This study showed that young children do not have a long attention span, yet. As children play, they are able to stay on task for longer periods of time. The younger children are, the smaller their attention span is going to be. During this study, the children were able to engage in play for however long they desired. The children were not forced to play with the toys, but they did, because those toys were the only ones given. This showed that the simplest toys can be fun to play with. Also this represented that with the use of simple toys, it allows children to be creative and expand their imaginations.

A second study, done in two parts over a five year period, proves that attention span increases with play. In the first part of the study, the 67 children were observed at ages 1, 2, and 3.5 years. These children engaged in free play with developmentally appropriate toys. These children had many more options as to what toys to play with. The attention span of the children in session 1 increased a small amount. During the second session of this study, the same children were observed at ages 2.5, 3.5, and 4.5 years. The children's attention span grew significantly more because the children were older than in session 1. The conclusion of this study was that as children play, their attention span grows, too (Ruff & Lawson, 1990).

Age plays a factor in attention span because as children grow and develop, they are discovering their likes and dislikes. Typically, a child's age is relatively close to how long they can focus at a given time. When children explore their likes and dislikes, they are more attentive to playing with what they like more than playing with toys that they do not enjoy as much. As teachers, there are many different ways that attention span can be increased and expanded upon. One way to enhance children's attention span is through scaffolding.

Scaffolding play is the idea that the teacher serves as a model and then assists children in learning a specific skill or solving a problem. The teacher will support the children in play, until the child can successfully complete the specific skill or problem on their own. When teachers use scaffolding, it is so that children can gain a stronger understanding and independence when playing (The Glossary of Education Reform).

When teachers use scaffolding in the classroom, it allows children to gain a better attention span. Scaffolding play allows children to build background knowledge of make believe scenarios, situations, and the roles within those scenarios. Teachers can scaffold play by having guest speakers come into the classroom, allow children watch short videos about certain occupations, or even take field trips to a hospital or fire station, in order to allow the children to make the connection that the roles they take on are ones that real people have as an occupation (Bodrova, 2008). This scaffolding when teaching allows children to take on roles more appropriately and also engages them in make- believe play more often because they are able to make further connections to the world.

Children are intrinsically motivated

Intrinsic motivation is a desire to participate in an activity because it is pleasurable and ends in a result that creates happiness (Carlton and Winsler, 1998). Intrinsically motivated play is

child- initiated and [it is] something that comes from *within* (Emslie & Mesle, 2009; Kruse, 2007). When children are able to play with the things they enjoy the most, it allows them to build on what they already know and can spark interest in new ideas.

There are three psychological components to having intrinsic motivation: “the need for competence, relatedness, and autonomy or self- determination” (Carlton & Winsler, 1998, p. 160). These components are crucial because a child is able to begin to understand how to relate, communicate, and create relationships with others. As children grow, they learn more of what they want through play, experiences, and discovery.

A child’s competence develops through their experiences in the environment as well as interactions with others, starting when the child is a newborn (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). As the child creates bonds with a caregiver, they are able to freely explore the environment while using the caregiver as a security base. Then as the child chooses to continue to explore their environment on their own, they are able to use the caregiver as reference to the environment (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). When children become more comfortable with their surroundings and environment, their relationships with caregivers and teachers becomes more prominent.

Relatedness is a child’s ability to process and develop secure and successful relationships within a social interaction (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). As children continue learning through their surroundings, they also continue to create bonds and lasting relationships with people. When a child first goes to daycare or preschool, it can be difficult because the child is having to leave the primary caregiver, to go into a new, unfamiliar environment with strangers. As time progresses, however, the child develops relationships with their teachers. Developing relationships with the teachers allows the child to become more motivated and free to explore the

learning environment (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). As teachers motivate children, they become more comfortable in their environment and creating relationships with others.

Children are in a constant state of learning. They are always discovering new ways to explore or create. When developing relationships with other children, autonomy is a crucial skill that is needed. Autonomy is needed to regulate one's behavior as well as guides initiation and direction of one's actions (Ryan & Powelson, 1999; Carlton & Winsler, 1998). Autonomy can be difficult to learn, especially as a child, when the child can not exactly target their emotions. Children who come from homes where the families discuss emotions are more prone to bring what they know into the classroom, than those children who do not know how to express how they feel in an appropriate manner. A part about autonomy that children struggle with learning is that the child has control over the situation. This is difficult for some children because controlling the situation leads to children feeling lack of personal control over their actions (Carlton & Winsler, 1998). Many young children struggle with this because when a child makes a decision and discover that it was not the best, they tend to blame their decision on someone or something else. This is all part of learning and developing to make and take decisions and actions as your own.

Implications for Practice

Play is disappearing from classrooms. This is because schools are pressured in preparing students to perform well on standardized tests, rather than continuing to let children play. School systems are pushing more for kindergarten preparation and the first thing to leave the curriculum is play. Even though schools are pushing play out the door, there are many teachers who offer play, daily, in their classrooms. There are ways teachers can adapt the curriculum and classroom environment to continue to ensure play is still present. By using practices, like the different

teaching philosophies mentioned or how to build meaningful relationships within the classroom are ways to ensure children are still able to play every day.

Student-teacher relationships are an essential part of how children become more confident and learn in the classroom, but according to Diane Levin, “many teachers don’t know the reasons why play is important” (Miller & Almon, 2009, p. 24). In today’s education system, there is an immense pressure on teachers to make certain that their students are ready for kindergarten. Teachers in today’s classrooms saw conflict between their views and their perception of school administrators’ views about the importance of play in the classrooms (Miller & Almon, 2009). Teachers are skeptical about play, especially in kindergarten because of the National Standards that are enforced when children enter elementary school. Everything academically leads to the standardized testing scores, so play is the first thing that gets cut out of the school day. Curriculum becomes more important and the focus moves away from play. The 2009 study completed by The Alliance for Childhood stated that free play has lessened during the school day. Many classrooms were not properly equipped with materials to play meaning not all children were able to play simultaneously because of the shortage of materials. The class was unable to have more play time also because part of the curriculum was focused on standardized testing preparation. The study also mentioned that the majority of the class time was teacher directed, rather than child- initiated. (Miller & Almon, 2009).

Educational Approaches

In order to prevent play from completely disappearing in schools teachers must make play a priority. There are three major teaching philosophies that are play directed. The Reggio Emilia approach, the Montessori approach, and the Project approach are ways of teaching

children to become their full selves. These philosophies are used all over the world, in many different classrooms and schools.

Reggio. The first approach, the Reggio Emilia Approach was founded by Loris Malaguzzi in Northern Italy shortly after World War II. Malaguzzi was determined to change the educational system for children, and he did just that. The Reggio Emilia Approach is very much still used in today's classrooms. This approach is one that is carefully documented. Teachers serve as the facilitator while the children play and interact in the environment. Teachers are to sit back, observe, and document how children interact with peers, the environment, and materials. This philosophy has influenced play because children are encouraged to interact with each other when playing, create and explore new ideas as much as possible while use graphic languages, and have fun when engaging in play (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Graphic languages are when children use drawings with descriptions to explain themselves. When children express themselves through drawing during play, this helps teachers gain better knowledge of what is going on in the child's brain.

As children explore during play in the Reggio Emilia classroom setting, they are able to create their own projects which encourages decision- making and choices based on what the child enjoys. This initiates cooperation and consultation of peers which in turn increases and strengthens children's confidence as well as their desire to continue to keep learning (Edwards, et al., 1998). When children initiate in play that they enjoy and desire, they are more likely to make those decisions repeatedly. If a child likes playing with trains one day, that next day, he is more likely to play with trains than to go to the blocks center.

Montessori. The second approach, the Montessori approach was created by Dr. Maria Montessori. This approach is close to Reggio Emilia, however, it is more nature oriented. The

use of the outdoor environment is used to increase interest in children (Montessori Northwest, 2017). Play in this classroom is used to develop a child's natural intelligence over a period of time. Children are grouped with same aged peers, usually in a range of three years, and materials of all sorts are accessible to all children (Lillard, 2013).

The Montessori approach considers play to be something that is learned through exploration and free- choice. In this approach, children are the key factor and they have free will as to what to participate in or not. When children make mistakes while exploring their environment, this serves as a learning experience, because they are not scolded for making mistakes. As children play in this setting, they typically are interactive with peers, taking turns or discussing what they are doing or thinking.

The project approach. The third approach is called the project approach. This approach was developed for children to create and discover within their environment. The goal of this approach is for children to be actively discovering experiences that they enjoy the most. This approach fosters the whole child because as children are exploring and creating, they are developing physically, emotionally, and socially (The Project Approach, 2014). When children participate in the project approach, they are playing but at the same time, they are applying knowledge learned in the classroom or from experiences to create. As they play, children are able to make decisions, discuss what they are creating or drawing and why they are creating the object. This approach is very hands- on and interactive.

These three philosophies are ways teachers can combat the lack of play in classrooms. These approaches enable children to create, discover, explore, and manipulate objects all while playing. Play is the center of these approaches, so implementing these into the classroom curriculum would help children continue to play. Introducing these approaches could also

enhance children's development. Using the three philosophies, children are able to engage in play in different ways than before the philosophies were added to the curriculum.

In order to have an effective classroom, teachers must be actively engaged in children's curiosity. To become an actively engaged teacher, who gives effective praise, discipline, and encouragement, the High Scope Foundation created three specific interaction strategies. The three strategies are as follows.

“Participating in children's play” (Kruse, 2007, p. 47). By being a participant in the child's play, this allows the children to feel more comfortable. Getting down at the child's physical level, squatting, kneeling, sitting or even lying down allows the child to be more open to the teacher during play. This also builds the relationship between the teacher and child.

“Encourage children to describe their efforts, ideas, and products” (Kruse, 2007, p. 47). When children play while describing what they are doing, it allows them to practice language skills. As the teacher is asking questions about what the child is doing, it allows the child to continue to play, rather than removing the child from the situation at hand. This is a crucial part of teacher- child interaction because it is another way for the teacher to evaluate each child, while the child is doing their work.

“Acknowledging children's work and ideas by making *specific* comments” (Kruse, 2007, p. 47). By making specific comments on children's work and ideas allows the child to think about what they have created and tell you about it in their own words. This allows the child to use their imagination as well as language skills. Being specific when commenting takes thought and some getting used to as a teacher. For example, by saying “I like how you used the color orange?” is a vague comment, but asking the child “How did you make the color orange?” or

“Why did you choose the color orange?” would be more specific. The more specific the teacher is while commenting, allows for more feedback from the child.

These three interaction strategies are great to keep in mind when teaching young children. By doing these in the classroom, the bonds between teachers and children, should grow stronger and deeper. These strategies allow the teacher to get to know the child on more than just surface level. It also serves as a good way to document what the children are creating in the classroom and their ability to apply what they learn in the real world.

Children make their own decisions

Jean Piaget, a famous psychologist and theorist, studied cognitive development in children. He was mainly interested in how a child’s cognitive development affects their decision making processes and social behaviors. While studying children for sixty years, he discovered that the thought processes of human development are essential for our ability to make our own decisions, learn, and adapt to the environment. This occurs in four stages of development (Gould, 2014). The four stages of development are Sensorimotor, Preoperational, Concrete Operational, and Formal Operational.

The first stage, the Sensorimotor period, occurs during birth to age two. During this stage, children learn about themselves and the world around them through the use of their senses and movement (Gould, 2014). An infant during this period begins to recognize sounds, faces, and their surroundings and associates those sounds, faces and surroundings as parts of their environment. Through the use of the five senses, touch, smell, sight, taste, and hearing, the child is discovering how to perceive his environment. By the end of this period, typically at the age of two, children learn that objects remain the same and are there even if the child is unable to see it directly (Gould, 2014). With the child learning to perceive the world around them, he or she also

begins to develop language skills that will be essential for both cognitive and social development in the long run.

The second stage is the Preoperational period. This stage typically lasts from age two to seven years of age. During this stage, children learn to use language to express themselves (Gould, 2014). This stage is crucial for cognitive development because it is when the child begins to speak. The use of language is a huge step in overall child development. Language is how people interact, so when a child begins to use words, communication gets more advanced. Through the use of language, the child can describe their emotions and interact with adults and other children on a more sophisticated level. Also, at this stage, children are egocentric. They think that the entire world revolves around them. They often engage in monologues that pertain to nothing but themselves and do not consider who is around them in their environment (Gould, 2014). Through the use of language, the child is further able to communicate and begins to also expand ideas and thinking skills.

The third stage is the Concrete Operational Stage. This stage typically occurs between the ages of seven and eleven. Throughout this stage, the child has begun to develop basic logic and abstract thinking skills. The child is also beginning to understand perspective taking (Gould, 2014). During this stage, when the child is learning about abstract ideas, it would be beneficial to use a picture or manipulative to help the child complete the task. For example, if the child were learning a simple math problem, manipulatives, such as blocks, would help the child to correctly demonstrate his or her knowledge. Using manipulatives and pictures is helpful for a time, however, as the child grows cognitively, they are then able to complete tasks without assistance of those manipulatives or pictures.

The fourth and final stage of development is the Formal Operational stage. Children ages eleven and older are typically in this stage. During this stage, children understand hypothetical situations and begin to apply more advanced ideas (Gould, 2014). This is different from the Concrete Operational Stage, in that the child is able to fully understand the concept without the use of pictures or use of manipulatives. The child is able to think more critically and apply hypothetical situations in his or her mind before making a final decision. Critical thinking problems as well as open-ended questions are a good way to assess the knowledge gained during the cognitive process. Once the child has completed all four of these stages, they are considered to have mastered the cognitive process, although there is some discrepancy as to when a child has truthfully completed the process (Gould, 2014).

There is some discrepancy as to when a child has actually completed the cognitive process. This is because children develop at different rates, and as humans, we must remember that everyone interprets information at varying times.

Inclusion and Play

Inclusion is a heavy topic especially in the classroom. Whether to allow children who have developmental delays (DD) in the classroom is controversial in itself. However, there are two laws put into place to cater to those with disabilities. The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 “ensures children with disabilities to a free appropriate public education and special and related services to those children...in a least restrictive environment (LRE)” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., para. 1). The second law put into place is a Section 504 Plan. This plan “prohibits discrimination on the basis of the disability and students with a 504 plan are allowed to receive appropriate educational services designed to meet the needs of the student” (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, n.d., para. 6 & 9).

With these laws in place for those with disabilities, it allows schools to be inclusive. “According to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2007), 36 of the 59 states and territories reported serving 50% or more of their preschoolers with DD in general education programs” (Hollingsworth & Buysse, 2009, p. 287). This is an important statistic because with this, it enables teachers to be more cognizant when creating a classroom environment. Allowing all children in the classroom, disability or not, creates positive interactions within the classroom, incorporates meaningful relationships between children with and without DD, and increases development for those with developmental delays when they are in the classroom (Hollingsworth et al., 2009, Tsao et al., 2015). Also, research shows that when children are paired with the same- aged peers, they are more likely to engage in play independently rather than having to depend on an adult to facilitate interaction (Bailey & McWilliams, 1995).

However, studies done of children with developmental delays also states the opposite. That children with DD tend to be less engaged in the classroom and have lower interactions than their normally developing peers. When peers interact with those with DD, the child with the DD will look to the adult for the interaction and reinforcement instead of the peer (Tsao et al., 2015). Adults in the classroom often use prompts to begin an interaction. This can be difficult because the child is unsure of how to continue without help from the adult.

A study was conducted to examine the engagement and interaction between 37 preschool children with peers and adults. The children suffered from a range of disabilities. This study measured free play and group play. Free play was both indoor and outdoor, allowing children to choose the activities they desired. Group play encompassed gross and fine motor skills with teacher interaction.

The results of the interactions during the various times throughout the day were diverse. During free play, the eleven children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) seemed to be less engaged and were uninterested. According to the data collected, these children were engaged in play for a total mean time of 47.60 minutes compared to the other children who have other disabilities at 84.58 minutes. Also the same children with ASD had less interaction with adults and peers during free play time (Kemp, Kishida, Carter, Sweller, 2013). The mean interaction between adults and the ASD children was 10.49 minutes, while the mean with the other children was 16.03 minutes. This data shows that children with ASD struggle with interactions when playing significantly more than those without ASD.

During group play, the children were less engaged than in free play and routines. The total engagement was lower because the adult interaction was more prominent and teacher-directed. During free play, children are able to explore freely and the play is child-initiated. The data showed the mean amount of total engagement during group activities was 49.59 (Kemp et al., 2013). When comparing the amount of total engagement during group activities to free play (73.59), group play scored significantly lower. Group activity had the lowest engagement time and interaction between peers. This was because group activities are typically adult directed and initiated.

Although some children are born with disabilities, or develop disabilities later in their life, this does not mean that they cannot be a part of the learning community. This means that children with developmental delays should be included in the classroom just as much as their peers. Children with developmental delays may need to play in different ways than their peers, too. It may be hard for them to interact with peers, but when a child feels included, this adds comfort and allows children to find their potential through interaction.

Observation of play in schools

Social play in schools is still prominent, but not as prominent as it used to be. I went into a preschool to observe and found that play is still very evident. This school is located in central Kentucky and has two different programs. The two programs are the Infant/ Toddler Program, ranging from birth to two years old, and the preschool program, from two years old to Kindergarten. It is also NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) accredited and Reggio Emilia inspired.

The classroom ratios of children to teachers is typically 10:2. Each classroom is set up in centers which consists of kitchen/ housekeeping area, blocks and cars, sand or water table, book area with a rug, a discovery center, and tables where they can draw, play with playdough, manipulatives, or have snack. The classrooms are different but also similar. The centers are developmentally appropriate, in that, all children can access materials that they may need and the chairs, tables, sinks, toilet, and hooks where they hang their bags, are all at the children's level.

During my observations, I was in three different classrooms. I was in a two and three-year-old classroom and two different four-year-old classrooms. The social aspect of play is drastically different between the three ages. The ages of the children I observed were 2.75 years, 4 years, and 4.75 years old. The attention span, friendships, regulation of emotions, and interests in each age varied. The tables below show the differences in age, attention span, types of play each child/ children engaged in, and their regulation of emotions.

Table 3

Two Year Old Data

| Start Time | End Time | Activity/ Center | Who is interacting with the child (Parten's stages of play) | What is the child doing? |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| 9:18 am | 9:19 am | Peg board activity | 1 boy sat next to girl, two peg boards, had their own, solitary play, parallel play | Playing on her own peg board, activity was set out before children got into the classroom |
| 9:19 am | 9:20 am | Playdough | Solitary play | She took chunks of playdough out of the bag, went around to the each spot at the table with a chair and placed playdough at each spot |
| 9:20 am | 9:38 am | Housekeeping | 6 other children, solitary play, parallel play, associative play | Girl took picture of her family off of wall, showed boy, boy went over and took his off and started showing other friends his picture like the girl was doing with hers. She also played by herself, put stuffed animals and baby doll in grocery cart, interacted with friends around her (shared toys) |
| 9:42 am | 10:00 am | Music/ Movement | Teacher is leading, whole class followed along, freely participating | Girl sang along with music teacher, participated, followed directions, waited her turn |

There were a total of eleven children in the class. The child I observed was able to engage in solitary play as well as interact with others. She was perfectly content with doing her own thing. When she interacted with other children, she cooperated and shared ideas. She shared

stuffed animals and dolls with other children in the same center. When she was showing her friend the picture of her family, she used labeling to describe her family members. The friend then went and got his picture to show his family to her. This is considered associative play because the boy imitated the girl by going and getting his picture. Imitation during play indicates that the children acknowledge each other and desire to interact.

During music, the teacher led the songs and the child participated by singing along and doing the motions when singing. She participated and was able to follow directions well. When the teacher called her name to get an instrument, she waited her turn, instead of going up and grabbing one without her name being called. Also, when the class was doing movement around the carpet, she watched at first. She was tentative, but once she saw friends participating and having fun, she freely joined.

Table 4

Young Four Year Old Data

| Start Time | End Time | Activity/ Center | Who is interacting with the child/ children (Parten's stages of play) | What is the child doing? |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|--|---|
| 10:08 am | 10:28 am | Gym | 9 friends (2 girls, 7 boys), cooperative play | Girl was participating in game of Duck- Duck- Goose |

The class was in the gym for the time I observed. There were two other classes in the gym as well, so there were around 30 children in the gym all together. The child was participating in a game of Duck- Duck- Goose in the middle of the gym floor. There were eight other children playing with her. Cooperative play was evident because the children had to all agree on what to play together as a whole. The girl was patient when waiting to be picked. When she got picked, she knew to get up and chase who chose her.

The game eventually turned into tag without them really knowing. This was because as the children played, they started being on “teams” instead of waiting for their turn. Also, this is a prime example of how games with rules turns into free play. The children started out by playing Duck- Duck- Goose but then it turned into tag and then into a game of basketball. By following rules of one game, it allowed for the children to start a group game. Over the 20 minute period, the play became less rule following and more play initiated. The children began to create their own rules to the games while running their energy out and having fun playing.

Table 5

Older Four Year Olds (3 Girls)

| Start Time | End Time | Activity/ Center | Who is interacting with the child/ children (Parten’s stages of play) | What is the child doing? |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| 10:35 am | 10:37 am | Discovery center | 3 girls, cooperative play | Playing in circle area with different materials, discussing what they are doing with each other |
| 10:38 am | 10:45 am | Teacher directed activity at a table | Teacher and same 3 girls | Teacher directed activity, draw about any pet you could get if your parents would let you |
| 10:50 am | 10:53 am | Pet hamster | 3 girls, 2 boys | Observing the hamster, described hamster to me |
| 10:54 am | 11:00 am | Clean up | 3 girls, two other girls join | Teacher directed them to clean up the discovery area |

Table 6

Older Four Year Olds (2 Boys)

| Start Time | End Time | Activity/ Center | Who is interacting with the child/ children? (Parten's stages of play) | What is the child doing? |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---|---|
| 10:45 am | 10:50 am | Blocks/ Cars | 2 boys, 3 other boys in same center, cooperative play | Created a ramp, made cars go down the ramp |
| 10:50 am | 10:55 am | Pet hamster | 2 boys, 3 girls | Observe hamster in the cage, describe hamster to me |
| 10:55 am | 11:00 am | Clean up | 5 boys, cooperative play | Help each other clean up the blocks center |

There were 16 children and two teachers in this classroom. I chose to observe three girls and also two boys. The girls and boys I observed did not really interact with each other. If they were at the same center, they did then interact with each other.

The three girls were playing in the discovery center in the circle area. The object of this center was sorting, however, they just played with the materials however they desired. The girls played nicely together, discussing what they were doing, creating their own dialogue and enjoying being around each other. This is cooperative play because the girls were sharing materials, discussing and trading ideas, and creating friendships while playing.

One teacher then called them over to her. The teacher directed them to create a journal page about a pet. It could be any pet that they wanted or they could create one, too. The girls were to draw the pet and then describe it. Once they finished, they went and observed the pet hamster that one of their classmates brought in. When it was time to clean up, the girls were asked to go back to the discovery center. One teacher helped them begin cleaning up. The teacher explained that each type of material went in different containers. She showed the girls

what she was explaining and then allowed the girls to continue cleaning up on their own. This is an example of scaffolding. It is scaffolding because the teacher showed the children what she was wanting and how to sort. Then the teacher allowed the girls to continue to sort the materials by themselves.

The boys were in the blocks center. They were building a ramp and letting cars roll down it. There were also three other boys in the center, too. Cooperative play was evident because the boys were playing and interacting with each other. Also, they were cooperating with the other children in the blocks as well. They were discussing ideas and creating different ways to build ramps. The two boys then left the blocks center and went to look at the pet hamster.

When they were looking at the hamster, three girls were also observing it. They were discussing what the hamster was doing. They described the hamster to me and then moved back to the blocks center to clean up. One of the boys was concerned at first because no one was helping him clean up, but then the other boy helped. Recognition of emotions was apparent in this situation because one boy recognized that his friend needed help, and went over and helped clean up the blocks.

Comparisons between Ages

Regulate emotions. During preschool regulations of emotions becomes more and more evident. Research marks the ages between “three and five as a critical transition point in child development” and social and emotional development also play a role in this transition (Willis & Schiller, 2011, p. 42). Preschool is an essential period for overall child development. From multiple sources, it seems that children with more advanced self- regulatory are more successful in school and when building relationships. They are also able to better control their impulses and

emotions and adapt to different environments and situations (Kangas et al., 2015; LaFreniere, 2013).

Throughout the observations., it was clear that the ability to regulate emotions became better with age. The two- year- olds struggled with regulating emotions because as they play, they interact but weren't the best at using their words. At one point, the teacher stepped in and interrupted play because one child bit another. When the teacher stepped in and pulled the boy who bit another child, she explained that that was not something we do, and that was not how we treat our friends. The teacher then made sure that the child apologized to his friend and then continued playing.

The three- year olds were more developed in regulating emotions. This was because their language skills were more developed. As children interacted with each other, they discussed about what they were doing and how they could help each other. The children were building relationships through playing and interacting with each other. Three- year- olds began to move from interacting with everyone in the classroom to a select group of peers.

In the 4's classroom, regulation of emotions was very evident. This was evident because the children were able to almost fully communicate their wants, needs, and desires to the teachers and their peers. The children seemed to have their groups that they played with and they played with that group most of the time. Their emotions were well regulated because a lot of negotiation and discussion was going on during centers and play time.

Interaction with peers/ stages of play. The observations also prove that children go through different stages of play at various ages and interact differently with peers. The two year olds play ranged from solitary to associative play. The two year old was content playing on her own, but she was also comfortable at playing next to a friend and somewhat interacting with her

friends, too. The four year olds, both younger and older, showed cooperative play. Because of cooperative play, friendships were stronger and the children were more aware of each other's emotions.

Throughout the observations, I also discussed with the teachers about the differences between free play and teacher directed activities. There seemed to be a big range between 2, 3, and 4 year olds. The teachers in the 2's classroom just let them free play, while observing the interactions between the children, but also intervening when needed. The only teacher directed activities in the 2's were "morning meeting" on the rug, wrapping up the day on the rug, and also when the class goes to specials, like art or music and movement. During these times, the children were expected to pay attention, listen, and participate. The 3's teachers had more teacher directed activities, but also still allowed free play and centers. The 3's classroom had more transitions and the teacher directed activities were things such as cutting with scissors, or beading string. These activities were teacher directed because the teacher called small groups of children over at a time. They also had art, music and movement, and gym. The 4's classroom was completely different from the 2's and 3's when it comes to comparing teacher directed activities. There was still free play, but it was more teacher directed. During centers, the children were able to choose where they wanted to play, but the teachers were much more involved. The teachers had one center set up where the children would be called over in groups to create a journal page with one teacher. The other teacher was using the iPad to look up pictures of hamsters because one of the children had brought in their hamster for the class to see. The teacher asked questions about the pictures she found, such as differences and similarities between the hamsters. Also, during clean up, the teachers were directing the children by showing or asking them to put things up within the classroom. This allowed for a quicker transition into the next activity.

Overall, from observations, the 2's classroom was very different from the 3's and 4's. This was because the 4's are more advanced in their overall development. The social aspect of play was drastically different because of the developmental stages at which each child is at currently. The 2's are just starting to engage in cooperative play while the 3's and 4's are constantly in a state of cooperative play. The two year olds interact with each other occasionally but still engage in solitary and parallel play. The three and four year olds were much more willing to engage in play with each other. It seemed like so because the children were constantly talking, sharing ideas, and developing friendships because of the shared interactions going on while playing.

Attention span. The observations between the three different ages are diverse. The observations prove that attention span increases with age. The two year old's attention span lasted the least amount of time. At the beginning of free play, her attention span lasted one minute, at the most. When she was engaged in an activity that she enjoyed, she had a longer attention span. When the activity was teacher directed, the attention span was also longer.

The young four year old's attention span lasted a good amount of time because of her environment. The class was in the gym, so playing with friends was one of the only options. She played for 20 minutes on and off with the same group of friends. The teachers were just observing and monitoring the gym, so there was not much teacher directed activity during this time.

The older four year old's attention span lasted around five minutes in each activity. These children were active within the classroom. They were in centers and free play, so they were able to move from center to center. The attention span was also increased due to the teacher directed activity occurring during centers as well.

Children are intrinsically motivated. The observations proved that children are intrinsically motivated. They are intrinsically motivated because as they played, they moved throughout the room. At each age, the intrinsic motivation changed. The intrinsic motivation of the two- year- olds was evident because the children moved around the room freely. The 2's did not stay in the same center for very long. They were able to play with whatever they desired. The children played with the toys and stayed in the centers that they enjoyed the most, the longest.

In the 3's classroom, the intrinsic motivation grew. The children in this classroom were able to play and interact with each other more during play as well as during other activities. Peers desired to play together in the same centers and with the same or similar toys. The intrinsic motivation of the three- year- olds was more focused than the two- year- olds. This is because as children grow, they continue to discover what they like more and more.

Intrinsic motivation was apparent in the 4's classroom, too. It was apparent because during free play and centers, children stayed in the same centers longer. Typically, the children had their groups of friends and that was who they played with during centers. When the children wanted to move centers, they would clean up and then move to a different center together. Because the children were able to move from center to center, this allowed them to continue to discover what they like the best.

Conclusions

Throughout this research, it is evident that play is significant in children's development. Play is a their job. They are learning when they play. It is how children learn about the world around them. Children are like sponges, so every time they engage in play, they will learn something new. Play is an essential part of a well-rounded child. It increases the physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic abilities of children.

The impact of social play in a child's environment makes a difference in their life. The ability to regulate emotions is something that children learn from the beginning of their life. This is especially crucial during the preschool years because as children regulate their emotions, they are developing socially. Developing socially through regulating emotions also creates relationships.

As children play, they are interacting. At different ages, children are in different stages of play. The six stages of play help us to understand the interactions between peers and teachers. Peer interaction is a major factor in a child's social development. This interaction increases relationships because it enables children to create and develop feelings towards others. Play also increases the desire to have a relationship between children because children crave interaction.

Attention span is increased when children play. This has an impact on a child's social development because as children grow, they discover their likes and dislikes, with people and toys, alike. Children are more prone to focus their attention on a task that they like more than not. Attention span increases social play because when children interact with each other, they create relationships.

When children begin to discover their likes and dislikes, this leads to intrinsic motivation. Children are intrinsically motivated to play. As children play, they are free to do whatever they like. They are not stuck in one place for a given time. Social play is a part of intrinsic motivation because when children play with each other, they are interacting and bouncing ideas and creativity off each other.

Overall, play proves to be a crucial part of child development. Play is how children learn about the world. Play is necessary in school because it allows children to develop, think outside the box, and interact with others, just like they will have to their entire life. Play provides

children with a basis to build relationships, explore their interests, and to find their most pure, authentic selves.

References

- Ashiabi, G. S. (2007). Play in the Preschool Classroom: Its Socioemotional Significance and the Teacher's Role in Play. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(2), 199-207. doi: 10.1007/s10643-007-0165-8.
- Bailey, D.B., McWilliams, R.A. (1995). Effects of Classroom Social Structure and Disability on Engagement. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 15(2), 123-147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/027112149501500201>.
- Bernstorf, E. (2012). Social Play Contexts. *Organization of Kodaly Educators*, 39(1), 7-11. Retrieved from http://www.oake.org/kodaly-envoy/Kodaly_Envoy_Vol_39_no_1_Fall_2012.pdf.
- Bodrova, E. (2008). Make-believe play versus academic skills: a Vygotskian approach to today's dilemma of early childhood education. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 16, 357– 369. doi: 10.1080/13502930802291777.
- Bodrova, E. Leong, D.J. (2003). The Importance of Being Playful. *Educational Leadership Journal*, 60(7), 50-53. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr03/vol60/num07/The-Importance-of-Being-Playful.aspx>.
- Bodrova, E., Leong, D.J. (2005). Promoting Student Self- Regulation in Learning. *The Education Digest*, 54-57. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234758330_Promoting_Student_Self-Regulation_in_Learning.
- Bodrova, E., Leong, D.J. (2005) Why Children Need Play. *Early Childhood Today*, 20(1), 6. doi: 507820074.

- Bodrova, E., Leong, D.J. (2008). Developing Self- Regulation in Kindergarten: Can We Keep All the Crickets in the Basket? *Young Children*, 63(2), 56- 58. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237121551_Developing_Self-Regulation_in_Kindergarten_Can_We_Keep_All_the_Crickets_in_the_Basket.
- Carlton, M.P., Winsler, A. (1998). Fostering Intrinsic Motivation in Early Childhood Classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 25(3), 159-166. doi: 1082-3301/98/0300-0159.
- Catron, C.E., Allen, J. (2008). Chapter 10: Play and the Learning Environment. Retrieved from https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/53567_ch_10.pdf.
- Denham, S. (1986). Social Cognition, Prosocial Behavior, and Emotion in Preschoolers: Contextual Validation. *Society for Research in Child Development*, 57(1), 194-201. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1130651>.
- Drew, W.F., Christie, J. Johnson, J.E., Meckley, A.M., Nell, M.L. (2008). *Constructive Play: A Value- Added Strategy for Meeting Early Learning Standards*. Retrieved from https://www.publichealthbaron.info/uploads/7/1/0/3/71038325/play_article_3.pdf.
- Edwards, C., Forman, G., & Gandini, L. (1998). *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach- Advanced Reflection* (2nd ed). Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing Company.
- Edwards, S. (2017). Play- based Learning and Intentional Teaching: Forever Different? *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 42(2), 4- 1. <http://dx.doi.org/10.23965/AJEC.42.2.01>
- Emslie, A., & Mesle, C. (2009). Play: The use of play in early childhood education. *Gyanodaya: The Journal of Progressive Education*, 2, 1-26. doi: 0974-1801.

- Foley, G.M. Play as Regulation: Promoting Self- Regulation through Play. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 37(3), 241-258.
https://journals.lww.com/topicsinlanguagedisorders/Abstract/2017/07000/Play_as_Regulation__Promoting_Self_Regulation.5.aspx.
- Goldstein, J. (2012). *Play in Children's Development, Health, and Well- being*. Retrieved from <http://www.ornes.nl/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Play-in-children-s-development-health-and-well-being-feb-2012.pdf>.
- GoodTherapy.org. (2012). Playing Helps Children Develop Emotional Regulation. Retrieved from <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/play-creativity-emotional-regulation-0628123>.
- Gould, M. (2014). Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development. *Research Starters Sociology*, 1-6. doi: 37219643.
- Gray, P. (2017). What Exactly Is Play, and Why Is It Such a Powerful Vehicle for Learning? *Topics in Language Disorders*, 37(3), 217-228. doi: 10.1097/TLD.000000000000130.
- Hewes, J. (2006). Let the Children Play: Nature's Answer to Early Learning. *Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Centre*, 1-8. Retrieved from http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/docs/suggestions/let-the-children-play_jane-hewes.pdf.
- Hollingsworth, H.L., Buysse, V. (2009). Establishing Friendships in Early Childhood Inclusive Settings. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 31(4), 287-307. doi: 10.1177/1053815109352659.
- Kangas, J., Ojala, M., Venninen, T. (2015). Children's Self- Regulation in the Context of Participatory Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education. *Early Education and Development*, 26, 847-870. doi: 10.1080/10409289.2015.1039434.

- Karsten, A.E., Foster, T.D., Decker, K.B., Vallotton, C. (2017). Toddlers Take Emotion Regulation into Their Own Hands with Infant Signs. *National Association for the Education of Young Children*, 72(1) 38- 43. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/openview/eecff621b6fa2497409f6c6aed386c1c/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=27755>.
- Kemp, C., Kishida, Y., Carter, M., Sweller, N. (2013). The effect of activity type on the engagement and interaction of young children with disabilities in inclusive childcare settings. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 28, 134-143. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0885200612000336>.
- Kruse, T.S., (2007). Fortune Cookie Philosophy: Using Motivation Effectively With Young Children. *Beginnings Workshop, Exchange*, 44- 49. Retrieved from <https://www.childcareexchange.com/article/fortune-cookie-philosophy-using-motivation-effectively-with-young-children/5017344/>.
- LaFreniere, P. (2013). Children's Play as a Context for Managing Physiological Arousal and Learning Emotion Regulation. *Psychological Topics*, (22), 183-204. Retrieved from <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=db763cda-149d-4a2d-9e1c-87f20a336d64%40sessionmgr120>.
- Lillard, A.S. (2013). Playful Learning and Montessori Education. In the *American Journal of Play [online]*, 5, 157- 186.
- Mead, S. (n.d.). How Do Children Learn Through Play? [Blog]. Retrieved from <http://www.ornes.nl/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Play-in-children-s-development-health-and-well-being-feb-2012.pdf>.

Miller, E., Almon, J. (2009). *Crisis in Kindergarten: Why Children Need Play in School*.

Retrieved from

http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/kindergarten_report.pdf.

Montessori Northwest. (2017). What is Montessori Education? Retrieved from

<https://montessori-nw.org/what-is-montessori-education/>.

Moyer, K.E., von Haller Gilmer, B. (1955). Attention Span of Children for Experimentally

Designed Toys. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 87(2), 187-201.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221325.1955.10532930>.

Pakulak, E., Gomsrud, M., Reynolds, M., Bell, T.A., Giuliano, R.J., Karns, C.M., Klein, S.,

Longoria, Z.N., O'Neil, L.V, Santillan, J., Neville, H. (2017). Focusing on Families: A

Two- Generation Model for Reducing Parents' Stress and Boosting Preschoolers' Self-

Regulation and Attention. *Young Children, National Association for the Education of*

Young Children,72(2), 25-37. Retrieved from

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2017/two-generation-model-reducing-stress>.

Parten, M. (1932). Social participation among preschool children. *The Journal of Abnormal and*

Social Psychology, 27(3), 243-269. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0074524>

Raising Children Network. (2017). Sharing and Learning to Share. Retrieved from

<http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/sharing.html#Why>.

Ruff, H.A., Lawson, K.R. (1990). Development of sustained, focused attention in young children

during free play [Abstract]. *Developmental Psychology*, 26(1), 85-93.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.26.1.85>.

- Ryan, R.M., Powelson, C.L. Autonomy and Relatedness as Fundamental to Motivation and Education. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 60(1), 49-66.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1991.10806579>.
- Shacter, H. S. (1932). Personality Tendencies and Sustained Attention in Preschool Children. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 5(3), 313- 328.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1934.9921601>.
- Slutsky, R, DeShetler, L.M. (2016). How technology is transforming the ways in which children play. *Early Child Development and Care*, 18(7), 1138-1146.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1157790>.
- Smith, P.K. (2013). Play: Synthesis. In the *Encyclopedia of Early Childhood Development [online]*, 1-3.
- T Armstrong. (2015, October 28). What Children's Play is Not. Retrieved from <http://www.institute4learning.com/2015/10/28/what-childrens-play-is-not/>.
- The Glossary of Education Reform. (2015). Scaffolding Definition. *Great School Partnership*. Retrieved from <https://www.edglossary.org/scaffolding/>.
- The Project Approach. (2014). The Project Approach: Engaging Children's Minds. Retrieved from <http://projectapproach.org/>.
- Tsao, L., Odom, S.L., Buysse, V., Skinner, M., West, T., Vitztum- Komanecki, J. (2008). Social Participation of Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Preschool Programs: Program Typology and Ecological Features. *Exceptionality: A Special Education Journal*, 16, 125-140. doi: 10.1080/09362830802198203.
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). About IDEA. Retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>.

U.S. Department of Education: Office for Civil Rights. (n.d.). Protecting Students with Disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>.

Whitebread, D., Coltman, P., Jameson, H., Lander, R. (2009). Play, cognition, and self-regulation: What exactly are children learning when they learn through play? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 26(2), 40-52. doi: 16552-005.

White, R. (2015). The Power of Play: A Research Summary on Play and Learning. 1-31. Retrieved from <http://www.childrensmuseums.org/images/MCMResearchSummary.pdf>.

Willis, C.A., Schiller, P. (2011). Preschoolers' Social Skills Steer Life Success. *YC: Young Children*, 66(1), (42-49). Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42730695>.